



SIRIUS - Policy Network on Migrant Education

MULTI-COUNTRY PARTNERSHIP TO ENHANCE THE EDUCATION OF REFUGEE AND ASYLUM-SEEKING YOUTH IN EUROPE – PERAE

England, UK

2018

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“Multi-country Partnership to Enhance the Education of Refugee and Asylum-seeking Youth in Europe” is funded by Stiftung Mercator

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1 Introduction

This report presents the contextual information, research and findings of a project conducted in relation to the educational integration of Refugee and Asylum-Seeker (RAS) children in the United Kingdom (UK). The project (PERAE) is part of a partnership between eight countries that is exploring options and avenues to enhance the quality of education and the experiences of RAS children arriving and settling in European countries. The partnership was established within the SIRIUS Network, a European policy network that is working towards improving the educational access, opportunities, quality and experiences of migrant children and young people whilst being integrated into the society of their host country. Through this partnership various issues related to the inadequate access to quality education by RAS children are brought to light enabling actions to resolve them.

Although the general situation discussed and the statistics quoted in this report apply to the whole of the UK very broadly, the authors specifically focus on the integration process of settling RAS children into the education system of England. Firstly, the report draws together the general scenario of addressing the individual situation of RAS children arriving in the country; secondly, it moves on to discuss their access to education and their integration; and thirdly, it comments on the educational systems, structures and opportunities that are available for RAS children and youth in England. The report highlights some concerns that exist in the current situation of 2016. From doing that it identifies future directions towards enhancing the education of RAS children and youth.

1.1 General situation of asylum seekers in the UK

An individual needs to be within the borders of the UK in order to apply for asylum and be recognised as a refugee. The UK is a signatory of the United Nations Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) and is also bound by the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). This means that the government cannot instantaneously and automatically deport the entrants seeking asylum due to reasons of security, war, prosecution and threat, including torture, to their life in their home country that they have fled from. The decision relating to the status of such people is varied. Often the two terms – Asylum-seeker and Refugee – are misunderstood in the popular media. The Refugee Council which works closely with the UK government states that “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” (<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk>). The difference between the two terms is that “Legally, an asylum seeker is a person who has applied for asylum in the UK and is waiting for a decision on his or her claim. A refugee on the other hand has already received

a positive decision from the authorities on his or her asylum claim” (Semmelroggen, 2015). An asylum seeking applicant whose refugee status is refused at initial decision can still appeal and may still have a chance of being granted “Leave to Remain” permission. In such cases humanitarian or other reasons will be considered.

Refugee status is assigned to those who are legally granted the refugee status and therefore, remain and continue to live in the host country with a new life. The initial period of five years of having “Leave to Remain” status can potentially become a settled status for a person resulting in “Indefinite Leave to Remain” status. Once the asylum applicant receives refugee status they can access public funds and services independently including housing, education and health.

Data available from the Home Office of the UK government shows that the number of people seeking asylum in the UK although was on the rise up until the beginning of 2016 has since decreased in the latter half of the year. At the end of the first quarter of 2016, 35,683 asylum seekers and their dependants were being supported by Local Authorities in the UK under Section 95 with either supported accommodation or receiving subsistence only support. The number was 30,476 at the end of March 2015. However, applications seeking asylum in the UK decreased in their number in the third quarter of 2016 compared with the same time period of 2015 and also earlier quarters in 2016. There were 7,146 asylum applicants in the third quarter of 2016 compared to 10,231 of the same period in 2015. The table below shows the comparative statistics of country-specific applications received in and the grant rate of 2015 and at the end of June 2016.

Countries with highest number of applications for asylum in the UK, year ending June 2016 compared to year ending June 2015

Ranking in year ending June 2016 (Year ending June 2015)	Nationality	Year ending June 2015	Year ending June 2016	Grant rate based on initial decisions (%)
1 (4)	Iran	2,052	4,910	40%
2 (10)	Iraq	847	3,199	12%
3 (2)	Pakistan	2,313	2,992	16%
4 (1)	Eritrea	3,540	2,790	48%
5 (7)	Afghanistan	1,337	2,690	35%
6 (3)	Syria	2,157	2,563	87%

Source: Home Office, Immigration Statistics April to June 2016

The table shows that the number of Eritreans topped the list of asylum-seekers in 2015 and they were fourth on the ranking list in 2016. Applicants from Iran, on the other hand, topped the list in 2016, followed by Iraq, Pakistan, Eritrea, Afghanistan and Syria. The grant rate based on initial decision was the highest in the case of Syrians followed by applicants from Eritrea, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq. With this information it can be ascertained here that the recently arrived dependent children came mostly from Syria and Eritrea.

1.2 Situating asylum-seeking children and young people in the UK

As with their adults, children and young people arriving in the UK seeking asylum are required to go through the same systems and procedures defined and controlled by the Home Office. Dependent children are generally attached to the application of their adults. On the other hand, a large number of children and young people apply on their own, as they are unaccompanied by a family member or a guardian. Such an Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking child (UASC) is a young person under the age of 18, or someone who may not be having documentary evidence that establishes their age and appears to be under the age of 18 years. Their age cannot be legally determined which makes their case complex.

There were 695 asylum applications from Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) in the third quarter of 2016. (Refugee Council, accessed on 23/1/2017). This is a 32% decrease compared with 1,023 UASCs in the third quarter of 2015, the year that had a total of 3,043 UASCs applying for asylum.

The countries with the highest number of UASC applications in the UK were Eritrea (694), followed by Afghanistan (656) and Albania (456). These three countries contributed to more than half (59%) of total applications (Home Office, accessed on 23/1/2017). The age surrounding persons who claim to be a child, in several cases, is disputed (Home Office, Immigration Statistics April to June 2016). In 2015 the age distribution of the UASCs was: Between 16 & 17 yrs – 62%; 14 & 15 yrs – 24%; under 14 yrs – 7%; age unknown 6% (Refugee Council, Accessed on 23/1/2017).

The following table shows the asylum applications made by Unaccompanied Children by quarter between 2011 and 2016.

Year	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
2016	661	658	695	
2015	525	575	1,023	1,130
2014	397	396	551	601
2013	282	288	327	368
2012	263	244	310	308
2011	343	339	271	295

Refugee Council, UK stated that Afghanistan was the top country of origin for the number of UASCs in the 3rd quarter of 2016 (29% of all applications) followed by Albania and Eritrea each with 13% of applications, Iraq and Syria with 8% each. Together, these countries made up the 71% of all applications in that quarter. When UASCs and dependent children of the asylum-seeking adult/s arrive in the UK they carry mixed feelings and experiences with them. Between leaving their home land and arriving in the UK they are filled with hopes of starting a new life, feeling safe, also being anxious for the well-being of their family and friends left behind. Looking forward to such new beginnings can only be done with their past still alive in their minds. Education becomes the best avenue to follow for children and young people in their journey forward.

The Factsheet of Immigration Act 2016 (Section 67) on Unaccompanied Refugee Children (arriving from European Union countries) states that “The UK has well-established and effective safeguarding procedures to ensure the safety of children who come to the UK.” To realise this, an enhanced level of engagement is seen between the government at the national level, the Local Authorities at the regional level and Non-Government Organisations besides other stakeholders such as local schools.

Until the time of accessing education children and young people go through stages of uncertainty. Children and young people are out of education until their legal status is determined although initial support in terms of accommodation is offered to the applicants. Their uncertain situation is, at this stage, compounded by this out-of-education experience. Non-Government Organisations spread throughout the country at local, regional and national levels such as the Refugee Council start the immediate process of inclusion for such children with a variety of programmes and activities that enable the children and young people to start learning language skills, social skills, cultural awareness and basic literacy and numeracy skills. To a large extent, this enables the smooth transition in to school life for those children who are involved in such programmes. For those who are not involved in the programmes of the NGOs, their families, relatives and community members already living in the UK society become the main sources of support in their structural adjustment as with their adults. Both ways, their new life is filled with challenges inherent in such migration.

Normally the Local Authorities are faced with the challenge and responsibility of finding a school nearest to the child's accommodation/housing or a college for the young person. As per law, the child's residential address is matched with the school that is geographically located closest to it. Schools tend to be oversubscribed in cases where most of the housing offered to asylum-seeking and refugee children falls within urban settings that are populated. Often, this particular law delays school admission causing the child to be out of education for longer periods of time. Once the child is placed in a school appropriate to their age level the integration process begins at the school level, with the possibility of continued support from the NGOs and local community.

The integration process carries a significant message – education is the most effective pathway that ensures social inclusion, financial security in future, access to careers and jobs, a reasonable standard of living and quality of life. Schools, community organisations and families place their own faith in the message.

On the other hand, the message of any education system is to be one of quality, easy access and positive educational experiences.

Are RAS children placed in schools able to realise this message? How are they being included in the education system? Are they experiencing their education positively? Are they being able to access education on a par with their peers who are born and brought up in the UK? What is their meaning-making process in their integration process? What are the challenges and opportunities that are embedded in the integration process? What support mechanisms are available for them to have quality education?

This report investigates the above research questions further in the following sections. The immediately following Section 2 describes how education of and for RAS children is situated in England. In Section 3 the authors carry out a review of research literature unpacking the issues related to the education of and for RAS children in the UK. In Section 4 the authors outline the methodological framework adopted for the research conducted for this project. Section 5 will detail the discussion of research findings obtained from the data. In Section 6 recommendations are listed for policy and practitioner organisations in the UK and SIRIUS Network of partnering EU countries.

2 Education system in England, U.K.

Education is compulsory in the UK for all children aged between 5 years and 16 years although children start early at 4 years in Northern Ireland. The five stages of education – Early Years, Primary, Secondary, Further Education and Higher Education – mark the educational journey of children and young people. However, Further Education is not compulsory for young people once they complete their Secondary education with a GCSE certification status. Young people, upon leaving school after the completion of GCSE can engage in Further Education and/or vocational education combined with education so that they remain as learners until the age of 18 either studying full-time or studying and gaining work experience. This stage may be non-advanced education or it may advance the learner to take up Higher Education in colleges and universities leading to different qualifications of degrees and diplomas.

Within the UK there are different curricula followed in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. In our research and in this report we focus on English education system in general and particularly, the secondary education following the National Curriculum throughout England.

2.1 Early Years and Primary education in England

When they turn two, children in England can start attending a preschool; every three and four-year-old child is entitled to a free early education place with a registered playgroup, child minder, a childcare centre, nursery schools or nursery/reception classes in primary schools for 15 hours a week. The parent or the legal guardian of the child can decide how they could spread these 15 hours flexibly over at least three days a week during normal term times. The UK government lists the registered providers on their website as well as the Local Authority having such details (Home Office, UK government).

The Early Years Foundation Stage sets the standards necessary for the learning, development and care of the child from birth to 5 years. Hence, all schools and registered providers must follow the EYFS standards. Local Authorities (LA) in England generally have a policy of accepting children turning five into schools. However, the age of the child is matched with the term period of the school year allowing the parent to ask the LA to admit the child either into Reception year or Year 1. The admission of a child who is gifted and talented or one who has an ongoing long term health condition or a child with special educational needs or children with disabilities may vary although it is the responsibility of the parent/guardian as well as the LA to offer suitable ability-level educational opportunities to such children.

The phase from Reception year through to Year 2 is Key Stage 1 and the years between 3 and 6 are categorised as Key Stage 2. Throughout these years of schooling the schools must follow National Curriculum.

2.2 School admission policy in England

All parents or those legally responsible for a child have the right to express a preference for their child's school. Parents or legally responsible adults apply for primary and secondary school placement through their Local Authority. The Local Authority (LA) caters to those who are living within the school catchment area which is a specific geographically marked area following the demographic features. The government has specified that such school admission policies be clear, fair and impartial which is legally binding. The government guidance called the School Admissions Code is available on www.gov.uk. Young children have an advantage for their schooling as preschools and primary schools are in plenty. Parents or legal guardians apply to the LA seeking a school place for their child which is an easy process. The child will complete Reception to Year 6 primary education before progressing on to secondary stage. Whilst the child is still in Year 6 the parents/legal guardians of the child are asked to put down three preferences for high school which takes place in October. It offers the immediately available and closest to home address school place which is announced in next January. The next or the second available school place is applicable in cases where the nearest school matching the child's residential address is oversubscribed. The child will have to travel longer than expected distance when this happens, may not have schoolmates living in the same neighbourhood and may experience exclusion to some extent. All LAs in England have a Choice Advice Service offering child's parents help and support.

