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Refugee Access to Early Childhood Education and Care in the UK*

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Executive Summary

This study and report considers the provision of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) for pre-school children in the UK, and the extent to which refugee children and asylum seeker children up to the age of five access that provision. The refugee and asylum seeker context in the UK is outlined and statutory provision across the four countries of the UK is described. Barriers which may prevent refugees and asylum seekers from accessing that provision for their children are considered. Examples are given of how these barriers have been overcome in some contexts.

Inspiring practices and innovative solutions described in the report highlight the importance of ECEC not only for children but also for their parents, particularly mothers. The engagement that mothers have through interacting with Early Learning educators, becoming involved in and supporting their children's learning, participating in family activities and accessing the support services available at some institutions, contributes to their well-being and own language development, and facilitates integration into the community for themselves and their children.

Some best practices of those educators involved in the Early Childhood Education and Care of vulnerable children (whether refugees, asylum seekers or children in need of support) are identified in the report. These include strategies for cultural adaptation, behaviour management, and language development, both in English and the child's home language. A range of resources developed in different contexts is identified. A key recommendation is for research into best practices to be expanded and for available resources to be collated in order to provide training and support for all those involved, either directly or indirectly in ECEC, including the voluntary sector.

It is clear from the examples provided that ECEC is about support for the whole family, and in the case of refugees and asylum seekers, complex needs may need to be addressed. Provision is most effective where services are integrated and involve a wide range of professionals and voluntary organisations to provide co-ordinated support. Some examples of integrated provision at a **local** level are included in this report. However, the *New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy*¹ and a pending *Integrated Communities Strategy*² are promising developments which may lead to more tightly integrated and targeted support at a **national**³ level in the future.

¹<https://www.gov.scot/Publications/2018/01/7281>

²https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/696993/Integrated_Communities_Strategy.pdf

³ The [Migration Policy Report](#) (2018) highlighted the need for and effectiveness of support for local initiatives from central government

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1 THE UK CONTEXT

1.1 Key terms

Asylum seekers and refugees are officially referred to in terminology that depends on the status of their application and the means by which it is processed, either entirely through the UK Home Office or in liaison with UN resettlement schemes. Some key definitions at the outset are intended to aid understanding of the complexities involved. These definitions are reproduced from the [UK Refugee Council Glossary](https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/glossary#R).⁴

Asylum seeker

An asylum seeker is someone who has lodged an application for protection on the basis of the Refugee Convention or Article 3 of the ECHR (European Commission for Human Rights).

Refugee

A refugee is a person who 'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country...' (Definition quoted from the 1951 Refugee Convention).

Refugee status

Refugee status is awarded to someone the Home Office recognises as a refugee as described in the Refugee Convention. A person given refugee status is normally granted leave to remain in the UK for 5 years and at the end of that period can apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain. See ILR.

Indefinite leave to remain (ILR)

ILR is a form of immigration status given by the Home Office. Indefinite leave to remain (ILR) is also called 'permanent residence' or 'settled status' as it gives permission to stay in the UK on a permanent basis.

Refused asylum seeker

A person whose asylum application has been unsuccessful and who has no other claim for protection awaiting a decision. Some refused asylum seekers voluntarily return home, others are forcibly returned and for some it is not safe or practical for them to return until conditions in their country change.

In this report, 'refugee' will be used to refer to those who have refugee status and 'asylum seeker' to those who are still seeking it.

⁴<https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/glossary#R>

1.2 Routes to refugee status

1.2.1 The asylum process

There are two systems for accepting refugees in the UK. The first is the asylum process managed entirely by the Home Office. See following link for a short overview of the asylum procedure.

<http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/united-kingdom/asylum-procedure/general/short-overview-asylum-procedure>

When asylum seekers first arrive, they are accommodated in reception centres (Initial Accommodation Centres (**IACs**), of which there are 7 in the UK. These may accommodate up to 200 people. Alternative temporary accommodation may be in interim hostels or hotels while longer-term temporary accommodation is found if the asylum seeker is judged to have a legitimate claim for asylum. Asylum seekers should not stay in initial accommodation for more than 19 days but backlogs may occur and they may be in initial accommodation for 3 weeks or more.⁵

Some asylum seekers may be accommodated in [Immigration Removal Centres](#).⁶ The majority (81%) remain in these centres for less than 2 months while their applications are being considered.⁷ Evidence that the detention of children in these centres was [harmful](#)^{8,9} has led to a sharp decrease in the numbers of children detained. Nevertheless in 2016, 71 children entered detention,¹⁰ in 2017, 44 children were detained. Only a quarter of these children left the country.¹¹ See also Home office stats D2.¹² The latest statistics provided by the Home Office showed that there were no children in detention centres.¹³

Those whose applications for asylum have been accepted are then transferred ('dispersed') to regions across the UK to ensure that the responsibility for supporting those seeking asylum is shared. The Home Office has contracted private companies to provide accommodation.

The Refugee Council summary of types of accommodation reports inadequacies in both initial and dispersal accommodation. For example, with reference to dispersal accommodation:

Accommodation frequently fails to meet the needs of supported persons, particularly those with children or mobility and health needs. Asylum accommodation has been repeatedly criticised for failing to provide security, respect for privacy and basic levels of hygiene and safety, particularly for women; in the media and in the Home Affairs Select Committee report.

⁵<http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/united-kingdom/reception-conditions/housing/types-accommodation>

⁶<https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/glossary#R>

⁷ <http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/immigration-detention-in-the-uk>

⁸ <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/030857591003400112>

⁹ Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, Intercollegiate Briefing Paper: Significant Harm – the effects of administrative detention on children, young people and their families 2009

¹⁰ <http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/immigration-detention-in-the-uk/>

¹¹ <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/20facts>

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-statistics-july-to-september-2016/list-of-tables#detention>

¹³ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/709326/detention-mar-2018-tables.ods

*This was not accepted by the government.*¹⁴

The second system for seeking and acquiring refugee status in the UK is through resettlement programmes. [Resettlement programmes](#) are managed in co-ordination with the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). Refugees who are being resettled in a new country do not go through the asylum process, though applications forwarded by the UNHCR are screened by the Home Office.

All definitions below are from the Refugee Council Glossary.

[Gateway Protection Programme](#)

This is a government scheme which provides permanent resettlement for refugees who have been living in refugee camps, sometimes for several years, and will not be able to return to their own country.

[Syrian Vulnerable Person's Resettlement Scheme](#)

A scheme established in 2014 by David Cameron, the then Prime Minister, for the UK to accept 20,000 Syrian Refugees over several years. Initially leave to remain is given for 5 years.

[Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme](#)

This scheme was established in April 2016 with the aim of resettling children and their families from the Middle East and North Africa deemed to be at risk. The intention is to resettle 3,000 refugees 'in the lifetime of the current Parliament' – i.e. up to 2020.

[Mandate Refugee Scheme \(MRS\)](#)

Launched in 1995. The aim is to resettle refugees with a close family member living in the UK. 'Mandate status' is given by the UNHCR and is taken account of, but not automatically accepted by UK Immigration authorities. *'All applications for asylum by mandate refugees will be considered within the normal asylum process.'* There is no commitment to accepting a given number of refugees under this scheme and numbers appear to be low.^{15,16}

See [UN Chapter on UK](#)¹⁷ in the UNHCR Resettlement Handbook (revised March 18) for a summary of UK Resettlement commitments and criteria for acceptance.

¹⁴<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/030857591003400112>

¹⁵https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/257392/manadaterefugees.pdf

¹⁶<http://www.refugeelegalaidinformation.org/resettlement-uk>

¹⁷<http://www.unhcr.org/40ee6fc04.html>

1.3 Numbers and locations of refugees in the UK

The Refugee Council for (all of UK) analyses Home Office statistics including numbers of dependent children.

The most recent analysed statistics of [*children in the Asylum System*](#)¹⁸ (dated February 2018) provides figures for 2016.

