

What do Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Oxford need help with?





Who did we speak to?

We spoke to 66 people living in Oxford. This includes people who have claimed asylum, people with refugee status, Ukrainians, EU migrants, and people on refugee resettlement schemes. They come from eighteen different countries.

We talked to 30 people who work with refugees and asylum seekers in Oxford, to hear their ideas too.

We would like to say **thank you** to everyone who helped us to create this report.

Why?

To understand what asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants need in Oxford. This helps Oxford become a better place of sanctuary and welcome.

What is happening today?



Asylum Welcome did this research in 2023. Since then, more people have come to Oxford to find safety, and many others have been given refugee status. When people are granted refugee status, they need help finding a job, a community, an education, and somewhere to live, make a home and belong – making this work even more important.

More people came to the UK to seek asylum in 2024 than 2023 and 2022. At the end of 2024, more than 90,000 asylum seekers were waiting for a decision, so we need to keep working together to protect, support and welcome them.

Since doing the research, Oxford City Council has become a Council of Sanctuary. They have used this research to make plans about what to change and improve. The council has already started putting some of these plans into action.





A Council of Sanctuary

- Is a safe and welcoming place for refugees and asylum seekers.
- Listens to people who have lived experience.
- Makes information and services easy to understand.
- Works on issues before they become big problems.
- Celebrates refugees and asylum seekers in our communities.

What people said about the big issues



Not enough information

- Most people do not know what support they can get.
- They do not know how and where to get help.
- This leads to wrong information being shared (for example, about council housing).
- Some say the information on the council website is difficult to understand.
- People who arrive in Oxford need easy-to-understand, easy-to-find information in different languages.



Transport

- Public transport (trains, buses, etc.) are expensive; refugees and asylum seekers struggle to pay.
- This stops people from going outside and reaching other services.
- Bicycles are good, but they break or get stolen and can't be used in all weathers.
- Parents sometimes cannot pay for buses for their children.
- Free and discounted travel passes would be helpful.



Health and wellbeing

- Mental health support is difficult to find; waiting lists are very long.
- There is not enough information about how to get healthcare (including dentists, hospital appointments, etc.)
- Most people we spoke to say they feel safe in Oxford.

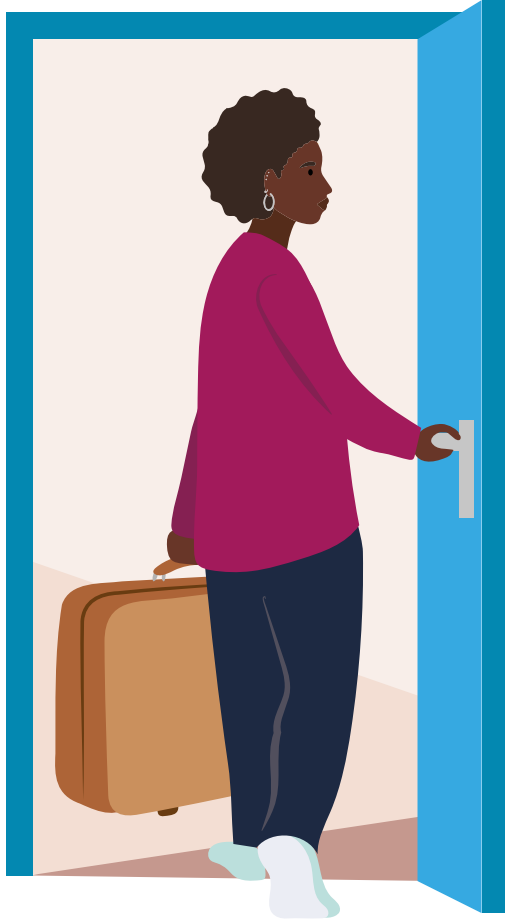
“Getting an appointment for mental care is a mission impossible.”

English language and jobs



- People wait a long time to start English classes, which makes them bored and depressed.
- People who are studying English wish they could have more lessons each week.
- Some parents can't study English because nobody can look after their children.
- They think colleges, charities and councils could work together to create more English classes.
- Councils and local businesses could offer work experience for refugees and asylum seekers.
- People struggle when their qualifications from other countries are not accepted.

“I would like to be a nurse, but my language is a barrier. I can't find English classes because of my shift rotation.”



Housing

- Asylum seekers in hotels say they have problems with the food, the location of the hotel, and sharing rooms.
- When people get refugee status, they have 56 days to find somewhere to live. Even though this went up from 28 days to 56 days, it is still difficult and some people become homeless.
- People need correct information about council houses, so they do not wait to be given one.
- A clear 'to-do list' in multiple languages will be useful after someone starts renting a house. For example, council tax, energy bills, recycling, paying rent, repairs, etc.

"I don't understand the housing system".



Talking to Oxford City Council

- Many people do not understand the council. Some think 'City Council' is the same as 'Council House'.
- Some people think 'City Council' is the same as 'Home Office'.
- Some people say they ask the council questions but do not get answers.

What can Oxford City Council do to help?

- Work with colleges, charities and other councils to create more English language classes.
- Help asylum seekers and refugees find mental health support.
- Offer volunteer opportunities and work experience to refugees at the council.
- Help share other volunteer and work experience opportunities with refugees.
- Work with the Jobcentre to help them understand how to help refugees.
- Provide more translated information when people get refugee status and start looking for a house.
- Make sure everyone who works at the council understands the situation for refugees and asylum seekers.
- Keep working with charities and faith groups to help refugees and asylum seekers.
- Work with GPs to improve the help they give refugees and asylum seekers.
- Celebrate asylum seekers and refugees in the community.

Where to find more information



Oxford City Council

Provides a range of local services including: housing; waste collection; Council Tax.

Call **01865 249 811** or use the online form or live webchat at: **www.oxford.gov.uk/contact-us/webchat**



Asylum Welcome

Offers advice and practical support for asylum seekers, refugees and vulnerable migrants.

Call **01865722082** or email **welcome@asylum-welcome.org**



Refugee Resource

Provides psychological, social and practical support for asylum seekers, refugees and migrants.

Call **01865 403280** or email **info@refugeeresource.org**



Crisis

Supports people who are experiencing homelessness.

Call **01865 263900** or email **oxford@crisis.org.uk**



Mind

Mind is a free mental health support and signposting charity.

Call **01865 247788** or email **info@oxfordshiremind.org.uk**

Who made this report?

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with help from volunteers and local groups.

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SANCTUARY AWARD
WELCOMING PEOPLE SEEKING SANCTUARY

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