The standard and quality of education is critically evaluated by OfSTED which is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. The office, a non-ministerial department, inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people, and services providing education and skills for learners of all ages (www.gov.uk). In other words, it is the quality-controlling body in England for education.

2.3 Secondary education in England

It is an expectation of the government in England that a young person must continue in education or vocational education combined with training until their 18th birthday. However, the compulsory school leaving age is not being raised after completing Year 11 around the age of 16 years. Although education is compulsory until the GCSE level (Year 11), the public provision of secondary education may be offered in different types of schools. The two main types of schools are Local Authority maintained schools and independent schools. Both types of schools are open to all ability-levels and aptitudes of the students. Maintained schools typically cover a specific geographical area known as 'catchment area' and are sometimes flexible in their student admission policy if they are undersubscribed. They reflect historical

circumstances and the policies adopted by their Local Authority. They may, in some cases, co-exist with other types of schools such as grammar schools.

With the introduction of Academies Programme in 2000, secondary schools are gradually showing a preference to become Academies which are publicly funded independent schools. Academies set their own standards of student and staff performance, are largely free from the control of their Local Authority, have the freedom to set their own pay and conditions for their staff, have the freedom to decide the delivery of the curriculum, and the term period of schooling. The preference to become an Academy is also driven by the motivation to raise the standard of educational outcomes. The advantage that an Academy offers is that it is an outstanding leader in a cluster of local schools some of which may be good and/or underperforming. The lead school helps such schools to raise their standards of performance and outcomes by sharing their expertise and excellence.

The general rule applicable to all schools in England in school admission is that the availability of staff, physical space and resources should match the number of children in order to provide them with quality education. Where a school is oversubscribed after fulfilling the list of who to be admitted as per given priority, which is normally the case for most inner-city and urban schools, a child may be refused admission. When and if this happens for an asylum-seeker or a refugee child it may complicate their everyday life circumstances.

When children complete their Year 6 they move on to Year 7 which is the beginning of Key Stage 3 and their high school. They remain in KS 3 through Years 7, 8 and 9 studying general subjects such as English, Modern Languages, Mathematics, Science, Design & Technology, Computing, Physical Education, History, Geography, Art, Life Skills, Drama, Music, and Religious Education in accordance with the National Curriculum.

The next Key Stage 4 comprises of Years 10 and 11 where the majority of students prepare for their GCSE – general certificate of secondary education – studying core subjects and a group of choice subjects that the student may have higher level of aptitude in. Schools cover core subjects of English, Mathematics, Science, Physical Education, Life Skills and offer choice subjects varied from languages, social sciences, humanities, health and social care, science and technology, art and design, mathematics, business and accounting. Academies may also offer other specialist subject areas such as engineering.

Depending on what grades students get in their GCSE examinations they either move on to Key Stage 5 which is the Sixth Form offering A Level certification in the same school progressing on to university education pathway. Or they may move on to a college for their A Levels where they study courses that focus more on vocational experience through formal studies. Students studying in colleges may complete their

study with a basic A Level Certificate or a Diploma or they may carry on with their study leading to a university degree. Depending on the pathway that they choose young people are expected to remain in education – post-16 educational phase – as a full-time student in a school or college, or in a college carrying out work-based learning with an apprenticeship, or carrying out part-time education and work-place training if they are enrolled in a work environment with or without pay. In all these instances the LA is responsible to oversee that a young person has access to a suitable offer of a place in their post-16 education or vocational training.

3 Situating the education of and for Refugee and Asylum-Seeking children in England

3.1 General legal setting in the UK impacting asylum-seeking children

A child seeking asylum in the UK will generally have two different situations – that of being accompanied by an adult or unaccompanied. The child's asylum application may be attached to that of their parent or closest blood relative who the child is living with or an adult legally responsible for the child or the social services responsible for the child. The second type of background is that the child is applying on his or her own.

In the first instance, the adult responsible for the child will have to follow the legal framework and procedure as the child is attached to their application. The decision time on their application status can vary from 30 days to six months once the adult visits the screening centre lodging their application. If the child does not have a legally responsible adult to represent them, then the child must access help and assistance from the social services or the police. Depending on whether the child is in the care of the social services or not an appointment will need to be booked with information related to their date of birth, passport details or national identity document number, medical conditions and/or their foster carer's details. A significant change in circumstances may happen if the unaccompanied child is found to have relatives living in the UK (www.gov.uk). If the child does not have any family or relatives to support them then the social services will become responsible for the child.

The UK government states that the welfare and well-being of the child is paramount in both instances. Whilst waiting for the decision to be made on their asylum application the family may be able to access free housing, healthcare and money to support their daily material costs. This is currently (2017) distributed through a post office account and is £36.95 per week for each person in the household. Their dependent children will be able to access free education at a LA maintained school. In case of their asylum application being refused and if they are preparing to leave the UK they may still apply for short-term support, which is £35.39 per week per person on a payment card.

In both instances of a family applying for asylum having dependent children or an unaccompanied child applying for asylum on their own, they both have to access the application centre, understand the process, produce relevant documentation proving their genuine situation of not being able to go back to their home country and live an uncertain time whilst awaiting decision on their asylum application.

Once their application is lodged with the government the LA will place them in any accommodation that is available such as a flat, a hostel, a bed & breakfast place, a shared house, or a single room which is dependent on the number in the family. They will be given an application registration card (ARC) that allows them to get the money from the local post office on weekly basis towards their basic living costs. This will continue until the time they are granted asylum or leave the country without such status. In some cases the decision related to their status of remaining in the country may be delayed due to legal procedures, absence of documents and other such issues. Although children must be placed in schools even at this stage the process is not easy due to frequent relocation, lack of an address, overpopulated geographical urban areas and oversubscribed schools.

This uncertain situation typically affects the personal experiences of children. In case of those who are with their adults it is a waiting period for them remaining out of school and a stop-gap in their education. It is somewhat easy for primary school-aged children to access schools as the 'catchment area' rule is not strictly applicable and also with the fact of primary schools being more in their numbers in most urban areas where the AS children are placed. On the other hand, it is complicated and challenging for a secondary school-aged child to be placed in school given the strict admission rules and most inner-city and urban schools being oversubscribed. Adults and unaccompanied children seeking asylum have to start their first step registering their application and follow the legal process. They need the appropriate level of understanding of the terms and provision of the details required. This very first step can be completed only with help from a range of people and organisations who are professionals in that area. Dealing with this entire process becomes a challenging experience for an unaccompanied minor.

Once the asylum-seeker is granted refugee status in England the asylum support of accommodation and the weekly cash allowance will stop after the initial transition period of 28 days. Their new legal status brings on its own challenges. The refugee, if they were previously living in an accommodation whilst receiving asylum support, will have to find their own housing, money and materials for their daily life. They will be able to work in any skill area as they would now have permission to work. However, most employers ask for National Insurance number, a bank account and an address. Obtaining these is a difficult phase for refugees unless they have developed good knowledge of the ways of life in the UK, a network of helping hands and confidence. Once they have the legal status of a refugee they can apply to claim various welfare benefits to support themselves and their families (www.citizensadvice.org.uk). However, the challenge is gathering information and an understanding of systems and action steps.

3.2 General legal setting in the UK impacting refugee children

Schools in the UK are bound by a legislative duty to promote inclusion and race equality under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. Schools have a responsibility to ensure children from refugee background who are in the age group of 5 to 18 years have equal access to education and receive quality education on par with all other children. The Education and Inspections Act 2006 specifies that all maintained schools in England must promote community cohesion which ensures effective inclusion and integration of those children.

Children in schools, once they are granted the status of a refugee, may feel relief as their uncertain legal status in the UK is over. They can live a new life of guaranteed life quality. However, this may not be the realistic picture. Children, even as asylum-seekers, come to be recognised as refugee children by their peers and in the neighbourhood, carrying a stigma and to some extent social exclusion in the early days. It may take months and years for them to integrate into the normal daily life in the society. This can only happen through sustained support and help towards their inclusion and well-being. Such help and support is expected from a number of agencies such as the LA, local NGOs, community organisations and school.

3.3 Role of the Local Authority (LA)

Data for this study was collected from within the jurisdiction of Leeds City Council falling in the West Yorkshire county region of northern England. The cities of Leeds and Bradford in the county receive most families seeking refugee or asylum status. Research from the Children's Society in Leeds shows the Local Authority follows structure and system already in place whilst settling children in schools (Franks, 2006). This is in the midst of seeking asylum or having the status of a refugee. This exercise may be that of 'lost in translation', putting those children out of school for longer periods of time and thereby, causing more hardships for their future inclusion and integration.

Parents have found it to be challenging and difficult when they have tried to enrol their children on their own by approaching the Local Authorities and schools. As mentioned in the earlier sections, majority of the RAS population is challenged by the lack of English language proficiency combined with their comprehension of the systems and processes involved in starting a life and settling children in schools.

Although enrolling children in primary schools (4-11 years) is easier than the secondary school enrolment (11-16 years) both stages of schooling life carry many challenges. The UK government at the national level, LAs at the regional and local level collaborate with national NGOs such as British Red Cross and Refugee

Council, and also a number of county-based organisations to support refugee children and their families in their integration process. All these organisations have a range of programmes and activities promoting inclusion and effective transition into a happy life in Britain.

Key community organisations such as The Children's Society focus on the issue of settling children in schools as a priority and therefore are more successful in enrolling children into schools with 'good practice' strategies of inclusion and integration.

3.4 Support from Non-Government Organisations

Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) play a pivotal part in the lives of RAS children and families. A number of them either work directly with separated children or support the families having children in the process of their settlement in the UK. Among them, the most prominent organisations at the national level are British Red Cross and the Refugee Council.

Refugee Council has a Children's Section operating since 1994 at the national level offering advice to those who are involved in supporting RAS children besides running their own programmes with children. Currently, the Children's Section works directly with about 200 children every month, after receiving referrals from statutory bodies, volunteer organisations and/or children themselves. Their work includes Age Disputed children and children in detention, children who have been trafficked, and children and young people who arrived in the UK on their own, lived here for some time and then came into contact with the Council directly. They offer educational, health, accommodation services besides offering advice on various issues affecting RAS children.

Particularly with regards to education, the Children's Section conducts classes in English language for the newly arrived children and young people who are still out of education. They also offer advice on accessing educational services to families and children's carers. As part of their Youth Development programme they conduct social activities, sports, visits to local places, entertainment, and generally introduce the young people to life in England. Such national organisations join hands with other national bodies and international agencies in policy implementation, reform and impact.

At the regional and local level of West Yorkshire where the project concentrated on collecting data, a number of NGOs such as Migration Yorkshire, Leeds Refugee Forum, British Red Cross, Leeds Asylum Seekers Support Network, Migration Access Point, City of Sanctuary, Positive Action for Refugees & Asylum Seekers, Angels of Youth and others are working with refugee population offering support, promoting advocacy, conducting research and trying to bring changes to the existing policies. The

projects and programmes that these regional and local NGOs conduct are quite dependent on the availability of funding and resources. There are many instances where the NGOs have reported that some of their programmes were suspended mid-way due to funding issues.

3.5 Support from the School, School Governing Body and Friends of the School

Most schools in England have English as an Additional Language (EAL) Coordinator depending on the number of students whose first language is not English. In England, the Department for Education stated in January 2013 that the school census results showed that one in six primary school students (a total of 612,160 students) spoke a different language as their first language. In secondary schools the figure was 436,150 with one student per eight who spoke English as their first language. Combined with figures from special schools and pupil referral units, the total number was over a million, doubling since 1997 (<https://www.naldic.org.uk>).

The EAL Coordinator supports the student to develop and enhance English language skills to reach the expected level of academic attainment. It is up to the EAL Coordinator as to how they design such support programmes to include not only the student but also their parents and their local community showcasing cultural awareness, diversity and inclusivity to find opportunities for intercultural education. Once again, the appointment of an EAL Coordinator, the mentoring programmes, language skills help, and the running of home-work clubs are dependent on much-needed funds. It becomes a new role for the schools' governing body and the Friends of the School to raise funds for such significant inclusion programmes. This, again, needs support from the local community that is empathetic and compassionate.

All schools in England have a governing body made up of several governors including a staff governor, the head teacher, a parent governor and from the local community. Besides, schools have a separate body known as Friends of the School made up of all parents of children studying in the school and any volunteers. These two individual bodies are other sources of support to RAS children in their integration process. Often it depends on the motivation level of these two bodies in how best they support the children in school life and community life. Befriending the child, their families, organising multi-cultural events, showcasing their stories of resilience, courage and strength, an awareness-creating programme and other such activities not only help the children but also raises the awareness within the local community of the life of a refugee child.