Table 1 – Children in the Asylum system, 2016

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Under 5	2,030	2,423	2,687	2,681	3,052
5 – 9 yo	1,094	1,125	1,312	1,337	1,640
10 – 13 yo	566	590	746	670	809
14 – 15 yo	247	223	307	282	336
16 – 17 yo	191	210	253	232	264
18+ yo	1,658	1,705	1,969	2,033	2,481

However, these statistics do not appear to include refugees who have been granted leave to settle in the UK through the Gateway Resettlement Scheme, the Syrian Vulnerable Persons' Resettlement Scheme, the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme or the Mandate scheme.

The statistics do not include information on the countries of origin of pre-school children though these are likely to reflect the diverse backgrounds of those seeking asylum. The [*top ten countries*](#)¹⁹ of those seeking asylum in the UK in 2016 are listed in the table below. The numbers coming through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme are not included in these data, see 1.3.1 below.

Table 2– Top ten nationalities, UK asylum applicants, 2016

Rank	Country	Number of Applicants	Share of Total
1	Iran	4,837	12.3%
2	Pakistan	3,774	9.6%
3	Iraq	3,734	9.5%
4	Afghanistan	3,115	7.9%
5	Bangladesh	2,256	5.7%
6	India	2,054	5.2%
7	Nigeria	1,894	4.8%
8	Albania	1,884	4.8%
9	Syria	1,569	4.0%
10	Sudan	1,445	3.7%

¹⁸ <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/search?q=Children+in+the+asylum+system>

¹⁹ <http://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/migration-to-the-uk-asylum/>

1.3.1 Update on statistics

A [report](#)²⁰ published in May 2018 provides figures for the year from 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018 and states that there were:

- 14,116 grants of asylum in that period (a fall compared with the previous year) 42 % of these were children (age not stated)
- 5,874 Family reunion visas issued
- 4,342 Syrian nationals accepted through Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme (VPRS)
- The total number of Syrians given protection since 2014 is stated as 11,469.

Although some of the 3,052 pre-school children in the 2016 data (See Table 1) will now be in the mainstream system, the overall number of pre-school children in the asylum system will have increased. Assuming that pre-school children who came to the UK in resettlement programmes were not included in the 2016 data, and given that new families continue to arrive and children are born to families already here, there may be between 3,500 and 4,000 pre-school children in the asylum system across the UK. Some of these children will be in settled accommodation, while others will be in temporary 'dispersal' accommodation.

1.3.2 Supporting asylum seekers and refugees after dispersal or when resettled

Asylum seekers: Asylum seekers who have been dispersed across the UK while their application for refugee status is considered may wait 6 months or longer for a decision. They receive around £35 per person per week to live on. They are not entitled to work. On receipt of refugee status, asylum seekers then have 28 days to find accommodation and alternative means of financial support. Clearly, asylum seekers in this category need financial support and other assistance.

Refugees: Refugees who have been given right to remain as part of a resettlement programme are given immediate accommodation. Financial aid is given to local authorities to support new refugees over a 5-year period with a tapering tariff available as long as a local authority provides support to a resettled individual or family. There is additional funding for education including pre-school children, health and ESOL in the first year. However, these sums are not ring-fenced so may not necessarily be spent as specified.

1.3.3 How are refugees and asylum seekers supported?

Regional Government - District and local Councils

Responsibility for supporting asylum seekers and refugees rests with local government - district and local councils (Local Authorities or LAs.) Where district and local councils form a unitary body, support is easier to co-ordinate. Where they are separate bodies, support is less co-ordinated. (Personal communication, experienced ESOL Teacher and Volunteer, June 2018)

Strategic Migration Partnerships

Earlier this century, the Home Office set up twelve funded Strategic Migration Partnerships

²⁰https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/710781/immigration-statistics-mar-2018snr.pdf

across the UK. The focus of their work changes according to the new patterns of migration in each region. These Partnerships provide the link between national policy and regional support and have a key role in bringing together and supporting the various public, private and voluntary agencies involved in addressing the very diverse needs of refugees and migrants in the UK.

The UK Government recently published an *Integrated Communities Strategy*²¹ green paper for consultation in England. The Strategic Migration Partnerships are supporting this by encouraging multi-agency forums, emulating existing good practice such as the multi-agency forum in the East of England, which has existed since 2009. Peterborough City Council, the Red Cross, G4S (the contractor for accommodation), PARCA (Peterborough Asylum and Refugee Community Action) and local colleges all meet together to address the needs of refugees and asylum seekers in Peterborough.

UK Cities of Sanctuary

Cities of Sanctuary are a network of cities and towns, which have declared themselves as places where refugees are welcome. The City of Sanctuary Movement originated in the US and was adopted in the UK in Sheffield in 2005. There are now 101 Cities of Sanctuary in the UK and Ireland, grouped into regions, each with a regional co-ordinator. Agencies within Cities of Sanctuary provide support together with a number of voluntary organisations and individuals.

NGOs such as the Red Cross

The Red Cross has a key role in providing support especially for asylum seekers who are not supported by International Development and Home Office funding, and who may find it harder to access the support of social workers and local authority staff. A member of a Red Cross centre in the UK confirmed that asylum seeker families are eligible for free ECEC. Red Cross advisers provide information on ECEC where families they are supporting have pre-school children.

Children's Centres

Children's Centres / Sure Start centres in England are a source of information, advice and support for families including health, parenting, money, training and employment. The aim of these centres is to provide integrated services all available in one location. There are similar services in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Some of these centres provide crèche or formal nursery facilities so that children can be looked after while parents access support and training. For example, the St Paul's Nursery School and Children's Centre in Bristol provides ESOL classes.²² Funding for these centres is a current issue and some have closed, the result being that the nearest Children's Centre may be difficult to access if it is some distance from the parents' accommodation.

Community organisations such as church groups, volunteers and befrienders

Volunteers work in a variety of settings including Initial Accommodation Centres, Community Centres, and in home settings. In Cambridge, for example, volunteers who have joined the Cambridge Refugee Resettlement Campaign and who are student teachers from the Faculty of Education provide support for children in their own homes, often helping school age children with homework, but frequently engaging with younger children in the family. In Peterborough, PARCA runs activities for mothers and babies. Urban House, Wakefield, Yorkshire (NE

²¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/integrated-communities-strategy-green-paper>

²² <http://stpaulschilddrenscentre.co.uk/family-support/adult-learning/>

England) is an Initial Accommodation Centre for asylum seekers waiting to be removed to dispersal accommodation while their applications are considered. Length of stay is usually about three weeks. There is a large playroom with toys and bikes, and several sessions a week are run by volunteers. The volunteers engage naturally with the younger children as they play asking simple questions such as '*What colour is it? How many have you got?*' By default, these informal learning opportunities are meeting some of the developmental goals outlined in pre-school curricula, which are described in following sections.

2 ECEC PROVISION IN THE UK

2.1 Benefits of and rights to education and care

The benefits of high quality Early Childhood Education and Care for refugees and migrant children have been reported in recently published research papers.^{23,24}

The benefits are not only for the social and educational development of the individual child in preparation for school and progression into education and eventually employment, but also for society as a whole. The needs of disadvantaged children can be addressed at an early stage, mitigating the need for later intervention. The involvement of parents in ECEC programmes develops parenting skills, provides opportunities for socialising outside the home and may also provide the time needed for education, training and employment opportunities. Wider social and economic benefits for society as a whole have also been identified. Free ECEC is seen as a way of breaking the cycle of social deprivation, particularly in families needing substantial support.

These benefits are even more important for asylum seekers and refugees who lack the social capital that will enable them to integrate and thrive in their new community. A [research report](#)²⁵ produced by the Universities of Cardiff and Birmingham includes statistical analysis of what facilitates integration most effectively through building up 'social capital' and what the actual priorities for most migrants are (housing, language learning and building social capital through networks of family and friends). The more social capital a person has, the more integrated they become and have better health, job prospects, etc. Building of social capital is more difficult for refugee women with young families who often have minimal contact outside the home or their own community.

All children have a right to ECEC regardless of status. This includes children from families who are granted right to remain in the UK but with NRPF (No Recourse to Public Funds). The inadequacies of provision and the need to address inadequacies through the identification and dissemination of good practice have been highlighted in the Migration Policy Report.²⁶ The report does not include the UK situation, but some of the findings are relevant to the UK context, for example the need for nationally supported initiatives and co-ordinated responses.

²³

https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/ECECforRefugeeChildren_FINALWEB.pdf (April 2018)

²⁴ <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/14194adc-fc04-11e7-b8f5-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

²⁵ <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/iris/2013/nuffield-refugees-integration-research-report.pdf>

²⁶ See Footnote 23

The Word Gap

At the Pre-school Learning Alliance conference held on 1 June 2018, Amanda Spielman, the Chief Inspector of Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education (in England)), discussed the importance of the development of early literacy, as well as the development of children's physical and social skills.²⁷ She stated that '*the right education and care at this time have a profound impact on children and their life chances*'. She reminded the conference that there are differences in family culture with some children getting considerable support at home, for example, parents reading nursery rhymes and bedtime stories with their children, while others do not benefit from this home support. These children, therefore, need access to language development as well as the physical and social development opportunities they do not get at home. 'Unlucky' 4-year old children, she states, have less than a third of the English vocabulary of their peers. This is known as the 'word gap' and Spielman refers to research that has found a word gap affects children's progress across the curriculum.

These children arrive at school without the words they need to communicate properly. Just imagine the disadvantage they face, right from the start. Unable to follow what's going on. Unable to keep up with their classmates. Unable to reach their potential.

Disadvantaged children who fall behind their peers may never catch up, develop low self-esteem and often experience a sense of exclusion. Ms Spielman makes clear that she is not talking specifically about children who speak another language at home but any child who lacks the advantage of ECEC and home support.

The word gap has been identified as a crucial factor in children's life chances, even for those born and raised in the UK (whether first or second language speakers). It would seem of paramount importance that refugee and asylum seeker children do not become even further left behind through lack of access to ECEC, which would help them bridge the 'word gap' and also develop the physical co-ordination and social skills acquired through structured early learning and play.

2.2 Provision in England

All 3- and 4-year-olds in England are entitled to 570 hours of free early education or childcare a year. This is often taken as 15 hours each week for 38 weeks of the year. This is a non-compulsory [universal entitlement](#) and parents do not have to be in work.²⁸ Some [2-year-olds](#) are also eligible where parents are receiving specific benefits.

The 15 hours universal entitlement is extended to 30 hours extended entitlement for working parents. They can use the entitlement as 30 hours per week during term time or 22.8 hours per week across 50 weeks of the year (1140 hours in total).

Information about free childcare is available on the government [website](#).²⁹ Implementation is the responsibility of Local Authorities. The latest [Statutory Guidance](#)³⁰ for Local Authorities was issued in March 2018.

²⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/amanda-spielman-at-the-pre-school-learning-alliance-annual-conference>

²⁸ <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/children-and-families/childcare-and-early-learning/free-childcare-for-3-and-4-year-olds/>

²⁹ <https://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk/>

³⁰ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/692348/Early_education

Early Years Education and Care includes independent nurseries, pre-school nurseries attached to the primary school, playgroups and childminders. All of these providers work with the EYFS the [Statutory framework for Early Years education](#)³¹ issued in March 2017, which outlines standards for children from birth to 5 years old in England. Specific reference is made to learners whose first language is not English and the need to value the home language:

*For children whose home language is not English, providers must take reasonable steps to provide opportunities for children to develop and use their home language in play and learning, supporting their language development at home.*³²

Detailed guidance to support those delivering pre-school education with reference to the EYFS outcomes is provided in a non-statutory guidance document, [Development Matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage](#)³³ produced by the British Association for Early Childhood Education. This document makes reference throughout to cultural diversity, the need to support and give value to home languages within the pre-school setting, and the importance of involving parents through the use of translated material or interpreters. Practical examples of home culture and home language support are given. For example:

*Share rhymes, books and stories from many cultures, sometimes using languages other than English, particularly where children are learning English as an additional language.*³⁴

*Display lists of words from different home languages and invite parents and other adults to contribute.*³⁵

*Plan to include home language and bilingual story sessions by involving qualified bilingual adults, as well as enlisting the help of parents.*³⁶

This guidance would be challenging in contexts where there was a lack of bilingual support and/or specific training in teaching multilingual learners.

The EYFS only applies to schools and early years providers in England. There are different early years' standards in [Scotland](#)³⁷ and [Wales](#)³⁸ and [Northern Ireland](#).³⁹

Quality of provision is monitored by Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education (in England)). There are separate inspection systems in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

2.3 Provision in Wales

A number of schemes are available in Wales. Free childcare is available for 2 - 4 year old children as part of the [Flying Start Programme](#)⁴⁰, which was set up with the specific aim of addressing poverty and providing parental support to families who have been identified as

³¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/596629/EYFS_STATUTORY_FRAMEWORK_2017.pdf

³² Ibid, p.9

³³<https://www.early-education.org.uk/sites/default/files/Development%20Matters%20in%20the%20E>

³⁴ Ibid p.16

³⁵ Ibid p.17

³⁶ Ibid p.29

³⁷<https://beta.gov.scot/publications/early-years-framework/>

³⁸<https://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/foundation-phase/?lang=en>

³⁹http://ccea.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/curriculum/pre_school/preschool_guidance_2018_v2.pdf

⁴⁰<https://gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/people/children-and-young-people/parenting-support-guidance/help/flyingstart/?lang=en>

having some level of risk. This programme offers free childcare for 2 and a half hours a day for 5 days a week for 39 weeks.

Early years programmes for children aged 3 - 7 are referred to as the [Foundation Phase](#)⁴¹. All children in Wales are entitled to at least 10 hours a week of free Foundation Phase education. A scheme to provide 30 hours a week of free early education and childcare for working parents of 3 and 4 year olds is currently being piloted in 7 local authorities in Wales. As in other parts of the UK, additional financial support may be available.

The Families First and Refugees co-ordinator in Ceredigion, Wales, described provision in her context as follows:

ECEC is provided to all families who want it. Every effort is made to support those who request access to nursery including the funding of transport, but there is no pressure to take up the free entitlement. Families are told that it is available. As is the case in many locations, ECEC is promoted as something which allows parents to attend ESOL classes.

The [Early Years Framework](#)⁴² for Wales specifies standards for children for 3 - 7 years. Regulation and inspection is undertaken by the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW (<https://careinspectorate.wales>)) and/or by Estyn (<https://www.estyn.gov.wales>).

The Framework Curriculum also has seven areas of learning. See Appendix 1 for a comparison of areas of learning in Early Years curricula across the UK.

The introduction to the Welsh framework has a clear statement on including all children and clear statements on language learning and use of home languages:

*For children whose first language is neither English nor Welsh, settings/schools should take specific action to help them learn both English and Welsh through the curriculum. Settings/schools should provide children with material that is appropriate to their ability, previous education and experience, and which extends their language development. Settings/schools should also encourage the use of children's home languages for learning.*⁴³

Cultural Diversity is given prominence as the first area of attention in the Welsh framework (Personal and social development, well-being and cultural diversity) and there is a clear statement of its importance:

*Personal and Social Development, Well-being and Cultural Diversity is at the heart of the Foundation Phase and children's skills are developed across all Areas of Learning through participation in experiential learning activities indoors and outdoors.*⁴⁴

2.4 Provision in Scotland

All 3 or 4 year olds in Scotland are entitled to 16 hours funded early learning and childcare a week - this is around 600 hours a year, depending on how the parent uses them.

Free childcare is defined as provided by individuals and organisations **registered** with the Care Inspectorate including nurseries attached to schools, local authority nurseries, private

⁴¹<https://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/foundation-phase/?lang=en>

⁴²<https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-02/foundation-phase-framework-revised-2015.pdf>

⁴³ Ibid p.5

⁴⁴ [Ibid](#) p.9

day nurseries, playgroups, childminders, college, university or workplace nurseries, child and family centres run by social work departments and community childcare centres.

Statutory Guidance is provided.⁴⁵ All ECEC providers in Scotland work with the early stages of the [curriculum for excellence](#),⁴⁶ which includes [benchmarks](#)⁴⁷ for the early stages. Provision is inspected by Education Scotland.