It can be assumed that the RAS children are well-supported and sustained together with the help and support available from the above mentioned sources. Although there seems to be reason to assume so, the evidence points to a different scenario concerning the life of RAS children in England. The space of network and collaboration between policy-making bodies, practitioner organisations and schools often is filled with gaps. Policy bodies must demonstrate their responsibility of executing the policy frameworks; practitioner agencies strive to help their target groups of marginalised populations; schools are limited by their own resources and adherence to structural approach. The 'lost in translation' exercise of integrating RAS children into education becomes an uphill task for all the concerned stakeholders. The educational experiences of RAS children become multi-layered. In the following section the authors review academic literature that discusses such multi-layered experiences.

4 Literature Review

Eurocities, a network of major European cities, published a report in January 2017 on cities' action for the education of refugees and asylum-seekers (www.eurocities.com). The report recognises the ongoing collaboration between NGOs, volunteers, schools, tertiary education providers, and cities' administrative bodies that have shortage of funds and/or staff. Despite their efforts there are gaps to be filled whilst connecting refugees to education services and the labour market.

The report, based on responses received from 26 European cities identifies that new strategies are required to effectively integrate refugees into a host society. New strategies to be developed and/or applied must be in the light of the challenges present in the current situation concerning the education of refugees and asylum-seekers. The challenges, being realistic, refer mainly to financial resources to develop and offer more need-based language teaching programmes, employing well-trained staff to deliver such programmes, expanding services and infrastructure matching the needs of refugee and asylum-seeking population, managing the diverse backgrounds of students for inclusion, recognition of young people's existing skills, dealing with their traumatic experiences and health issues, dealing with UASC and placing them suitably in education, and providing adequate support to schools in admitting students and their integration.

In this section the authors review academic literature that covers the above mentioned and other multi-layered issues and challenges. In particular, the focus here is to highlight challenges faced by dependent and unaccompanied RAS children and youth. Although most of the challenges listed above are applicable to all age-group children some are specific to young, primary children and some are more relevant to secondary school-aged children and young people who are in the post-16 education phase. Nevertheless, the underlying themes of this literature review illuminate their material conditions, socio-emotional needs and the need for an education system that is easier to access and one that provides for positive educational experiences. A trajectory of law, policy and practice needs to guide the integration process.

4.1 Issues related to Refugee and Asylum-Seeker population

As Jones (2001) argued, contradictions existed more than a decade ago between law, policy and practice related to children immigrating into the UK seeking refuge and asylum. Contradictions are still continuing to impact the children's lives today whilst looking forward to a new life in the British society. Changes in law and policy seem to be occurring more frequently within the UK than bringing stability to the situation in the background of the fluctuating number of children seeking asylum, changes in the agreements between European Union States and changing political scenario in individual countries.

A study conducted in 2004 in Leeds city of northern England (Dwyer & Brown, 2005) recommended that the Local Authorities be allowed to take a lead role in the management of forced migrants to ensure a better co-ordinated approach to the provision of services. This would bring more clarity to the situation of RAS children. However, the internal political and economic changes within the UK since the economic recession of the previous decade also have had a large influence on immigration laws and policies, putting pressure on the LAs to meet new demands of housing and other welfare benefits for the citizens. This could have aggravated the situation of RAS children coming from Eastern European countries and other troubled countries from Asia and Africa in the last and present decades. Put together, the situation has not improved much through the last two decades. This has contributed much to the negative social construction of a 'refugee' in the UK.

The process of diverse cultural groups moving to a new society creates a multi-layered experience, one which is profound in the case of migration from a non-Western society to a Western, English-speaking society. This experience is ultimately related to how the host society views the newly arrived migrants and also to the self-identity of the migrant (Puttick, 2016). The negative social construction around the imagery of refugees and migrants tends to mask social inequalities that exist in the mainstream society. Detention and impoverished treatment of young asylum-seekers negate their child rights and the promise of safeguarding their welfare and well-being. This is in contrast with the UNCRC which urges all States not to detain a child until the very last measure of law is applied in favour of the child, addressing their individual situation in their best interest. If detention is found to be the last resort it should be for the shortest period possible, making sure the child's well-being is not compromised.

In the UK, although there is generally a widespread appreciation for the UNCRC as a guiding force, there are confusions, lack of applicable knowledge and matters of legal obligation that seem to be operating against the realisation of all child rights. The confusion and dilemma shown in policy and practice areas are mostly related to the delays in immediately initiating an integration process for RAS children. The national NGOs are critical about the delayed decisions and actions of the government agencies. Policy bodies often express their helplessness pointing towards the ever-changing legal frameworks. Whilst there are odds in the hope of creating a socially just society, the work on the ground by those directly responsible for children needs clarity and transparency – all for the welfare and well-being of an asylum-seeking or a refugee child. Dryden-Peterson (2016) reminds that, during all such exercises of being responsible for a RAS child, the problematic of the argument is only one – the child's fundamental right to education enabling her or him to become an informed participant in the society. Education, to that extent, is the best path for children to

follow. Gateley (2015) asserts that refugee young people, surrounded by austerity measures of the UK government, will be more vulnerable without many appropriate opportunities of further and higher education. This will only compound their precarious position in the society. This can potentially impact on their psychological well-being too.

There are differential needs, provisions and challenges inherent in integrating children from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds into English education system (Reakes, 2007). Isolation felt by children in schools due to their English language skills and refugee status potentially results in an exasperated feeling for the child and family. A clear programme of inclusion is a networking relationship between various departments with the LA, schools, communities and multi-agencies. An effective co-ordination between such departments and multi-agencies to execute successful programmes and activities of integration often is affected by numerous factors. The experiences of how the family of a RAS child can access education and respond to it is much related to the changes in the law that filter down to the policy level, withdrawal of funding in schools due to such changes in policies, start of new programmes that don't have a clear understanding in vision, aims and delivery, rushed and inadequately time-framed activities related to language skills and difficulties in understanding the welfare society. This situation has been continuing over the past decade despite period changes in policy and practice to offer better provisions for the RAS population (Spicer, 2008).

In 2016 the majority of RAS children arriving in the UK were from Afghanistan, Iraq, Eritrea, Albania and Syria. Most of them left their homes fearing threat to their life and prosecution on various grounds. They travelled to the UK with the aim of finding safety. Hintjens (2012) details the plight of Iraqis leaving their home country in the post-war period, seeking asylum elsewhere. Describing their state as 'nowhere to run', she draws attention to the policies practised in the UK. The policies seem to be more structural and systemic, and therefore, often are less effective in addressing the issues that refugees and asylum-seekers face including potential homelessness, children out of school, unemployment and health problems. As a result, they experience a number of barriers in terms of acceptance, inclusion and integration in the English society, including children and youth under 21 years.

Barriers and hardships that the RAS children experience in educational integration are related to their ability of speaking English language (Phillimore, 2011), successful social inclusion, recognising their educational aspirations as significant, and general negligence towards widening their participation in higher education with adequate support (Stevenson & Willot, 2007). Schools, where good EAL support programmes are running successfully, report that refugee children work hard to reach the expected educational standards

so that they do not fall behind their peers. They also believe in the value of education getting them out of social exclusion, low income status and set them on the path of achievements and success.

If asylum-seeking children are delayed in accessing education their situation of out-of-education stretches further in its effect as they would already be out of school since leaving their home country or not attending school there for some time due to hostile conditions of war or violence. This long break/gap in education has a serious effect on a child's mental health and their well-being (Gaulter & Green, 2015; McCarthy & Marks, 2010; Sanchez-Cao, Kramer, Hodes, 2012).

However, despite such contradictions and challenges, various third sector organisations (NGOs) are offering community support, assistance in accessing government support schemes without delay, management of effective parental involvement and engagement, assistance to children and youth to enhance their educational experiences, and help to access reasonable quality of life without stigma and exclusion (Chiumento, Nelki, Dutton & Hughes, 2011; Desforges, 2003; Doyle & McCorriston 2008; Franks 2006).

As mentioned earlier, the close collaboration between NGOs, policy bodies of the government and their departments, and schools must share the responsibility of integrating a refugee child or an asylum-seeking child, along with the family, in education. For, understanding the education system in England throws many challenges for both the child and their family. Parental educational qualifications, their work experience and skills might ease the challenges to some extent but not all together. More often, parents are forced to become learners themselves whilst responding to new systems and structures in their host country. Their educational qualifications, skills and previous work experience are either not considered as relevant to England or they require an assessment to suit the UK standards. The frustrating experiences of getting recognition for their own educational qualifications and work experience may push the parents into low-skilled jobs as refugees which aggravates their psychological mind set. Depending on how they gear up to adapt to their compromised situation parents may put extra pressure on their children to adapt fast to school life setting high expectations for their academic achievements. Schools need to offer adequate support, encouragement and inclusion mechanisms to those parents. Such support services influence the well-being of their students at school and will enhance their integration. On the other hand, parents with low literacy skills and basic educational qualifications may not find much meaning in investing in their children's education. Such parents also need to be supported adequately through school and multi-agencies with good practices, keeping their children as the focus (Puttick, 2016).

Research literature quoted above stems from various research studies conducted since 2000. They provide an in-depth analysis of the issues that have continued through to 2016. Recommendations and suggestions made in the 2000s and during the first half of the current decade until 2016 have repeatedly pointed out the need for improving the material conditions and well-being of RAS population. Besides the quality of life a family must experience on a par with others in their host societies. Children in particular must access quality education producing positive educational experiences. The current situation of RAS children's schooling is a unique canvas of problems and challenges.

4.2 Issues related to Refugee and Asylum-Seeker children's education in England

Education system differs from country to country. Within the UK, education system has variations across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Within England, although National Curriculum is in place in all schools, life in each County has different cultural connotations and sub-cultural influences. These influences impact on the educational experiences of children as they carry unique cultural capital with them.

Puttick (2016) recognises the wide-ranging positives of children's cultural capital adding to the diversity of a school. Studying Somali families in an inner-city primary school in Manchester, Puttick rightly notes the need for certain adaptations that both schools and families must make if the child is to be included and integrated successfully. Communication, relationship building efforts, respect for diversity and its acceptance together with a wide variety of inclusion activities with the participation of families are paramount to the child's integration process. This helps parents against social isolation and children to quickly adapt to their new environment.

Coming from a foreign country such as Afghanistan, Eritrea, Albania, Iraq and Syria into the UK is a culture-shock to most immigrants. Families go through a basic learning curve from the time of their arrival into the country to the time of their child being enrolled into school. Families speaking English language may help to some extent in overcoming the cultural shock, but for a majority of migrants cultural differences act as a new ground to explore.

Gathering information about compulsory school education, the phases that a child goes through until 16 years of age and understanding every step of school admission is an uphill task for most families. Added to this bewildering experience is English language skill (Phillimore, 2011).

Most families awaiting decision on their asylum application are assisted by a case worker assigned to them by the government, and also help from various NGOs. This is also the case with UASC. The parents or

responsible adults sign an agreement drawn between parent and the school ensuring the child's effective participation in education. Filling relevant paperwork for school admission, applying to the LA, waiting for a school place, finding transport if the school is outside the range of three miles, finding school uniform sets, appropriate clothing for Physical Education lessons, footwear and resources required for day to day classes and lessons in different subjects are some of the knowledge that parents, families and children must understand and prepare themselves to respond to. Children must attend school every day of the school term and be on time for each lesson. Absenteeism is only allowed in case of sickness and emergencies. School home work is compulsory.

Understanding the above processes and rules is challenging for families having different cultural perceptions about education. Research has shown that the concept of childhood and its socio-cultural construction is different between cultures. Many countries from which refugees originate from do not have a compulsory education system (Sporton, Valentine & Nielsen, 2006).

School attendance, the school uniform policy and attending classes are strict routines in all secondary schools of England. The school policies state them clearly besides reminding the responsible adult (for the child) on an ongoing basis. Despite this, school attendance is an issue for RAS children and their families. Reasons for absenteeism are various but mostly related to the experiences that those children have undergone whilst leaving their home countries and thereafter as well as a lack of understanding towards the schooling system. The trauma of witnessing war, violence, crimes, loss of family members and friends, the arduous journey to reach the UK shore, and making a quick adjustment to the UK life are high demands on a child. Merely attending school and lessons without space to talk about their experiences will distance the student from a positive educational experience. This may result in losing interest in school and absenteeism (Seeberg, Bagge & Enger, 2009).

As Popov and Stureson (2015) have described in the context of Swedish schooling system, often the policy bodies focus on the welfare of the asylum-seeker and a refugee child, leaving their education in the hands of educational institutions. As Candappa (2000) pointed out the welfare of the family and the standard of living are intertwined with the child's right to education, more so, quality education. It is the responsibility of the State and Civil Society.

In reality terms, it is not only the educational institutions but also the families that need to strive hard to establish a meaningful relationship, cohesion and an appreciation towards putting the child at the centre of their attention. Puttick (2016) underlines that potential conflict could arise if families lack a clear

understanding of legislation, school safeguarding laws, school policies on attendance, classes, participation, home work and curriculum. Teachers at schools where there is a continued inflow of RAS children throughout the year may come under pressure to work with each individual child from induction stage to bringing the child up to the age-expected academic attainment. Appointment of additional Teaching Assistants, EAL and subject-specific mentors and extra staff at various times of the year may be hard on schools. This situation will again alter if children leave the school due to reasons of family's housing status, income, parents' job or training, and changes in any other personal circumstances. Schools are also grappling with the issue of segregation – RAS families are housed in or prefer to live in particular pockets of inner-city and urban areas where their communities are present in big numbers. Typically, such schools could be underperforming needing improvement in their OfSTED reports and/or having a large number of immigrant population experiencing disadvantages. The concentration of children in certain schools, not all in the city suburbs, has negative impacts both on schools and students. Labelling, stigma, stagnation in realising their potential, carrying on with the same conditioned belief of remaining disadvantaged, and continuing to live a marginalised life could be potential effects.

As discussed in the above paragraphs educational levels of families (parents and/or an adult legally responsible for the child), English language proficiency and cultural differences act as major hurdles in developing an understanding and awareness prompting appropriate responses from families towards their child's educational integration. Effective co-ordination between families, school, LAs, multi-agencies and community members can help in such situations.

On the other hand, an effective EOSL or EAL programme developed by the school, intercultural education incorporated in the curriculum and involvement of community members acting as interpreters and/or cultural ambassadors will act powerfully towards integrating the child and enhancing the confidence of the family as a key stakeholder in the child's education (Puttick, 2016).

The above mentioned literature has identified many issues and challenges for RAS children in the school admission, inclusion and integration. Children and their families need help from various sources to adapt and thrive in their new environment along with clarity in understanding the structures and processes of education in England. On the other hand, schools, NGOs and community organisations need sustained support in their efforts to help the RAS children in a range of ways. Adequate help and appropriate support enhances children's access to education and experience quality education positively.

The validity of above detailed scenario could be verified further in the current research study through data collected from various stakeholders participating in RAS children's education. In the next section the authors briefly discuss the research methodology applied in data collection.

5 Research Methodology

This report is about the research study that aimed to provide insights into the process of refugee and asylum-seeking children's integration in the education system of England. The study investigated challenges, barriers and current practices impacting on their educational experiences by examining the structures and systems of education in England. The experiences of different stakeholders – children, school staff, parents, staff of policy organisations and NGOs – provided key data to map the educational integration process. The data was collected from the city of Leeds. The following paragraphs outline various research methods applied in the study.

Documentary sources: Statistics about RAS children were collected from the Home Office of the UK government and also from several key practitioner organisations working in Leeds Local Authority area, England, and national organisations such as British Refugee Council. Documents and reports generated by the practitioner organisations were studied to develop a baseline understanding of the structures and systems that are used in matters related to refugees and asylum-seekers. Materials that were developed by the participating secondary school were examined to learn about their practice of inclusive educational activities and success stories of integration.

In-depth interviews: A review of existing academic research literature was carried out to reflect on the design of the research, data collection methods and focus questions. It was deemed appropriate to hold in-depth interviews with participants following Hamilton's (2011) work of studying the educational experiences of migrant children in a British school. In-depth interviews would illuminate how professionals working with RAS population are providing support to the children through policy frameworks and practice. Interviewing parent/s would highlight issues and challenges that they are facing which is also a record of their personal stories. The research methodological design adopted qualitative research methods of collecting written responses to the semi-structured Interview Schedule where possible, and conduct face-to-face and telephone-based interviews where necessary. The interviews ranged from 45 minutes to one and a half hours in length. During the interviews the semi-structured Interview Schedule was used as an initial guiding framework allowing the interviewer to ask spontaneous questions based on what the interviewee was sharing.

The professionals interviewed for this study included staff of the key policy and practice organisations (both government and non-government) and schools. Data was collected from four staff of three NGOs working at the local and national level, two staff members of Leeds City Council working in projects related to

refugees and asylum-seekers in West Yorkshire, a freelance consultant who is a trainer in the area of refugees and asylum seekers, staff of a secondary school in Leeds city and one parent seeking asylum.

Within the secondary school, interviews were held with the Head Teacher, the EAL Coordinator, and a volunteer involved in the inclusion processes and activities to integrate refugee and asylum-seeker students in the school. Angelides, P., Georgiou, R. & Kyriakou, K. (2008) recommend Action Research when collaborating with research participants to develop inclusive practices. Drawing from their recommendation, the interview process adopted with the school staff and the volunteer was collaborative in that the participants were consulted on what their best practices were, success stories and learning experiences. They were informed that their experiences would be shared with policy-makers and other project partners of the European Union.

One single in-depth interview was conducted with a parent seeking asylum in England for herself and her children.

Focus group interviews: As part of the qualitative research study it was necessary to explore the experiences of RAS children in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the issues involved in their educational integration. The interviews were also designed to allow a sharing of personal stories and examples of 'others' where possible. Two separate focus group interviews were held from the same secondary school involving a total of 12 students.

Analysis of data: The interviews were recorded using audio recording devices such as MP3 recorder and an iPad. Where possible, thick descriptive notes were also taken as the interviewee was narrating the experiences. The recorded interviews were listened to, to draw the main content. This content was analysed at a later stage to compare and contrast with existing similar studies and theories. The findings were considered as a whole, rather than parts, to make sense of the subjective experiences of the participants involved in the educational integration of RAS children. This, it was felt, would move the project more towards the frame of social justice and social change informing both policy and practice.

6 Current practices and challenges in the educational integration of RAS children in England: Research findings

This country-specific research study was informed by policy, practice and personal experiences. Different stakeholders involved in the educational integration of refugee and asylum-seeking children in England shared their knowledge of current policies and practices. Personal experiences of school staff, a parent and secondary school students provided different lens to view the educational experiences of RAS children.

Hence this section details research findings arrived at from the data collected from different stakeholder groups. All the groups address one single beneficiary – the asylum-seeking or refugee child – in a collaborative manner allowing an overlapping and interrelatedness. However, there could be marked differences within such overlapping content. For example, the issues, challenges and situations that a policy organisation share may possibly overlap with that of what NGO staff share terming it as a commonly shared understanding. Within such commonly shared understanding about a particular issue the NGO staff may differ in their perceptions to that of the policy organisation. One single issue could be shared by most of the stakeholders. For example, the issue of funding affects NGOs, LAs, policy organisations at the regional level and schools in their efforts to offer better services to RAS children. Nevertheless, they all may be able to create opportunities to extend and expand interventions in the inclusion programmes.

Firstly, the authors discuss the key role that policy organisations play in offering their services whilst addressing the educational integration of RAS children. Secondly, they discuss the role of NGOs in supporting RAS children in their adjustment and adaptation to their host society, the challenges staff face in that process, and what structural changes they suggest. The third discussion is on how the secondary school's Head Teacher, the EAL Coordinator and a volunteer of the Friends of the School are supporting the integration of their R and AS students. Fourthly, the parent's personal story and experiences as an asylum seeker in England are presented. Lastly, the secondary students' experiences of how they are being included and integrated into the education system of England are discussed.

6.1 Key role of policy & implementation organisations: Confusions and contradictions

Qualitative data was collected from two staff members of Leeds City Council working in projects that are directly related to refugee and asylum-seeking children. Participant 1 is particularly interested in issues related to children's mental health and is more focused on supporting their psychological well-being.

In her interview she pointed out that an average of six families numbering a total of up to 30 individuals seeking asylum or being granted refugee status are sent over to Leeds city. In some instances unaccompanied children also arrive in Leeds from Calais on the border of France.

Pointing out that too many service organisations were involved in the provision of care, support and services offered to refugees and asylum seekers this participant confirmed that unaccompanied children are placed in foster homes and several children could be accommodated in a single house at the same time. Where a relative or a family member is accompanying the child then 'Rent a Room' scheme is available to them allowing a separate room for the individual child. The city council is still developing plans to establish a 'Welcome Centre approach' – one point where all information and services are made available to newly arrived RAS children with or without their families. This looks hopeful towards improving the Council's services making them more reachable to the beneficiaries.

The participant agreed that the most needed service for asylum seekers was assistance with the process of understanding the law, rules, paperwork, rights and responsibilities and how the system works. This point has been affirmed by various researchers and reports submitted by many NGOs such as Refugee Council at the national level and The Children's Society in Leeds city at the local level.

The participant also shared that Council has identified issues with the coordination of and conflicts in implementing policies and executing responsibilities. Besides, determining the age of the young person is often difficult as there are extra support systems available to children up to the age of 18 years. Whereas the young people's age group goes up to 21 years. According to the Duty of Care Act the City Council is responsible for the provision of care to young people up to the age of 21 years, but in reality such help may not be available to young people over the age of 18 years. The Age Disputed children go through another layer of uncertainty as assessing a young person's age requires one day and 2 staff members per child. Often, these staff members are not trained to carry out age assessment as prescribed by the government. Recently, the City Council has started a special programme to train their staff in these sensitive matters. Despite these challenges, the Council's programmes and research are focusing on the well-being and inclusion of children and young people.

This participant's sharing reveals the confusion and to some extent lack of clarity across Local Authorities in addressing issues of integration of refugees and asylum-seekers. One strong reason could be the recurring changes in laws and policies at the government level that do not filter down to the regional and local levels. The staff members, as laws and policies are changed or renewed, need adequate training and opportunities to update their knowledge and professional skills to manage the issues effectively.

Nonetheless, the fact remains real that services reaching the RAS population, in particular children, in getting through the structures and processes are inadequate.

Participant 2 works mainly with adult refugees and asylum seekers in her project. She recognised the issues of learning English language (lack of it being a barrier) and understanding how services worked as most challenging for the adults. As such, the Council is making efforts to improve their own services to address gaps in language interpretation and understanding the processes of accessing services. However, due to the existing law, policies and government's expectations, the Council has to prioritise differently to the needs of the RAS population. NGOs identify this as a challenge and act as a bridge between the Council and the needy population. Within the NGOs the significant presence of volunteers who are from diverse ethnic and language backgrounds helps the needy people immensely. Some of those volunteers might be once refugees themselves, hence appreciation for their personal understanding of the issues and challenges and their knowledge of how to fill the gaps in accessing services. In contrast with the government, the NGOs and their volunteers focus on the needs of the asylum seekers and refugees, not so much on the structures and systems.

This participant's words are indicative of an agenda that is different at the government and LA levels, and is distanced from the real needs of the R and AS population. Although individual staff members might have passion towards social justice they may be constrained by systemic control, weaknesses in implementing the 'good practices' and their own limited roles, not their individual capacities.

6.2 Significant role of NGOs in supporting RAS children towards effective integration

Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) are practitioner organisations or combine their practice with policy-making bodies to change the policies. NGOs work directly with people and issues applying justice, transformation and rights framework powerfully to change the circumstances of their beneficiaries. Their language in their practice is underlined with social justice, empathy and compassion. Their objectives cover changes in both material and psychological conditions of a person who may be less aware of their choices and actions for a change in their circumstances. NGOs working with asylum-seekers and refugees in the UK are critical of the laws applied to the situation of asylum-seekers; they are critical of the government's welfare systems that are not inclusive of refugees unless an external intervention is prompted to effectively use them.

Four NGOs participated in this research study and shared their experiences of working directly with asylum seeking and/refugee families, children and unaccompanied children in the country. Of them,

two were Leeds city-based NGOs - City of Sanctuary (NGO1, in the process of obtaining the official NGO status) and Leeds Refugee Forum. The other two were national level organisations having branches or drop-in service in Leeds city. The names of these two NGOs are kept anonymous to safeguard confidentiality.