The Scottish Framework does not make overt reference to cultural diversity or specific reference to multi-culturalism or multi-lingualism, but there is potential for certain benchmarks to be extended. For example:

Reference to stories (*“Engages with and enjoys watching, reading or listening to different texts, including stories, songs and rhymes, and can share likes and dislikes.”* p.6) could be extended to include ‘stories and songs and rhymes from other cultures’.

Benchmarks relating to food have clear potential for inclusion of foods eaten by other cultures (*“Recognises that we eat different foods at different times of the day and on different occasions. Prepares and tastes a range of familiar and unfamiliar foods. Recognises and respects that others’ food choices may be different from their own food.”* p.28).

Benchmarks relating to the use of Gaelic (*“Responds to and takes part in Gaelic cultural activities such as St Andrews Day celebrations, local and national MOD events, or local and play situations connected to Gaelic culture.”* p.27) could be extended to include awareness of home languages and cultural traditions of refugees.

2.5 Provision in Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland one year of non-compulsory pre-school education is funded by the Department of Education. This provision is for from 12.5 to 22.5 hours in the year leading up to compulsory primary education. Provision is inspected by the Education and Training Inspectorate. The [pre-school guidance](#)⁴⁸ document emphasises the importance of cultural diversity:

It is important to help young children understand that we see the world in many different ways depending on our cultural, social and religious viewpoints. Staff in a setting should:

- *acknowledge and respect the culture, beliefs and lifestyles of the families and children in the setting;*
- *include activities and resources that encourage respect for diversity; and*
- *talk about cultural and religious festivals, discuss foods in different countries, read stories or listen to music from different cultures, and display photographs of cultural traditions, as appropriate.*

Support for home languages is not referred to though the importance of ‘supporting children for whom English is an additional language and those who are being taught through the medium of Irish’ is included.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0045/00457025.pdf>

⁴⁶ <https://beta.gov.scot/policies/schools/school-curriculum/>

⁴⁷ https://education.gov.scot/improvement/documents/earlylevelbenchmarksallareas_.pdf

⁴⁸ http://ccea.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/curriculum/pre_school/preschool_guidance_2018_v2.pdf

⁴⁹ Ibid p. 24

3 BARRIERS FOR REFUGEE CHILDREN IN ECEC

3.1 Cultural unfamiliarity and resistance

The system of pre-school education and care, and the rationale for it, is unfamiliar to many refugees and asylum seekers. It may not be the custom to place young children in the care of strangers in their own cultures. Concepts such as the value of physical activities, getting dirty or wet in outside activities in sand pits and water play may not be understood. Even when the advantages are explained through family case workers or own language translators, there may be reluctance to hand over children to be supervised without the mother nearby.

3.2 Parental anxiety, parental stress

All the refugees who have come to the UK on resettlement schemes have been selected on the basis of vulnerability, and this often involves healthcare needs of children; in these circumstances, parents are understandably protective. Where children have been exposed to danger, there may be reluctance to be separated from them. Separation anxiety for both parent and child may be particularly acute in these situations.

Asylum seekers may be living in temporary and inadequate accommodation while their application is being processed. They may not always be in the best mental state to think about access to ECEC while their current situation is still unsettled and their future situation is uncertain.

3.3 Lack of availability or access

While 15 hours' early education is in theory available for every child, this may be difficult to access in practice. Asylum seekers and refugees are likely to need considerable support to negotiate the application and paperwork requirements. In any case, there may be insufficient capacity in a given area. In Scotland, the [New Scots: Refugee Integration Strategy 2018-2020](#)⁵⁰ states a clear commitment to education available to every child, but to quote one interviewee, it can be 'a nightmare to join up the dots' i.e. to find nursery/crèche provision which is in the right location at a convenient time to fit in with ESOL classes or the needs of older children.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that Early Years providers may give preference to parents who want to take advantage of a full time place rather than offer 15 hours on a part-time basis, which may leave unused provision in the afternoons. The nearest available provision may be too far from the parents' accommodation, making travel to and from the venue impractical if there are conflicting family needs.

3.4 Lack of funding

If travel to the Early Years provision is required, the cost of travel may be prohibitive, especially for an asylum seeker awaiting a decision on leave to remain. If the provision is linked to ESOL provision for the parent, fares may be refunded by the DWP (Department of Work and

⁵⁰ <https://www.gov.scot/Publications/2018/01/7281/5>

Pensions) or by the Local Authority, but this is not always the case, and there is a reluctance to create a culture of dependency or to give resettled refugees or asylum seekers support which UK citizens on benefits do not receive.

3.5 Language barriers

Information provided by local authorities on arrival, or information on ECEC websites, may not be accessible even if provided in the home language. Many refugees have had their education interrupted and may not be literate in their home language.

Mothers may lack the language and confidence to communicate with Early Years providers (and/or other mothers if none of the other mothers share the same language).

3.6 Lack of confidence

Mothers may not feel confident in making their own way to an Early Years provider on their own. This may involve using public transport, crossing busy roads, interacting with other people en route.

3.7 Establishing a relationship of trust with ECEC providers

Establishing a relationship of trust is crucial where parents are reluctant to take advantage of ECEC offers or if they are anxious about leaving their child. In addition, they may not understand the expectation that parents will actively engage in their children's learning through 'at home' activities.

3.8 Lack of appropriately trained Early Years staff

Staff may lack the cultural sensitivities and training to help them engage more fully with parents and facilitate the integration of refugee children into Early Years provision. They may not have experience of working with children whose language ability and physical and social skills are under-developed because of the disruptions experienced in leaving their home country and losing the support of the wider family. Unless nursery staff have worked in areas where there are significant numbers of children who speak their heritage language at home and have English as an additional language, they are unlikely to have the specialised communication skills necessary to work effectively with these children. Additionally, there may be emotional issues that need to be carefully managed.

The need for appropriate resourcing of ECEC is widely recognised and in Scotland there are current initiatives to promote childcare as a profession.^{51,52} However, an interview with Naomi Eisenstadt in the Times Educational Supplement (September 2018 No 5317 www.tes.com) emphasised the mismatch between the government's stated policies on the importance of pre-school education (and specifically language development), and the low qualification requirements and poor pay and conditions for staff working in some areas of the sector.

⁵¹ <https://childcarecareersscotland.scot/>

⁵² <https://childcarecareersscotland.scot/resources/>

4 INSPIRING PRACTICES IN EARLY YEARS PROVISION

4.1 The Bristol Approach

The responsibility for supporting refugees lies with individual local authorities. Enquiries to Local Councils about how pre-school children access ECEC indicated in some instances that the priority on arrival was given, understandably, to finding school places for children aged 5 and above. Pre-school education is desirable but **not** compulsory for any child. An example of an authority which has recognised the importance of ECEC and devoting resource to it was found in Bristol.

Bristol became a City of Sanctuary in 2011 and like all Cities of Sanctuary brings together organisations and individuals across the city to ensure that Bristol is a welcome and inclusive city and that local organisations delivering services across the city are supported. The Local Council is developing a strategy⁵³ based on a comprehensive needs analysis of asylum seeker and refugee needs in Bristol. The strategy ('7.5 Family Support' below) includes specific action points relating to Early Years provision and is an example of an integrated approach to finding solutions to lack of access to ECEC by refugee families, including the appointment of a Specialist Leader in Education, and the commitment to develop a specialist training package for those working in Early Years settings:

7.5 Family Support

7.5.1 To improve understanding of local generic services for refugee families who don't meet the threshold for early intervention.

7.5.2 To use additional Specialist Leader in Education time to ensure best practice is adopted in different Early Years settings in terms of induction, language acquisition, integration and inclusion of refugee families.

7.5.3 To deploy Early Years staff to support the Bristol Refugee Rights specialist induction and support centre for up to 150 newly arrived children each year.

7.5.4 To devise and deliver a package of specialist training on the needs of asylum seeker and refugee parents to mainstream Early Years settings receiving children.⁵⁴

The Bristol City of Sanctuary has set up a Transport Fund to provide an allocation of free bus tickets for 'destitute sanctuary seekers and vulnerable refugees' (especially women) in Bristol (cf. the mention of a lack of funding for travel as a barrier in Section 3.3). Every donation is matched by a local bus company. It is not clear if the Transport Fund is currently used to fund travel to ECEC.