NGO 1: *City of Sanctuary* is a movement committed to building a culture of hospitality and welcome for all, and especially for refugees seeking sanctuary from war and persecution. One of their work streams is Schools of Sanctuary network that works towards developing an understanding towards inclusion, diversity and creating a sanctuary for asylum-seeking and refugee children through a welcoming approach, empathy and empowerment. Promoting active citizenship through a strong student voice in schools, Schools of Sanctuary reviews how welcoming the participating school is, and then to consider measures for improving their steps to involve young people in the school to promote race equality, human rights, social justice, diversity, interdependence, inclusion, community cohesion and the safety. The NGO is doing groundwork to fulfil their aims through working with schools. Students raise the standards of respect and acceptance towards different languages and cultures when they run different activities with the help of their teachers, EAL-Coordinator, and the NGO. The school, after being reviewed by the NGO, gets the status of 'School of Sanctuary', where students from different backgrounds come together as one.

NGO 2: The second NGO is a Forum made up of 56 member organisations working in the areas related to refugees and asylum seekers. It offers support to refugees belonging to these various member organisations to adapt, participate in the inclusion and integration programmes. Leeds Refugee Forum is a well-known community network among these member organisations which are spread throughout Leeds city. As such the Forum networks and collaborates with the Council, schools and government departments.

The Forum has physical space in a building where classes are conducted in English language, Life in the UK, running advice sessions on accessing services at the Local Authority, IT for beginners, Mental Health advice, and allied educational activities. The Homework Club helps to raise students' school learning focusing mainly on youth (over 14 years) with the help from the Children's Society. They support children and their families in their language learning, development until they are signposted to the Children's Society. Although some of these programmes have now officially stopped due to lack of funding they are still running with the help of volunteers. The participant said it poses its own challenges – the programmes are reliant on the time and personal effort of volunteers, their skills and diverse language and cultural backgrounds. For example, finding an interpreter to speak a particular language of asylum seekers may be instantaneously difficult. This potentially slows down their access

to services and advice. The participant said if the government funding was available to run refugee integration programmes for longer periods of time the beneficiaries would feel more supported and empowered.

The Forum also coordinates meetings with multi-agencies. The Forum's multi-agency meetings provide space to discuss gaps within the organisations to improve their services and activities aimed to settle the refugees in the country. Member organisations come to recognise how policies are changing, the impact, preparation on their part for such changes, closure and beginnings of projects, stories of success and opportunity, case studies and learning from each other.

The participant, in their interview, explained the issues affecting RAS children. The first one was the school admission. Although initial support is offered to many children and young people, other NGOs join hands to continue the support in school admission process. Despite this, it takes a long time for the children and their families to understand and adapt to the system followed in schools. It also depends on the educational level of parents or other adults responsible for children and the level of schooling a child has completed in their home country.

"Parents have no knowledge of the system, they cannot support their child without themselves understanding how it works; so, schools need to provide support to the families by arranging adequate interpretation services, understanding of the importance of school attendance, going to school on time, homework routine. Parents do not understand the significance of these school routines. As a result, children's learning experience at school, their confidence in the classroom, social skills, learning outcomes and achievements are affected."

The participant shared a case study. A Romanian child aged 14 years was enrolled into high school in November 2016; however, the school is 13 miles away; the child has to travel every day. There is the question of finances available for transport; the child's educational experience is at stake. This brings to question the issue of segregation and concentration of RAS population in particular socio-economic areas of the city.

"There are about 22-25 refugee children within 5 miles of Chapeltown, Harehills, Lincoln Green. Most schools are oversubscribed in these areas."

"When children come here for Homework Club they pick up learning so quickly; their school performance improves along with social skills and confidence at school. So, there is clearly a need which the government should support."

"There is a lot of ethnic community presence in the city. Schools need support... how to support children from those ethnic communities. Support to teachers is also needed."

The participant shared the following issues with reference to the educational qualifications of parents, how well the family is educated in their home country and whether it can be transferred to their host countries:

“Most refugee youth stop education after their GCSE. They don’t go to A Levels, College or to university education. They get fed up with language skills, and lose their confidence along the way in high school; lose confidence in education as they are not being able to do their best in school. Although some parents are highly educated, qualified as medical doctors, engineers in their own countries, they cannot find suitable jobs or find their career here in the UK as refugees. So, their children are also affected by this.

For example, this man. He is from Sudan, studied PhD in Agricultural Sciences at Manchester University, returned to his country, faced problems there. Later he returned to the UK, is now working as security guard as he couldn’t find a suitable job matching his qualifications. Such a vast amount of human capital is being wasted.”

The participant talked about other issues as being the Age Disputed young AS. Refugee Council has been at the forefront of measures to address this issue along with the Home Office of the UK government. Due to uncertain actions surrounding this issue the young AS whose age is disputed are at a huge disadvantage “children are suffering due to gaps in the system.” The participant shared on challenges related to the education of RAS children. The children are caught in the whirlpool of policies and practices having least knowledge and awareness for the same.

“When they arrive as refugees they are given services for 28 days, after which, the Home Office offers no support services. Parents have to get National Insurance etc on their own, find work, accommodation, enter the system immediately. This is a big asking for them without knowing how the system works here. All this affects their children.

They are not confident without continuous educational support; a lot of them do not want to go to school. They cannot make friends in class, cannot participate effectively in learning. So they lose confidence which affects them seriously.

Families who have been settled as refugees and asylum-seekers in Netherlands, France, Germany have moved to the UK. They say they moved here for education. They say children cannot move up on education scale in those countries, not leading to university education; so they moved to the UK. Here again they face problems. English language is a big problem.”

The above sharing of issues and challenges are also big concerns among all the NGOs working with RAS families and unaccompanied asylum seeking children. As the above participant identified clearly,

the children are in a floating situation of uncertainty as their adults grapple with the welfare system, to find their foot in the society, to get a job matching their skills and education and training. As adults continue to be challenged by the existing structures and systems so are their children as it all impacts on their physical, socio-emotional health and well-being.

NGO 3: The staff members of this NGO are working directly with children and young people up to the age of 21 years and/or their families as some children are unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people (majority of them between 16 and 17 years), undocumented, may be destitute along with their family or asylum-seekers, trafficked children and refugees. All these children and young people are considered as exposed to potential harm, experiencing inequalities and neglect. The organisation provides independent advocacy support on the asylum process and other immigration issues, advice on rights and entitlements, mentoring, social and skills-based activities (job skills, life skills, educational support).

Being a member of the Leeds Migration Partnership network the organisation takes a lead role in both policy and practice matters. It participates within a network of 38 such organisations to drive forward good practice with migrants generally across the region and children and young people as their specific focus groups.

The participant from this NGO provided written response to the Interview Schedule. Since April 2016 the organisation has helped 51 young people, the majority of whom are young boys, from Eritrea, Sudan, Iran, Afghanistan and Syria. She said the organisation delivered a project over four years between 2010 and 2014 called HEARTS (Help Each Asylum-seeker and Refugee to Settle). This project aimed at supporting RAS children, young people and families through advocacy support, skills-based programmes, educational support and social activities. Sharing quantified key deliverables, the participant stated that 161 beneficiaries obtained help and support through advocacy support, advice and guidance about systems, structures and procedures in their integration. As many as 307 young people took part in the Life Skills and Job Skills programmes; 1190 children and young people benefited from various group activities and awareness raising sessions. The organisation takes pride in the fact that they provided specialist training to 439 professionals from educational, youth work, early years, youth offending services background on the needs of vulnerable refugee and migrant children. The staff were able to create a participation group called Beatz of Happiness, made up of 9 young people who were former and present participants of their Youth programme. The group assisted other refugee and asylum seeking young people by providing advice, orientation, friendships as well as informing the development of the orientation and prevention programme. Young people in this project accessed other opportunities within The Children's Society, such as becoming young trustees, becoming members of Our Commission on Poverty, and taking part in All Parliamentary Inquiries. The activities of the HEARTS

project have continued within the organisation despite not having external funds as they were immensely successful in reaching children in need.

The organisation's success stories, strategies and participatory programmes are transferred to other organisations within the Leeds Migration network informing on the policies taken both at the local level and national, as the national office of this organisation is based in London. An example of their successful, measurable outcomes is co-produced assessment tool that focusses holistically on the changes the child/young person would like to make in their lives, allowing the practitioner to develop actions to meet those goals while measuring distance travelled towards them at the same time. All children/young people are assessed on engagement with the service, and reviews take place every 4 to 12 weeks. The categories – Mental and Emotional health, Physical health, Safety, Having a say, Hopes and dreams, Friendships, Education, employment and skills, relationships with family or carer, Housing – are clear indicators that not only help the children but also staff in measuring progress towards self-reliance and well-being.

NGO 4: The fourth NGO is a national organisation working in collaboration with the government in the specialist area of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. The organisation has a dedicated Children's Section and Youth Development project with aims to include and integrate children and young people. The organisation is a major practitioner body working directly with the target groups and also a reputed policy-adviser and policy-influencing agency. Having only refugees and asylum seekers as their work area this organisation works with them at all stages including application for asylum and grant of refugee status. All stages of supporting an asylum seeker and a refugee require sustained support, advice and care towards successful integration. All stages have their own challenges and issues that the target group experiences on a day to day basis. Their direct work with RAS population informs their role of being an advisory on policy matters. Their main interest to that end is to explore ways to change processes and policies in favour of their beneficiaries for a smooth transition into secure life.

The staff who participated in this project spoke mainly about the youth – young people who are either in the secondary school age or post-16 age group. He confirmed that in 2016 there were children and young people from 66 different nationalities; 300 were UASCs participating in youth development programme. Most of the children and young people came from conflict countries of Afghanistan, Syria, Pakistan, Sudan, Eritrea, Iraq and Iran. The activities conducted for their reception and inclusion are mainly with the purposes of mentoring them, offering adequate support for their adjustment, to offer

a helping hand for their socio-emotional needs and be there for them as a trustworthy source of support.

The participant said, *“Nobody knows what these young people go through to reach the shores of our country. They only have one hope – to be alive and safe in the UK. They have seen death, destruction of their home, loss of friends and relatives and family in their home country. They take all sorts of risks to get here. Some are sorted out in Calais and sent to us. Some just reach the UK. They are unaccompanied young people. Police find them, we find them on streets. They get the word of mouth about us and come to us in Croydon. Without a home, money, nowhere to sleep ... nothing. No one knows what they have been through. It takes a long time for them to talk about it. The trauma, suffering, pain of losing family, having travelled to get here ... everything. We provide that space for them. To talk. To support. To help.”*

The support and help they provide for the immediate inclusion and integration of children and young people comprises of a wide range of activities. They include English language and maths classes, visits to local tourist places, cinemas, art galleries, museums, train stations, shopping complexes, supermarkets and meeting with community members. These activities orient the newly arrived RAS children and young people to the British society, how life is in the UK, what to expect and a general appraisal of the new environment. Besides, there is temporary accommodation and availability of food, clothing and basic medicine. Befriending, mentoring, gaining their trust and supporting their socio-emotional needs through empathy and compassion are some of the areas that the staff are trained in.

“The problem is nobody knows where to go, what to do and how to deal with everything here. It is all new to them. And there is language problem. We have to get interpreters. The children and these young people are frightened to talk. They take some time to talk. They are traumatised by so many experiences. They are not sure who will understand them. So we have to gain their trust. Slowly. That is where our activities help them. We get community members to visit them, just to talk sometimes in their language. That gives these young people some confidence. We help them in their paperwork. They need more support if they get refugee status. Often government people themselves don’t know who is an asylum seeker and who is a refugee. There is so much confusion about everything, policies, responsibilities, what support....”

These words once again resonate with research literature and what other NGOs have shared. The system seems not only unfamiliar but also unfriendly for the integration of a RAS child and their family. This is further elaborated by the freelance consultant and trainer who participated in this project.

Freelance consultant and trainer: This participant has a background of having worked in the area of refugee and asylum seeking population with many Yorkshire-based NGOs. She asserts that there are too many issues surrounding the educational integration of a RAS child.

“There is a real gap in support services available to refugee children. Many agencies are there but mostly offer adult support services, not so much dedicated to children. Children’s Society tends to work more with teenagers not so much with young children. Children’s Panel of Refugee Council works with UASC children. So it is back to schools again to support young children. But they are not geared up to it.”

She talks about the participation of schools and what support is available from Education department. She argues that both schools and the department either lack awareness of how to integrate a child from RAS background or they don’t take such initiatives.