⁵³ <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/documents/20182/2022567/Welcoming+asylum+seekers+strategy>

⁵⁴ Ibid, p.9

4.2 The EAL Crèche: Norwich

As mentioned in Section 1.3.2, funding for refugees on resettlement schemes includes specific funding for language learning, which is essential for employment and social integration. Although many refugee women may not be seeking employment in the short or even longer term, lack of language restricts their involvement in the wider community and is a barrier to understanding verbal and written communications with schools, and interacting with teachers and other parents.

The solution in many contexts is to provide language learning with a crèche facility. However, although opportunities for learning through play and interacting with other children may be provided, some crèche provision is staffed by willing volunteers rather than by trained Early Learning practitioners.

In contrast, Norwich, like Bristol has a co-ordinated approach to addressing asylum and refugee needs, with all services working together to provide appropriate family support. For example, accommodation has been found in central locations in Norwich; advice services have been set up in the central library so that those in need of advice and support can walk rather than use expensive public transport. The team supporting Early Years provision for 'people from abroad' families (the alternative term for 'refugee families'), consists of 3 social workers, 2 support workers, a health visitor, Norfolk city housing, the Crèche Manager, who is a trained teacher, and the EAL/BME Specialist Advisor.

English language learning classes for families have been set up with a crèche facility and this is staffed by volunteers working with an employed Crèche Manager, who works closely with the Norfolk Early Years team and the Inclusion Adviser and other agencies in Norwich to ensure as many refugee and asylum-seeking children as possible can access childcare. The Early Years provision summarised below is funded partly by the allocated funds from the Government and partly by a 'Barrier to ESOL' grant.

The EAL (English as an Additional Language) class takes place in a church in the centre of Norwich, and the crèche is provided on-site in an adjacent room to the learning English classes and is well resourced. Local people were asked to contribute and donations were collected in libraries. There is an outside area with bikes, and sand and water play. Children are supported in a safe environment. In order to reduce separation anxiety, parents are allowed to stay and play with their children initially and can gradually withdraw.

Children (including babies and children up to 4) learn to play and share whilst also developing their English and their understanding of the rules of a structured environment. The Crèche Manager and trained volunteers work with the 7 areas in the Early Years Framework.⁵⁵ See Appendix 1 for a comparison table of areas of learning in pre-school curricula in the UK.

The crèche prepares the children for transfer to pre-school providers or Reception classes in primary schools.

Nursery provision (within the universal 15 hours free ECEC) is available from 9-11.30 or 12.30-15.00. The EAL class is from 10-12.00 from Monday to Thursday. Taxis are provided with a 'chaperone' to take the children from the nursery to the EAL class. The chaperone gets to know the children and becomes another consistent figure in their lives. This arrangement allows both children and parents to benefit from the educational opportunities provided.

The EAL Specialist Advisor at Norwich Council provides 3 hours initial hours training (and 2 additional 3-hour courses) for Early Learning staff and teachers working in pre-school settings

⁵⁵https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/596629/EYFS_STATUTORY_FRAMEWORK_2017.pdf

and reception classes. These courses cover:

- The VPRS scheme
- Differences in educational practice in the home countries of 'people from abroad' (pre-school education not the norm)
- Good EAL practice
- Assessment with reference to the Early Years Framework for England (for example, progression in the home language should be assessed. This is stipulated in section 3.4 of the Early Years Framework, but understandably without training ECEC providers don't know how to implement this.)
- Engaging with parents and encouraging them to engage with their children's learning.

When the children are placed in nurseries, initially the EAL Specialist Advisor, the key worker from the council who supports the family and an interpreter are present to support the transition from crèche to nursery. The interpreter also works with families. If there are ongoing issues, the EAL Specialist Advisor and or the key worker can be contacted.

ECEC providers are informed of translation support: Google translate with voice app; and Language Line.⁵⁶ Norfolk Early Years Team has set aside money to fund Language Line for all EAL providers in Norwich.

The EAL Specialist Advisor also liaises with Reception Year teachers in primary schools to ensure a smooth transition to mainstream primary school. In the UK, children start compulsory education in the year in which they reach their 5th birthday.

As mentioned in section 2.2, all formal ECEC care is inspected by Ofsted. The Norwich crèche has been set up initially without the delays of formal registration, but this is being applied for.

4.3 Nurseries of Sanctuary

The establishment of Schools of Sanctuary is a City of Sanctuary initiative, which began in Yorkshire (England) to ensure that schools are a safe and welcoming place for refugees and asylum seekers. There are now a number of Schools of Sanctuary across the UK. A [range of resources](#)⁵⁷ has been developed in co-operation with NGOs including guidance for teachers, lesson plans, and links to sites such as fun ways to learn Arabic.

An initiative is currently underway to establish a parallel scheme called Nurseries of Sanctuary and some nurseries are now promoting the diversity and inclusion of their provision. The [Royal Spa](#)⁵⁸ Nursery in Brighton is a maintained nursery with a substantial number of bi- or trilingual learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds, including some with refugee status. The [Royal Spa](#)⁵⁹ Nursery became a 'Nursery of Sanctuary' in May 2018, in recognition of their work on 'inclusion, diversity and welcoming all our families, including refugees from different parts of the world.'

This Nursery of Sanctuary was established with training and support from two local organisations – *Sanctuary on Sea* and the *Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS)*. For

⁵⁶<https://www.languageline.com/>

⁵⁷<https://schools.cityofsanctuary.org/resources/>

⁵⁸<https://www.royalspanurseryschool.co.uk/news/nursery-school-of-sanctuary>

⁵⁹<https://www.royalspanurseryschool.co.uk/news/nursery-school-of-sanctuary>

example, EMAS provided training on *Supporting children with multiple language and identity*.

The nursery website includes pictures of children's activities throughout the year including photos of celebrations of festivals from the children's own cultures, information about current activities, rhymes of the week so parents can practise them with children at home, and a newsletter for parents.

There is an excellent [EAL Welcome Booklet](#)⁶⁰ providing information parents need to know, with attractive visuals and minimal text.

Specific support is given for families who are new to English.

- There is a bilingual lending library every Wednesday.
- Mother tongue support is provided for children who are new to English. This is accessed through EMAS (Ethnic Minority Achievement Service).
- Regular coffee mornings are held for parents of bi- or tri-lingual children so they can meet and chat.
- Families are taken regularly to the Turner Children's centre Bilingual Family Group.

Specific strategies used at the nursery include:

- Using 'persona dolls'⁶¹ to problem-solve and resolve situations.
- Using language maps so that teachers at the nursery have a full profile of the child's repertoire of languages and interactions within the family. The father and mother may speak different languages to the child at home. See Appendix 2 for an example of a language map.
- Celebrating home languages e.g. by having a 'language of the week' – for a whole week children will say 'Hello' in the selected home language.
- Ensuring teachers at the nursery have about 15 key words in the children's home languages so that key concepts can be communicated, for example *please and thank you, mummy's coming*.
- Ensuring that staff have a shared language to deal with situations. For example if a child is having a difficulty or is upset, the agreed response is to ask *Can I help you?*
- Use of *Word Play*, a Speech and Language Programme designed by NHS Speech and Language Therapists in Brighton and Hove to build vocabulary with children who do not have depth of language. It is used the year before they start school, and has provided useful vocabulary building to support the language development of bilingual and trilingual learners at the nursery.
- Working with the *Every Child a Talker*⁶² materials to assess children's language development.
- Modelling and chunking language.
- Using Makaton⁶³, which is a sign language widely used in nurseries. Words are pronounced and signed or supported with a visual.
- Nursery staff use visuals on key rings which they carry with them at all times. These are pictures of key objects, e.g. a toilet, a lunch symbol etc. Nursery staff also have visuals in their group sessions on a board so children can see what is coming next. The pictures are taken off when an activity has finished, e.g. a story picture, a song picture, a goodbye picture. These help bi- and trilingual learners understand what is happening; they soon recognise the symbols.
- Making extensive use of visuals and stories. For example, if the teachers are looking

⁶⁰ <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57e0f600d1758e0caaa55f98/t/5a74814ef9619aaffde8a301/1517584723515/EAL+Visual+Booklet+Full+Day.pdf>

⁶¹ https://www.teachingforchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/ec_personadolls_english.pdf

⁶² <https://www.foundationyears.org.uk/2011/10/every-child-a-talker-guidance-for-early-language-lead-practitioners/>

⁶³ <https://singinghands.co.uk/about/what-is-makaton/>

at the story *I love my Mummy*, they have lots of images of mothers from around the world. They make the images into books, use them in group times and have them displayed, so all children can see the diversity. Teachers choose books that are specifically focussed on celebrating diversity, e.g. *The Swirling Hijab*.