“Education department people have a lack of understanding/awareness of what’s going on in the home life of refugee families... in adults’, parents’ life. (Gives a general eg of a school) - Does that school have any knowledge of what’s going on in this child’s life? Children showing remarkable resilience to the issues going on in their life... there are so many barriers for them to cross...

You want to really engage with parents... I wonder how we measure engagement? We come to know so much like during parents’ evenings etc, involving parents, talking to them... Teachers might make some assumptions... oh, this parent is not engaging, but... just wondering do they know what’s going on in their life at home? You can’t generalise schools too. (Quotes another school as an example).”

She argues that the whole society, in general terms, and particularly educational institutions need a positive approach to multi-cultural communities, their languages, customs and food. This would enable the whole family to integrate successfully.

“They are a school of sanctuary, they do all activities, school does a lot for migrants. That builds a meaningful relationship with parents, children with others - that is very meaningful. I run a few sessions there, there are a lot of migrant parents. Activities, building that relationship they are embedded into the school culture.

This boy with his mum. Teachers said they wanted to encourage positive behaviour in the school, accepting. So they asked parent to be present in the school. They tried to involve her. The school is progressive, they are doing these inclusion activities. Involving parents in those activities, parents feel they are welcome there. School is also culturally sensitive, including the languages there.

(Gives another example of a Secondary school). It is a real 'can do' school. That was the school where parents felt they were listened to, cared for. A parent of high school student. Mum had serious mobility issues. Student was the carer for her. Mum felt she wanted to see how the school was like. So the school made a Welcome DVD. If schools are willing, think out of the box, they can do a lot..."

The other issues that she recognises as having a powerful impact on the families of young children arriving as refugees are the confronting system, rules, routines and expectations.

"For parents it is daunting...entering a high school, it's so big in everything, kind of an alien place, there are language barriers. There are lots of barriers for them...language, transport, culture...they feel overwhelmed with everything. Like understanding the UK education system, procedures...everything is alien. If schools gave them time, opportunities...explained to them all the details...they would feel confident.

Also, parenting styles differ in different cultures. Praising children is not the same with other cultures. Schools need to understand such cultural differences. Literary levels of parents – understanding communication from schools...it is hard to understand what school is saying to parents about their children.

School system is exceptionally excluding. All the rules, uniforms etc... it is hard to follow with everything. Homework. Expectations around home work. A simple thing like bringing colouring pens for art lessons. Affording to buy them is an issue for parents."

Many such issues and challenges can be overcome with positive strategies of inclusion. Mentoring, provision of empathetic physical and emotional space for the students to share their feelings are significant in their effect, she says.

In education, there should be mentoring for refugees. Children need a space to talk about their experiences, feelings. Talk about their identity, who they are, their heritage...without barriers, without being a burden.

Capacity-building with all stakeholders needs to happen, keeping children as the central interest and focus. Understanding beyond information needs to happen. Children feel the trauma. It is a complex mental health issue, not just info sharing but listening to them, their experiences, feelings...

There is a real issue in schools identifying who is refugee child and who is an asylum-seeking child. Schools don't know how to identify them. They don't know the terms, there is lack of awareness.

Sometimes parents don't want to tick the R and/or AS box. They face discrimination or they fear so. They also might tick yes for White European as they don't want to reveal their heritage.

Schools can be really receptive to awareness – this needs to be explored. Schools can signpost children to volunteer organisations. But they never do so. There are services that exist. But schools need to use them. They need to be aware of the services. Help in Leeds website – helpful for refugees. Schools could look up and help families to settle in.

The participant sums up the main issues affecting RAS children as the issue of children out of education, English as Additional Language, families not having adequate means to send children to schools, their work situation, etc. She highlights what other NGOs have stressed – there are many issues that are intertwined together when one speaks of RAS child.

The data from the local Council (government) and NGOs (non-government) point out a single major issue in the educational integration of RAS children. There are gaps in the policy implementation process. Although support services are available to the families the questions of how long they are for, how effective they are, how easy they are to access and understand, how user-friendly they are arise demanding clarification. Both local government staff and NGO personnel are participants of 'lost in translation' exercise despite striving to fulfil their expected roles with passion and commitment.

Are schools showing similar passion and commitment towards integrating refugee and asylum seeking children? If they are, to what extent and what mechanisms are they using? What are their success stories?

The authors now turn to the secondary school where data was collected from the Head Teacher, the EAL Coordinator, and the volunteer helping in the integration process through Friends of the School body.

6.3 Case study of a secondary school: Inclusive practices of motivation, collaboration & mentoring

The secondary school from where data was collected for this project is in Leeds city. It is a School of Sanctuary. Although an undersubscribed school, it has 59% of students coming from minority ethnic backgrounds and 44% of students within the school speak English as an additional language. The different languages spoken at these students' homes are counted as more than 41. As a School of Sanctuary, which is an NGO working in the area of diversity and inclusion of multi-cultural communities including asylum seekers and refugees in West Yorkshire region, the secondary school states that it provides a safe and welcoming place for all.

The school admitted 7 refugee students in 2015 coming from Syria, Sudan and Eritrea. In 2016 this number was 8 and the students came from the same three countries. The number in January 2017 stood at 11. The students came from Syria, Iran, Sudan and Eritrea. In addition, there were two students from Syria and Eritrea waiting a decision on their asylum application.

The school has an outstanding process put in place to integrate all children from EAL background. The process includes the induction stage where the EAL Coordinator meets the family of the student, gains an understanding of their language and cultural background, carries an assessment of the student's ability level in English language to develop an Individual Language Plan. The students are matched up with a buddy to help them settle in and additional help is also available from an EASL Peer Mentor, specialist support from a dedicated Teaching Assistant to monitor how the student is progressing.

Even after reaching the expected level of English language which normally takes a few years (depending on the ability level of the student) appropriate support is offered to Advanced Learners of English who have progressed beyond Level 5 stage. There are also enrichment activities during lunchtime and through after-school clubs which embrace multi-cultural and ethnic heritage. Parents are included in such enrichment activities celebrating their food, festivals etc.

The EAL Coordinator also trains the other school staff to appreciate the needs of EAL students and support them. Effective teaching strategies, differentiation of curriculum, resources within all departments enable the staff to support students. Developing and improving relationships with parents and the community sits at the heart of EAL programme.

The Head Teacher of the school takes pride that their school is open to all students. She asserts that the school views refugee and asylum seeking students "as an asset to the school." She says they see those

students as “enriching the school community... they all learn from each other. They all share each other’s cultures, joys, experiences and recognise the importance of diversity. There is no one way of living. This is our understanding. During different subject lessons the experiences of students from other countries actually adds enrichment. This is seen as part of our integration process in the school.”

Commenting on how her staff members respond to their very successful integration programme, the Head Teacher said “...staff say sometimes it is challenging for them. But it is not seen as a burden. There is no resistance to our programmes. We value students’ diversities. The challenges that they talk about are usually to do with immersing in the curriculum. Students with EAL needs take some time to do that. We understand that there are needs of students with EAL backgrounds. So we differentiate the curriculum. That way, we also ensure we are supporting their emotional and social needs. Most staff have taken it on board.

In terms of the increase in the number of RAS children coming in to the school, we need more staff to support them. As we are running individualised learning plan for each student. Our funds are stretched. Lack of financial resources can impact on these integration programmes. But we have a wonderful EAL Coordinator. We have volunteers. And we believe in diversity.

We are not worried about the level of achievement in the school so much but we are worried about the funding available to continue the support to needy students.

Our EAL students do well due to their own work ethic. We do support them well in school immersion. Their parents may be different but we still support them. We know parents are sometimes frightened because they don’t know education system, how our school works; English language is a barrier in their communication; sometimes they may also think ‘ok, you are in school now, here you go. It is now the school’s responsibility.

Just to give an example. We did a Winter Festival, not a Xmas Concert last year. Few parents joined us in the festival which was aimed at wider integration of the families, of the community. It was good. We want to do more like that. Now, we see that parents are wanting to join in more. They feel confident. More parents are coming forward. It is just a word of mouth, that we support...there are different reasons... they trust the school or they are happy with the school. Which is a positive. We want to see the students to continue here. The longer they are here in the school easier it is to adapt and also better is their academic performance. We are aware of the stigma also... stigma put on Special Education Needs children. Like the English as additional language etc. Parents are afraid of the label of SEN because it is differently perceived in other countries. We are working on it. But it is hard to get parents to understand this.

The other issue is funding for inclusion in SEN programmes. It will be good if funding is available for continued support. If only the school had that funding attached to each child with SEN, it will be good. We need translators, English dictionaries, more books, resources, interpreters...

Just before Christmas a new family of refugees came in to the school. They had nothing. We emailed around to other schools. We were inundated with stuff...donations of clothes, footwear... so much! People in this country are willing to help and support.

With regards to support systems in place...there should be an online hub at the local, regional and national level for RAS families and children to access...things may become easier for them."

The Head Teacher's observations and sharing underlines what schools can do if they are willing. This is in consonance with what the Freelance Consultant said in her interview. Although there are funding constraints which are bothering the NGOs and the government departments equally as schools, the school becomes the central body in integration processes once the refugee child enrolls there. Even with minimum resources a school can support refugee students with raising awareness of their needs, training their staff members, involving parents in their immersion programmes, celebrating cultures and languages, differentiating curriculum and networking with other schools and local community. The success of such inclusion and integration programmes and activities at schools are much dependent on volunteers, Friends of the school body and EAL Coordinator.

The volunteer of the Friends of the School that we spoke to confirmed that positive and active participation can achieve good results. The participant has a background in healthcare. She participates in the integration of refugee students through giving her time, spending time with their parents to understand their language and culture, helping in English language learning of both students and parents, teaching parents about English culture, and networking within the community encouraging others to participate. She said she felt *"great to meet the kids. These children don't have Special Education Needs. They just don't have English language skills required in this country, that's all. So, it's just an upward trajectory. I work with adults. They are keen to integrate into the society, they are trying hard too. But it is the same with everyone. For some people, there has to be a change in their mind set. As I see Syrians are the ones now trying best to integrate. Compared to them, Pakistani women take a back seat, don't come forward to participate in school. Whereas, Syrian mothers are enthusiastic about learning English, our ways, mixing with others here... we have even shared a lunch they cooked. We have made a cookbook! They need some emotional support after*

fleeing from their home country. That is we are doing here.” This only establishes that with community support integration is easier and is a happy experience shared between different stakeholders.

The EAL Coordinator at the school, according to Schools of Sanctuary (NGO), is doing exemplary work in the educational integration of refugee students. Herself being not a trained school teacher, the EAL-Co is the key to the school being recognised as a School of Sanctuary providing outstanding support and help in the students’ inclusion.

She admits that “It has its own challenges. When these children come in to Key Stage 4 we are already aiming with other students at school to achieve C grade in their GCSE exams, Level 5 in English language. It is very hard to bring them to that level. But we are doing everything we can through many activities. I always keep thinking of different activities for them and their families.”

She demonstrates interest, enthusiasm, energy and passion for inclusion and immersion programmes tailor-made for EAL and refugee children. She plans and conducts special activities for refugee children to boost their English language skills and confidence to be in school. This also includes their parents.

We know there are vulnerable parents who wouldn’t feel comfortable to come forward. They are not confident. So we run Coffee Morning two times a term. For example, in our recent Coffee Morning we had Syrian mums. We discussed what help they needed. To sort out things like bus passes, lunch at school etc. The Council can give them free bus pass. It costs them something like four pounds or so for a round bus trip, cheapest. But it is something that is extra for them in their situation. If only they could get a free bus pass... at least they can get out of house, go meet people, places... but there are hard to reach parents too. We have gone into the community centres and tried. There are Pakistani parents...they still don’t get involved with the school. It is not the issue of language or race. Just don’t want to ...”

However, not all parents are responsive given their cultural backgrounds, life circumstances and motivation to participate in their child’s schooling. *“There are differences in perceptions. Difference between SEN and EAL. There is this child from Bangladeshi background, struggling... parents are adamant that there is nothing wrong with their child...nothing wrong going there...now, after the third meeting with them they are now acknowledging...something not alright here. So, that child’s behaviour as well as EAL both are now supported.”*

She gives an example of another child whose parents are self-motivated and set high expectations for their son. *“That boy from Syria. His parents are well-educated but came here as refugees. They know that only if he studies well he can overcome their present situation. So there is this extra pressure on him to do really well, aim for high grades in GCSE, do A levels and university. I sometimes think we have our other students here too who just come to school and go. Compare them to this boy who is doing such hard work to catch up and overcome...”*

The EAL-CO is proud and passionate about how well the refugee children are doing in their school achieving recognition for their involvement and courage. *“When our kids talk about their experiences in primary schools it is healing for them, like getting it out of their chest. So, when for some unnecessary reason if teachers give detention to these kids I question them. Just to come through the door itself is big for them.*

The above understanding is what is needed and what is most important in schools for refugee children. Little support and help from school together with the children’s hard work and their sincere efforts made in their uphill journey go a long way to secure a good future. Other factors that need to come into the focus in this picture are the government policies. In the following excerpt from her interview the issue of funding that all the other participants raised is once again highlighted. It also underlines how deeply funding, policy changes and the delivery of integration programmes are interwoven.

“We do six weeks of immersion programme here in the school. Including refugee children. We follow the child. We support them in a lot of things. Curriculum stuff, uniforms... We did English Tea for our refugee students. I sometimes ask parents – who is helping you? Do you have a case worker? Do you know about bus pass? Benefits? There should be some sort of uniform referral system. It keeps changing. We don’t know who’s doing what at the government. Projects keep changing, funding situation changes. All this will have a say on these children.”

The EAL-Co has succinctly pointed out the nexus between policy and practice. It is possible that the school may face shortage of funds to employ more staff and run more activities for the new student’s integration and sustain their support to existing students to achieve good academic achievement which is crucial for their future. On the other hand, if the school community works hard together for a few refugee students through networking and collaboration it is not impossible for them to raise resources and support to sustain those few students’ bright future.

The best practice or strategies an effective integration process requires are positive mind set, passionate initiatives, adequate training, using resources, good networking, effective collaboration and a cooperative and collegial environment. That creates a happy community of students, teachers and parents.

What do they students feel and say about their integration? What are their stories and experiences related to their arrival in England and their school life? The next section discusses two focus group interviews held with a total of 12 students.

6.4 Building bridges with resilience: Educational experiences of RAS secondary students

Focus Group 1: The seven students interviewed for this study were from Years 7 to 11. Their arrival in the country ranged from 5 and 9 months in two students' cases to 12 years in one particular Year 11 student who also acted as an interpreter for the younger student from Eritrea. Three students were from Eritrea and four others were from Syria.

When asked how many months they were out of school and what did they do at that time the students replied variously.

Child 1 from Syria (SC1), the older boy studying in Year 11 said he was out of school for (may be) three months when he arrived in the country. He has been in the country for three years now. His parents kept looking for a school place, they frequently visited the Council, filled the forms to get a school place for the boy. He went shopping with his parents, translated for them, he picked up his English quickly after their arrival in the country. After leaving Syria he went to Jordan, then Lebanon before making a journey towards the UK.

The boy said he thought education system was very different in his home country. He appreciated the support and help he got in his current secondary school. *"When I went to Ms... class there were other children like me. I made friends there. They had gone through similar experiences that I had gone through.*

Child 2 from Syria (SC2), who has been in the UK for nearly 2 years said she was out of school for two months. She didn't know which school and other details, she didn't have a house address. Eventually when her family got an address, the girl got a school place. She is in Year 7. She said her secondary school that she is in now helped her much in integrating and picking up language skills. The EAL-Co was very helpful and empathetic.

Child 3 from Syria (SC3), who has been in the UK for about 2 years now, said she was travelling long distance of a few miles to school and is now trying to change school. She did nothing in the months of being out of education; stayed with her aunty at home. She is in Year 9.

Child 4 from Syria (SC4), a younger boy who spoke very little English and hence took help from the older boy said there was a gap of 7-8 months in his education. He was in Greece for 7 months after leaving Syria and then spent 5 months in the UK. He is in Year 8.

Among the three children from Eritrea, the older girl who has been in the country for 12 years now, studying in Year 11, said she migrated to England years ago; having other family members and friends here helped her a lot to pick up English language skills. She also recognised the help her mother received from a Social Worker – *“When I came here first I remember there was a Social Worker helping my mum. She is a good friend now. And there was community support for us too.”*

The younger girl is in Year 8; she has spent about 5 months in the UK, still awaiting decision on her asylum application. She spent four months out of school.

The boy is in Year 10, has spent about 2 years in the UK. He said when he arrived in the country he was unable to read properly in English language, so he was practising his language skills and also played football to make new friendships in the community. He spent four months out of school at that stage. He appreciated the help he received from the Teaching Assistant in his secondary school.

The participants were asked about their participation in lessons and help available to them in doing their homework.

SC4 (Boy) said he went to Before School Homework Club at school regularly. He felt if lessons were translated into Arabic it would be much helpful for him. He also appreciated many students staying back after school and helping each other in their school work.

SC1 (Boy) said he was studying hard for his GCSE exams as he wanted to get high grades. He wanted to progress to do A Levels and then university. He wanted to study medicine. SC2 and SC4 both said they would consider going to university. SC4 said he had never written in English language before coming to the UK, so he was learning the language now in this school. He struggled most of the time although he understood what the teacher would say in the class.

SC1 said there were other types of help in the school. For example, *“...there is a teacher here who speaks Arabic. My friend goes to her for help...in Arabic...during lunch time and gets her help in lessons. I think we need to engage. We need to make friends. Like going to football club. You don't need English always. The younger you are it is easier to learn English. That is how I learnt.”*

SC3 disagreed with the above to some extent and said, *“But if you are with people speaking the same language you don’t learn English. So I made friends with English speaking girls.”* Friendship helping them to integrate was something that interested the participants. For example, SC2 said *“There was a girl in my class from my neighbourhood. I sat next to her, an English girl. So it became easy for me to learn the language.”* Learning a new language could also have potential side effects and impact on their own home language. SC1 said, *“You look up to them. But students who are here for too long forget how to speak in Arabic. When teachers say who speaks Arabic they say they don’t.”*

SC1 had an interesting thought to share about how friendship could be about role-modelling also. He said they could mentor other newly arrived refugee students such as becoming friends in a football club, mentoring them in language learning and the game.

On the topic of mentoring, EC1 (Boy) said, *“I sat in the classes alone in the beginning because I couldn’t speak English. After that I went to a PE club. Then I learnt English there.”* The older girl from Eritrea (EC2) said when students are young they don’t notice the stigma much. Older children notice other people laughing at them much quickly if they struggled with English. This could be a bad feeling.

This sharing led to other children sharing more of their personal stories of stigma. SC1 said, *“I was called a refugee all the time. They would call out ‘go back to where you came from’ every time I had an argument...I could not say anything back to them. Even now it makes me feel angry.”* This was supported by EC1 who said such people didn’t have a good understanding.

SC1 continued on the above subject of stigma of being a refugee. *“We try to explain to students what refugee is. Talk about other problems like tackling ISIS etc. We do campaigning for student assembly, to share with others the facts, stories... people listen to media and they say oh that is a Syrian there, may be ISIS etc. I say ‘look at me, I am from Syria. I am not like them... even people who are not English like Indians...they talk you are a refugee, they don’t realise our life, our problems... If I went to a fully English school I would feel an outsider. Here there are many children who are from different countries. I feel supported.”*

This throws light on segregation within the migrant communities affecting the refugees. Lack of tolerance towards RAS children and families shown by those who have migrated into the UK as skilled workers, or with family connections or through other routes divides the migrant communities leading to hostility

towards particular cultures and religions. However, on the other hand, diversity and the presence of multi-cultural communities act as positive forces in the integration of refugees as affirmed by EC2 participant.

On the topic of how they were being supported within their families SC3 said although her mum was British citizen her father was still left in Syria as he was not a British citizen. The participant wrote a story about this situation of family being torn apart due to policy.

Asked if they all shared their personal stories with others at school or in the community, SC4 said he did not, due to language barriers. SC1 said, "I have shared my story and experiences a hundred times in primary school and here." Whilst all the other participants agreed that they did not mind sharing their experiences with others SC2 said, *"I needed more support. But people didn't ask me if I needed help. They didn't ask me about my stories or experiences. Teachers also didn't help me much in primary school."* This particular sharing shows that this girl was troubled by such lack of attention towards her, and the general helping hand. It also reveals that every single refugee child needs individual-specific support by alert adults. No child should be taken for granted.

Asked if the community helped them with any resources to settle in well, SC4 said the community offered him books, toys, clothes. This participant's father is not in the UK. So, the boy said he thought the UK government thinks there are too many refugees here. SC1, SC3 and EC2 said they got material help such as school uniforms and books from the school.

When asked if they have been included in sharing about their culture, history of their country and their food with any others the participants said there were many instances when such sharing happened. EC2 said, *"I try to explain about my culture, history of Eritrea. I feel like learning about other's culture too."*

SC1 said, *"I discussed history of Syria in Primary school. What happened after war...we were all fine but then war happened."* This narration shows that the participant, although is sharing his personal experiences as a refugee, is having a space to talk about his feelings whilst creating an awareness of the R and AS situation. Both SC1 and SC2 mentioned sharing food, lunch, dance, etc from their culture in specially arranged activities at the school which was attended by their family members.

When people have a talking space in certain situations describing their circumstances it can also become a healing space. Such space is created at this secondary school with concerted efforts of the EAL-CO, the Head Teacher and the staff which has given confidence to the children to share their feelings without inhibitions.

Focus Group 2: The second Focus Group consisted of four girls (G) and a boy (B), all from Syria. The girls were two pairs of sisters. G1 is studying in Year 11, has spent a year in England. She joined the school about six months ago and is now preparing for the GCSE exams. Her sister G2 is in Year 9. G3 is in Year 7 and G4

is in Year 9 – they both have spent about 2 years in England. The boy has spent more than 3 years in England and is now in Year 10 at school.

They had a few months of gap in their education before joining the secondary school. They all tried to learn English language in those few months as a step in their integration. All said they had no idea about the schooling system in England, learning everything about how education system works only after joining school. They all said they have a good understanding now. G1 said she is feeling confident about her preparation for GCSE exams and has plans to continue to A Levels.

G4 said it was hard for her getting back to school after her experiences since leaving her home country. Science was particularly difficult to follow. G1 said when teachers spoke to her it was hard to understand what they were saying only because of English language and accent.

The participants were asked what they did to make new friendships. The boy said he wanted to play professional football after his schooling.

He said, *“I was shy. I couldn’t speak English. Teachers helped me a lot. And...it was really difficult ...with what happened to my brother. So I focus on playing football. It helps me. I also think... it is not easy to make friends. You don’t know anyone, you need learn English, need to make new friends. So I found it best to join a football club. But it took me one and a half years to get some friends. They want to see how you play. It is not easy to pick friends at school. It takes time. We are expected to do the tasks, listen to teachers, get on with everything...”*

G1 said, *“We shared our stories with Primary school children, it felt good. But it took me a long time to make friends, almost a year because I didn’t speak English.”*

G4 said, *“We share our stories with friends at school too.”*

G2 said, *“I had to get into groups. I have good friends now. Some are from Syria. Some are English. I joined the school Art Club, made cushions. It was nice.”*

When asked about how they coped with their lessons and curriculum G1 said during lunch time they got help for homework. All the children said their parents and/or family members did not know much about how education system worked in England. So, they make efforts to gain more knowledge and get information and share with their parents. G1 said her parents are now helping to choose GCSE subjects. But, *“...they can’t help much in homework. Mum is not good in English, Dad is ok. So, a Volunteer helps me in my lessons and homework. Parents try to help us as much as possible, but English language is a big problem to them and also that they don’t much about how school works here.”* The sisters are helping each other at school and at home. The boy said teachers help him in his lessons and homework. These efforts

demonstrate that refugee children are striving hard, along with their parents, to integrate and succeed in their life.

When asked about their life in general in England the girls said Leeds felt like home now. But the boy, although differed in his response saying Syria was his home, agreed that it is now home here too. He also said there was more freedom here in English society.

The above experiences shared by the participants exemplify how positive integrations processes initiated at school can have profound impact on the well-being of refugee students. The RAS children thrive in their education and personal life with appropriate support, empathy and a helping hand. The school staff members need to have cultural awareness, sensitivity and appreciation for the children's personal circumstances. Such a cohesive teamwork produces positive educational experiences.

6.5 "It's good for my kids here" – Story of a parent seeking asylum in the UK

The parent who was interviewed for the study is a mother of two dependent children aged 11 and 13 years, and originates from Albania. She has separated from her husband. She left her home country as she "had some problems", travelled through two southern European countries and reached Germany hoping to start a new life by settling there. She said it didn't go well for the family, so she sought moving to the UK seeking asylum. The children learnt German language and did some schooling when they lived in Germany. Mother and children arrived in the UK in the middle of 2015 for a better life. The participant said coming to live in Leeds city was not her choice but the government put her there with her children.