- Celebrating any festivals the children celebrate, together with invited parents.
- Managing problem behaviour with a positive behaviour policy, short-term behaviour plans, and use of consistent language when dealing with behaviour that needs to change.

4.4 The Rosemary Nursery Bristol

The Rosemary Nursery in Bristol is a Nursery School and Children's Centre. There are currently no refugees from the VPRS at the nursery but most of the children are from minority ethnic backgrounds and an above average number of children speak English as an additional language. For example, they have a number of children whose parents or grandparents came to the UK as asylum seekers and who speak another language at home, for example Somali. The government inspection report⁶⁴ conducted in June 2017 noted that '*Many speak no English, and others have underdeveloped language, social and physical skills. Most have had very little experience of the world around them.*' This situation would apply to many of the refugee pre-school children, particularly those newly arrived in the UK.

The inspiring practices adopted here are highly relevant to the needs of refugee children. These include:

Communication and language development strategies:

- The nursery conducts language screening for children at age 2 and 3 in order to identify language and communication development delays and disorders.
- Evidence from the language screening process provides information about whether the child is at a one, two or three word level for example. The staff keep their language at an appropriate level using short meaningful phrases and repetition of key information-carrying words.
- Visual aids are used to support communication, namely a set of cue cards created from Boardmaker⁶⁵, which staff wear around their necks.
- Visual timetables, such as line drawings of people sitting down to show that it's lunchtime, or a house to show that's home time.
- Staff use Makaton which is a sign language used for people with learning difficulties, such as autism. Words are pronounced and signed or supported with a visual.
- Staff use Eklan⁶⁶ techniques developed by speech and language therapists.
- Story-telling without words⁶⁷ in which a story is created with the use of props. The nursery reports that this creative approach not only develops children's attention and listening skills but, perhaps surprisingly, appears to support language development.

⁶⁴<https://reports.beta.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/20/108898>

⁶⁵<https://www.boardmakeronline.com/>

⁶⁶<https://www.elklan.co.uk/>

⁶⁷<http://www.rosemary.bristol.sch.uk/Professionals/CreativeCurriculum.asp>

Other support measures:

- Dual language books in all the languages spoken at the nursery are provided.
- There are language support groups for children who have an identified disorder in their home language.
- Staff learn some words in the home languages of the children.
- Therapeutic play with a specialist is provided for children with emotional issues and parents are involved in this process.
- Interpreters are provided for parents. The interpreters visit the parents in their own home before the children start at the nursery. Having someone from their own culture is vital in breaking down barriers and reassuring parents.
- A spoken newsletter in the language of the parents is produced twice a week to support parents who do not speak or read English.
- Sessions for parents are provided in which they learn how to help their child to read, reading from left to right, using pictures in the story, talking about the story. (Unfortunately, some of the services for parents are becoming more difficult to provide as they are offered as part of Children Centre provision, which are suffering from severe cuts in funding.)

4.5 Ofsted Inspection Reports

ECEC is inspected in all 4 countries in the UK and the reports are a source of information on best practice. Refugees are not specifically mentioned in the Ofsted reports on English provision though children who speak no English or for whom English is an additional language are referred to where relevant. The inspector's report is often uploaded to an ECEC provider's website. A review of several reports included the following key practices:

Bilingual staff helps facilitate communication, development of language skills and emotional well-being. (Bolton College Early Years and Pre-school centre, North-West of England⁶⁸)

Children are provided with familiar words that are important to them from their first language to ease the transition from home to nursery. (Royal Spa Nursery Brighton⁶⁹)

Staff use baby signing to support the youngest children who have English as an additional language. They model and repeat language as they play alongside them and in this way extend the children's range of vocabulary. (Joint Colleges Nursery, Cambridge⁷⁰)

Children who are learning to speak English as an additional language rapidly develop excellent communication skills in English from their starting point. Staff highly value all children's home languages and cultural backgrounds, and children learn to respect each other's differences. (LG nurseries, Kentish Town, London⁷¹)

⁶⁸https://files.api.beta.ofsted.gov.uk/EY415165_6.PDF

⁶⁹<https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/provider/ELS/114351>

⁷⁰https://files.api.beta.ofsted.gov.uk/221578_3.PDF

⁷¹http://www.lgnurseries.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/kentish-town-day-nursery_ofsted-

Younger children, including those who speak English as an additional language, listen intently to a favourite story. This is reflected in a story bag made by staff using ingenious props. This sustains children's interest superbly, as does staff's wonderfully captivating storytelling and signing. (Location, Leeds North East of England.⁷²)

There is also potential to identify best practice through examining the suggestions for improvement in Ofsted Reports. For example, the comment in one report that

'On occasion, children do not have enough time to think about and respond to the questions that staff ask.' has implications for working with children who do not speak much English and so will need longer processing time.

5 Supporting Resources

5.1 Stepping Stones Project

Stepping stones⁷³ is a course designed by to support mothers with babies. It was developed by the ESRC International Centre for Language and Communicative Development (LuCiD) whose research focus is on how children learn to communicate with language. The course includes functional skills combined with health and parenting information to help mothers engage with the community in which they live and also to develop their parenting skills, including ways to engage and interact with their babies. The material is free and is available to schools and children's cultural and community centres.

An introductory video showing the course in action can be viewed here:

www.lucid.ac.uk/steppingstones

Those working in educational settings can apply for a licence and then get authorisation to download the materials.

<http://lucid.ac.uk/what-we-do/impact/english-language-teaching-for-non-english-speaking-mothers/access-the-esol-stepping-stones-materials/>

5.2 ELC (Early Learning Centres) Resources Scotland

Resources on the Education Scotland website include a focus on how language can be developed in home and ELC settings. The Language is Fun⁷⁴ resource is specifically targeted for use with pupils in early learning and primary settings who have language and speech difficulties.

5.3 EAL Resources in Wales

The Welsh Strategic Migration partnership commissioned GEMs (Gwent Education Minority-ethnic Service)⁷⁵ and a Local Education Authority (EA) to produce a resource pack and guide for teachers receiving refugee children into their schools for the first time. The Education Toolkit for Refugee Children is available on the Welsh Government's site for teachers, [HWB](#)⁷⁶ and includes a range of information and resources relating to cultural backgrounds, diversity, language acquisition, and assessment, as well as a very useful video playlist of teachers (including nursery and reception year teachers) talking about how they prepared for and supported refugee children in their school, and parents talking about how they and their children were supported as they joined pre-school and main school settings.

⁷³<http://www.lucid.ac.uk/steppingstones>

⁷⁴<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/practice-exemplars/Language%20is%20Fun%20Together%20%28LIFT%29>

⁷⁵[http://www.newport.gov.uk/en/Schools-Education/Gwent-Education-Minority-Ethnic-Service-\(GEMS\).aspx](http://www.newport.gov.uk/en/Schools-Education/Gwent-Education-Minority-Ethnic-Service-(GEMS).aspx)

⁷⁶<https://hwb.gov.wales/resources/resource/c2ca434c-f523-43d8-9060-bf41690911e3/en>

5.4 Family packs / Booktrusts UK / Bookstart packs / Bookbug resources

The Booktrust⁷⁷ is a charity which has branches in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. They provide Bookstart packs for babies and pre-school children. These are free of charge and can be requested by any individual or organisation working with pre-school children. On request, dual language material can be included.

Scottish Book Trust is a national charity that believes books, reading and writing have the power to change lives. Its early years programme – Bookbug – is a book gifting programme that provides free bags of books to every child in Scotland from birth to 5 years. These bags are available in both English and Gaelic and there is a general Bookbug leaflet which is available in nine different languages. Bookbug also runs free song and rhyme sessions in libraries and community centres across Scotland.