"I didn't know... I only know I want nearby school. But... not for Secondary. For Secondary, we cannot find near... it is little far... school is far for him. My little son started after a week, may be two weeks. In Primary, 6 class. It is nice. Just walking to school. But big one later. Because they don't have school... may be a month."

She did not share clear information about what her older child did in that one or so month being out of school. She is happy about how they are doing in school. She talks about it at length here when asked is she happy with the school and how they are doing in school.

"Yeah. My kids are good. They like school. They are happy, they go everyday to school. I like. I think its OK. I think they work with kids good here. My kids, my big son, they both speak German. We were in Germany one and a half years. My little son, he doesn't like there, no friends. He likes it here. Here, I see the staff, teachers are good with kids. In Germany they are not good. They have in school special class for English. Little one, he is good...better than me. He learns better, he is always first in class in school."

A significant change in educational institutions, socio-cultural environment and language learning has not deterred the children in their learning performance in the UK. Their mother has observed this too and sees a good future for them.

The participant was asked how did she go about education and schooling in England, how did she get her children in to school, who helped her and what support was given to her. She said she did not know anything about the education system of England. *"They gave information. They said go to school, apply... I didn't know... I only know this woman worker from Council. They placed me here in this house and said apply to school." Sometimes kids help. But this lady... then the other lady from charity...she helps. It is hard here to understand."*

Further questions explored why she felt it was hard to understand life in England. She replied saying *"I can understand, sometimes hard. They send us information all the time. I visit the school. Yeah, both primary, secondary. When they call... first time I was there it was for immigrant kids. I don't understand. We were there a lot of immigrants with kids to know how they are in school, are they good or not...to listen...to teachers."*

The mother is making efforts to participate in her children's education. She is taking her own initiative and motivated to approach the school without feeling inhibited. She was asked about how she was participating in her children's schooling. *"In primary I go there all the time...I ask teachers...2 times a week. Not in secondary. It is too far."*

Is her participation towards securing their future in the UK? What does she think of them living in the UK? What support does she think is needed for her children?

"I think my kids, their future here is good. School, everything is good here. We are all together all the time. They know. I know. It is good here. Good school, may be good learning, may be good job later. I think my kids are good. They say they want to learn. Good life later. Yeah, have to do..."

Her words show her aspirations for her children's secure future but with good educational opportunities. She is investing in their human capital by supporting them emotionally. What about her own development as a new comer in the country, how is she learning about life in the UK.

"They give us lesson in English. In school. One teacher is there. They give us lessons. We are a lot of parents. Yeah, it is good. I have made friends. Only in the school. Not outside. I don't know. May be they all work. Only now we start friends. Till now alone here, like new here."

She also spoke about her experiences in her home country, travelling through Europe to reach the UK and waiting for a decision on their asylum application and finding a good future in the UK. *"I think my kids in*

school here it is good for everything. I live for them. Its not important what happened to me. But my kids, they are good here. I want good thing for them in school.”

The personal story of this parent reveals a parent’s hope for her children’s future despite compelling conditions and unfriendly laws surrounding a person’s movements through geographical and political borders. This single parent is striving to find a foot on a slippery ground like many other asylum seekers who leave their own shores seeking a safe place to live and build a future for their family or themselves. It is in the hands of the law and governments to allow her ground to become stable thus nurturing two young lives. This nurturance aspect and empathy is what seems to be the missing link in the chain of rules, regulations, rights, responsibilities, structures and systems that seem to ignore human and social capital.

7 Recommendations

1. There is need for clear, user-friendly policies to facilitate immediate placement of RAS children in schools and/or in transition classes soon after their arrival in England. Information about relevant procedures and processes relating to accessing local services should be readily made accessible to them with the coordinated involvement of relevant actors. Local Authorities should be able to assume this supportive role as long as appropriate intra-systems are in place.
2. The RAS students' access to school should be immediate and be based on the information provided by students and their families. Any necessary procedures, including the verification of age and other personal details, could take place while the students are in school. Any changes that may be deemed as necessary after the completion of the procedures should be coordinated and be actioned swiftly. The effectiveness of such procedures should be monitored and evaluated.
3. The deficit of skills and abilities approach must be changed to adopting the attitude of appreciating existing skills and abilities of RAS children and adults. Consideration should be given to a more flexible approach in the adaptation of school curriculum allowing RAS students the opportunity to tailor education to match their needs. Their previous educational experience should be valued and trialled.
4. Systems and procedures must be made more efficient towards providing services and facilities to RAS families and unaccompanied youth to access housing, welfare benefits, assessment of their educational qualifications and work experience, induction into skill development or skill enhancement programmes and language immersion programmes. This will have positive effects (a feeling of settlement, belonging and moving forward) on RAS children living with them.
5. A multidisciplinary approach should guide the design of schools' practices aiming to facilitate the educational integration of RAS children. Such school-level practices should involve English language teachers, interpreters, language immersion support staff, volunteers, whole-school positive approach in welcoming and inducting RAS children, and involving local communities in the integration process.
6. Government at the national level must allocate extra funding to specific Local Authorities to initiate projects that particularly develop measures and mechanisms to integrate RAS families, children and youth. These projects should also work with local schools, NGOs and community organisations to effectively support RAS populations.
7. Awareness programmes on diversity, events and cultural festivals must be organised regularly at the local community level through Local Authorities so that RAS families, children and youth are introduced to local people, participate in cultural exchanges and learn about each other.

8. Networking between schools, Local Authorities, NGOs and community organisations must include regular exchanges on the educational integration of RAS children.
9. Local Authorities, universities and schools could join together in starting summer schools for RAS populations for language development and introduction to life in local communities.
10. All relevant actors involved in the integration of RAS populations should initiate innovative action steps such as setting up language cafes in local communities, involvement of volunteers from work places and universities to act as language interpreters and ambassadors, and involve employment organisations to work closely with RAS populations. The integration process should be viewed as the responsibility of the whole community especially considering RAS populations as contributing members of the society.

8 Conclusion

The status of refugees and asylum seekers seems to be one of social exclusion, isolation and segregation in England despite various policies and practices working for their integration. Research literature points out that there are barriers and contradictions in relation to including and integrating both adults and children from refugee and asylum-seeking populations into the host society. A number of key community organisations and relevant Local Authorities are striving to support and help refugees and asylum seekers through community support, educational support and creating awareness about rights and services through advice and advocacy.

Education is deemed necessary and is identified as the most important path to the structural adjustment of marginalised groups of people. Education is the most easily accessible avenue for their integration into their host country for refugee and asylum seeking children and young people. However, how best they can access educational systems and processes is not entirely clear as their educational experiences are linked to law, policies and practices of organisations that deliver support services.

The 'Multi-country Partnership to Enhance the Education of Refugees and Asylum-seeking Youth in Europe' (PERAE) initiated a study to investigate the educational experiences of refugee and asylum-seeking children and youth in eight partnering countries in accessing quality education. This country-specific report arising from the study conducted in England, UK aimed to examine their experiences through using multi-lens approach. It explored policy and practice surrounding RAS children's overall circumstances in accessing education and thereby examined what challenges and issues were present in educational systems, structures and processes that negatively impacted on them.

The literature reviewed in this study was used to gain clarity on the multi-layered issues and challenges embedded in the integration process of RAS children. In particular, the literature informed the research questions and the design of the research methodology adopted in this study. The underlying themes of the literature reviewed illuminated many issues and challenges that are affecting the material condition, socio-emotional needs and the placement of RAS communities in the UK. A trajectory of law, policy and practice needs to guide the integration process. There is need for an education system that is easier to access and one that provides for positive educational experiences.

The RAS children and young people, arriving on the UK shores with or without families, are initially supported to apply for asylum. This support is offered by many NGOs and also the Local Authorities where they are directed to. The government may take up to six months to decide on their asylum application. During this waiting period all children and young people will be placed in educational institutions

appropriate to their age. All applicants receive certain help such as weekly living allowance, healthcare and free accommodation. This help will be withdrawn after 28 days soon after the grant of refugee status. Then the adults are required to find their own means of entering the welfare system for benefits related to housing and employment. They will need to start their life gaining an identity for themselves and their families. However, simple steps to a normal life such as opening a bank account, getting the National Insurance number, accessing welfare benefits, housing and finding employment will all pose challenges and barriers to a new refugee. The experiences may result in feeling social exclusion, stigma, isolation, and failure to understand the gaps in the systems.

These gaps affect their children and also unaccompanied refugee children and young people equally. Lack of adequate level of English language proficiency is a chief barrier added to other factors such as cultural differences, lack of understanding the system, confusions in understanding how system works in the UK, what policies are there for them to follow, and how to access services.

The frustration of not being able to understand the system to access services and unfriendly system towards migrants may push the families to a state of distress and desperation. Research and reports published by NGOs have stated that the refugees with good education and training fail to find suitable jobs as their education and training are not acquired within the UK. This adds to the challenges that refugee people experience. The challenges affect the psychological health and well-being of children and young people. They are vulnerable to changes in their physical and mental health.

Throughout the UK, the NGOs have been at the forefront of working with asylum seekers and refugees. They work with dependent and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children by including them in a number of activities to orient them to British society in general. They also offer, where possible, temporary accommodation, classes in English language, mathematics, IT and business. Several regional and local NGOs, depending on their funding, also involve with the refugee population in empowering them to understand life in Britain, offer language interpretation service, run programmes of empowering girls and women in learning new skills, run mental health programmes, and other inclusion activities. These NGOs mostly practise individual-specific approach or community development approach in their integration processes. The individual-specific programmes and activities benefit children and young people profoundly. They gain confidence, show courage to share their stories, develop resilience, learn new skills and quickly adapt to learning English language. However, their work on the ground is influenced by changes in policies and law which in turn affect the funding situation and the running of projects. NGOs express frustration when their

work is impacted by funding, when empathy has to compete with law, and when law curtails their role in upholding human and child rights.

When asylum seeker and refugee children enter schools they are put in age-appropriate school years. Their first challenge is to learn English language to speak, to write and to read as required for their school work in order to attain expected standards. Added to this, they are expected to understand school system, rules, routines and policies related to school attendance, participation in lessons and timely submission of school work including homework. Their parents are expected to fill various forms, agree to the plan shared between parent, school and the student, understand their roles and responsibilities in their child's education and participate effectively.

Secondary schools, where good integration programmes and plans are in place, support the new refugee student to start their educational integration process immediately. Starting from their immersion programme (including induction), buddying up with another student, individually planned mentoring mechanisms, personalised language development plans, volunteer involvement in cultural exchanges, availability of interpreters and translators, and suitable help with homework and preparation for GCSE. Staff members are well-trained in their cultural awareness and professional competence to support refugee children needing extra help. These schools need extended help from the government in terms of funding and easy steps to implement policies with less paperwork.

Refugee students fall behind in achieving expected progress in their integration in schools (mostly secondary) that may have weak integration programmes to include and immerse refugee students in their language development programme and in activities that enrich their understanding and participation in curriculum. This will cause social exclusion, isolation, peer segregation and many negative effects on their self-esteem. On the other hand, staff members with poor training and capacity-building professional development opportunities may view refugee students as 'burden' and 'unwanted work' in their classes. This will add to the problems faced by the school, staff and students. Supporting curriculum and socio-emotional needs of refugee students will be approached as negative and hostile. Many schools and staff may not even know how to support refugee students' needs although most schools have EAL programmes. On part of the government, policies made to integrate refugees and asylum seekers need to be user-friendly and be easy to implement in the integration processes. Issues such as concentration of RAS population in particular areas of urban pockets which are marked by lower socio-economic conditions, segregation, poor conditions of housing, consistency in policies, easy steps to access welfare system and compassionate attitude towards the personal circumstances can be addressed keeping up the framework of social justice. Government's failure to practise social justice, compassion with a lack of commitment to realising the human rights of RAS populations project a hostile environment in the whole society. This can transfer on to

the dominant communities and other citizens of the society. This will only worsen human relationships and community cohesion. Refugees and asylum seekers do not lack in anything; they must not be pushed into the deficiency framework when integration programmes are designed. Expressing acceptance, showing respect and compassion for them and recognising their human, social and cultural capital is a way forward in their integration that is good for the whole society. The RAS children need mentoring and nurturance to progress as informed and capable citizens of the UK, not as deprived and deficient in expressing their human capabilities.

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