There is a section on bilingual reading including a video of a mother reading and interacting with her four children in Romanian.

<http://scottishbooktrust.com/bookbug/sharing-books-rhymes/fun-with-reading/thats-not-my-monkey>

There is also link on the Bookbug site to the National Literacy Trust which has tips in 18 different languages to help parents and early years practitioners read to children:

<https://literacytrust.org.uk/early-years/bilingual-quick-tips/>

as well as resources to work with multilingual families with pre-school and primary aged children:

<https://literacytrust.org.uk/resources/early-words-together-MLL-programme-resources/>

The Bookbug web page also has links to two sites which both have a wealth of material to support the home languages of pre-school children:

- Mama Lisa is a site which has songs and rhymes in other languages. For example you click on Asia and then on Syria and can find rhymes and songs that may be familiar to Syrian children:

<https://www.mamalisa.com/?t=eh>.

- Mantra Lingua has books in a range of languages. The Mantra Lingua App allow schools to request translations of individual words or texts. Teachers and Early Learning providers can input the text they want and within five days Mantra Lingua sends a word document with the translated text.

<http://uk.mantralingua.com/>

5.5 Explanatory leaflets

Bristol Refugee Rights offer ESOL classes supported by a crèche facility. Leaflets are provided in a variety of languages explaining that activities may involve getting dirty or wet as children explore and play, and reassuring parents that the children will be changed if necessary.

⁷⁷<https://www.booktrust.org.uk/what-we-do/programmes-and-campaigns/bookstart/>

5.6 Language selection option on ECEC website pages

A day nursery in Scotland⁷⁸ included a facility to select a language. This is extremely helpful and allows information to be accessed - provided the user is literate.

5.7 Information maps

For asylum seekers, as opposed to those on resettlement schemes, access to formal nursery provision is more problematic and the resources to support access are less likely to be available. Opportunities for educational activities outside the formal structures of nurseries and playgroups may exist in such venues as libraries, toddler groups, community activities, and these are more accessible for those who are unable to access formal provision. How do asylum seeker and refugee families and the volunteers supporting them find out about these? Edinburgh, which is one of over a hundred [Cities of Sanctuary](https://cityofsanctuary.org/)⁷⁹ in the UK and Republic of Ireland, has provided a sanctuary guide – a city map, which outlines a whole range of venues and activities in Edinburgh including a link to Toddler groups and activities.

A click on the 'Toddler' tag reveals links to a whole range of activities and groups, including many where parents and children can socialise together with other families. Initiatives such as this facilitate access to informal ECEC, which may be the only option for families unable or unwilling to access formal, funded provision.

⁷⁸<https://www.glenberviekindergarden.co.uk>

⁷⁹<https://cityofsanctuary.org/groups/>

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Training for early years teachers and assistants

Bespoke training should be made available for Early Years providers on the following topics:

- Information about the backgrounds and culture of refugee children and the general circumstances preceding their arrival in the UK, and the difficulties they may have in adapting to UK culture
- Understanding of the educational norms in the country of origin, and how this may influence parents' views and expectations; providing parents with information about the early education setting and the approach to learning through play
- Language training
 - Awareness of features of the home language(s), structural and phonological differences and writing systems compared to English
 - Ways to incorporate and value home languages e.g. through dual language books, staff learning social phrases in different languages
 - Use of English in the multilingual classroom, e.g. signing, use of short meaningful phrases, modelling, repetition, providing visual support
 - Learning a few words in the language of their pupils particularly if a small range of ethnic groups.
- How to recognise and respond to trauma
- Use of online translation tools
- Training providing guidance and resources to help teachers deliver an inclusive curriculum with regard to refugee and asylum seekers
- The importance of regular communication with parents and carers and ways of facilitating this
- Cultural mediation training for Early Learning providers to support interaction with parents. (The University of Glasgow has developed an online course in cultural mediation. This is free on the Futurelearn platform.)
- Safeguarding issues.

Training can be integrated into existing systems for example in-service training or online training opportunities. One example is the existence of an online toolkit published on the Scottish Education website.⁸⁰ *Supporting refugee children in early years settings* could be added to this list.

It is clear from interviews undertaken as part of this report that bespoke training for ECEC providers working with refugee and asylum seeker children is being developed in many contexts. If funding could be provided for experts in the field to co-operate on producing a 'Master' training pack, this would be the most effective means of sharing best practice.

⁸⁰<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Pages/EEF-Toolkit.aspx>

6.2 Training for volunteers

Volunteers play a vital role in, for example, supporting sessions for children at the Initial Accommodation Centre in Wakefield, providing crèche support while parents are in ESOL classes, or supporting families in their homes. Basic training should also be provided for volunteers, for example communication strategies with children learning English as an additional language, story-telling techniques, how to engage parents in their children's learning.

Familiarity with Early Years Frameworks at a basic level would also be helpful as many standard activities, such as chanting rhymes, rhymes involving physical activities, songs involving numbers or letter sounds, encouraging children to tidy up after using toys, sharing words from the children's home language would all map to the frameworks.

6.3 Providing support for parents

It is clear from the best practices of nurseries such as the EAL Creche in Norwich, the Royal Spa Nursery of Sanctuary in Brighton and the Rosemary Nursery in Bristol, and initiatives such as the Stepping Stones Project that ECEC for Refugees is as much about ensuring the successful well-being and integration of parents, particularly mothers, as it is for their children. Opportunities should be provided to support good parenting such as providing parents with opportunities to learn how to:

- engage in early learning at home (for example by reading stories with their children in the home language)
- provide structure and routines
- set boundaries for behaviour
- ensure children's safety and well-being.

6.4 Collation of best practice across a range of contexts

This report has taken a 'bottom up approach' to identifying best practice in the provision of ECEC by following up website searches and recommendations given by interviewees as part of this project. A top-down approach to record best practice across ECEC provision across the UK would enable best practice to be cascaded down across the diverse bodies engaged in ECEC provision.

6.5 Resource bank

It is clear from the research undertaken for this report that resources are being developed by different agencies, some free, some paid for. Creation of a resource bank would be a significant outcome of this report and would support the recommendations 6.1 - 4 detailed above.

7 FINAL COMMENTS

Although refugee and asylum seeker children have equal rights to other children in the UK under the 2010 Equality Act, they are under-represented in ECEC settings.⁸¹ The NALDIC website provides some guidance on how provision for these vulnerable children may be extended, and this report has identified some examples of inspiring practices in nursery and crèche provision, where the specific linguistic and emotional needs of refugee and migrant children have been addressed.

Responsibility for the education of refugees and asylum seekers lies with individual local authorities in the UK. It is clear from the examples described in this report that ECEC is most successful when services are integrated, thereby enabling Early Learning educators to communicate with social workers, housing officers and health services. The examples of best practice described in this report are only vignettes and not intended to be definitive. There are undoubtedly more examples of good practice that have not been cited in this report, and also many areas where provision could be improved. For example, support given to asylum seekers appears, to be dependent on NGOs and local action groups to complement whatever official support may be available. As one interviewee commented, refugees on the resettlement schemes are ‘the lucky ones’, as targeted government funding has been provided for refugees on these schemes.

It is to be hoped that the adoption of an integrated services approach, for example that taken by local authorities such as the Bristol and Norwich Councils, and the work of Strategic Migration Partnerships with local authorities, will enable access to formal ECEC to be extended to all eligible children. However, any opportunity for pre-school refugee children to interact in less structured settings with other children under the supervision of adults will also support their language development as well as their physical and social skills. Training and support for these informal settings should not be overlooked.

A key need addressed by the best practice examples in this report is two-way communication with parents. This can be achieved with the aid of translation services, but supporting parents with their own English language learning will enable them to engage more actively in their children’s learning and participate in social activities organised by the school/nursery.

There is currently no overview of how many refugee and asylum seeker children are accessing ECEC provision, or how their needs are being met. A project providing such an overview and collating best practice would be a useful outcome of this report.

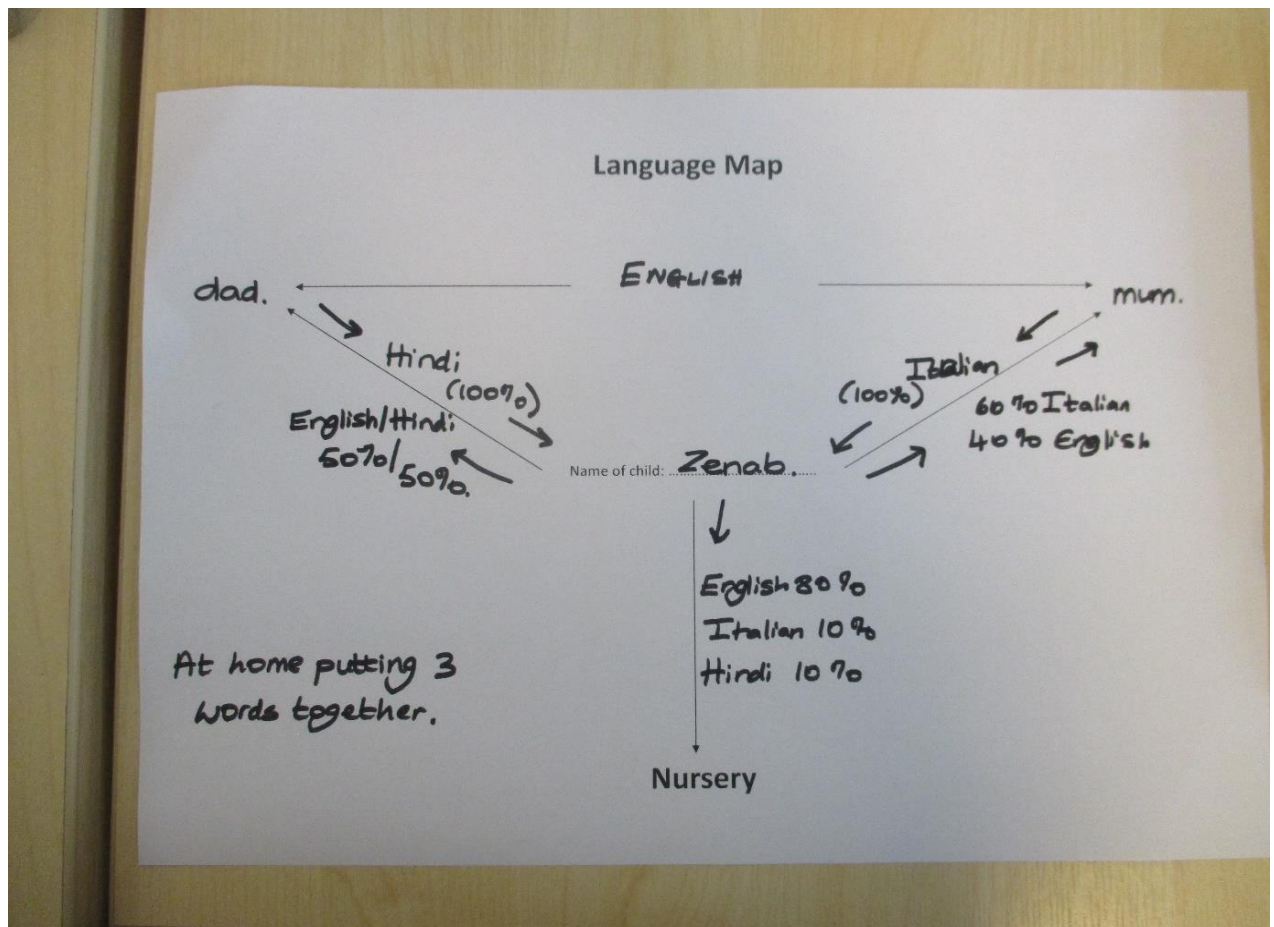
A key finding of the April 2018 Migration Policy Report was that provision is most effective when co-ordinated and supported at a national level. The recent publications of the *New Scots Refugee Integration Policy* and the *Integrated Communities Strategy* in England may lead to more tightly integrated and targeted support at a national level.

⁸¹ www.naldic.org.uk/eal-teaching-and-learning/outline-guidance/ealrefugee/refey/

Appendix 1: Comparison of areas of learning in early years frameworks in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

	England	Wales Foundation Stage	Scotland	Northern Ireland
1	Communication and language	Personal and social development, well-being and cultural diversity	Early Level Literacy and English	Personal, social and emotional development
2	Physical development	Language, literacy and communication skills	Numeracy and Mathematical skills	Physical development and movement
3	Personal, social and emotional development	Mathematical development	Early Level Literacy and Gàidhlig Early Level Gaelic (Learners)	Language
4	Literacy	Welsh language development	Early Level Expressive Arts	Early mathematical experiences
5	Mathematics	Knowledge and understanding of the world	Early Level Health and Wellbeing x3 (Food and health; Personal and social education; Physical education)	The Arts
6	Understanding the world	Physical development	Sciences	The world around us
7	Expressive arts and design	Creative development	Social Studies	
8			Technologies	

Appendix 2: Example of a Language Map



Appendix 3: Case Studies

Amir is 2 years old and lives with his mother and father and an older sister in one room with a small kitchen area. The family speak Arabic at home. Amir is a very quiet and withdrawn child; he says a few words in Arabic and has no English. His parents are anxious as they have claimed asylum and are waiting for the outcome. He has a toy car and a soft ball which have been given to him by a volunteer but he doesn't play with them. There is in any case no space to play and his parents never think of taking him to a nearby park. He has never been separated from his mother. His parents are very protective as he is the only son. His older sister has just started at a nearby school.

Iman is 3 years old and has had a very unsettled life. Her father was killed in Syria and her mother then spent a year in a refugee camp in Jordan with Iman and two older brothers. Iman has just started a local nursery but is finding it difficult to settle. She is not used to routine. On one occasion she bit one of the nursery staff, and her mother who observed the incident just laughed.

Nisreen is 3 years old and is being treated for a serious kidney disease. She is under hospital treatment. She has a weak immune system and is prone to infections. Her parents are very protective and don't want to take the risk of her picking up infections from other children. They will not take her out of the house if the weather is cold. For these reasons her parents have turned down the offer of a free nursery place. On occasions when Nisreen has contact with other children, she refuses to share and hits the other children. She has learnt a few English words from a volunteer who plays with her in the home, but her language is far less developed than other refugee children in the same location who go to nursery school.

Victor is 3 years old and is attending nursery 6 hours a day, 5 days a week. His parents are concerned about his language development in Arabic as he does not speak as well as his siblings at a similar age. Victor has settled into the nursery. He has some comprehension in both Arabic and English but does not produce much in either language. His parents are worried that he has learning difficulties.

Example taken from M Phil thesis, RUIJUN MA, 2018

Noor is just 4 years old. She was terrified on her first day and would not leave her father or the support worker who had come with them on the first day in the reception class. The staff helped her settle in and to feel safe but she found it difficult to sit down on the carpet and pay attention during story time.

(Noor - Example taken from Videos for Education toolkit – Refugee children Interviews with Phillipa Linton, nursery school teacher and Samantha Hawksworth, Reception Teacher, Griffiths Town Primary School, Wales.)

Appendix 4: Sources

Data collection

Information provided and statements contained in this report result from web searches of the referenced organisations. The data were collected between April and July 2018.

Contacts and Interviewees

A number of organisations were contacted and several phone interviews were conducted (asterisks indicate interviewees).

Regional co-ordinators of the Cities of Sanctuary*

COSLA Strategic Migration Partnership (Scotland)*

Bristol Refugee Rights, Early Years Project Manager*

Scottish Book Trust

Rosemary Nursery and Children's Centre Bristol, Head Toni Glazzard*, *

Strategic Migration Partnership, East of England*

Bristol City Council

Red Cross Peterborough

Urban House Wakefield

Families First and Refugees Co-ordinator, Ceredigion County Council, Wales

DPIA (Displaced People in Action), Wales

Crèche Manager*, EAL Crèche, Norwich

EAL Advisor*, Norwich Professional Development Centre

Norfolk ALCS

ESOL Coordinator, Wales Strategic Migration Partnership

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