

Refugee Charter for Manchester

Define us not by our differences but by the principles we share

We are people of courage, ingenuity and perseverance who have been forced to come to seek refuge in Manchester.

We are refugees and asylum seekers, exercising our legal right under the 1951 UN Convention to seek safety from persecution in our countries of origin. We include families, lone individuals, men women and children, young and old, people with disabilities and unaccompanied minors.

We applaud and thank all individuals, public agencies and organizations who have welcomed us and supported us to re-build our lives in the UK.

However the current situation for many asylum seekers and refugees is critical. We see our communities increasingly marginalised, denied or unable to access employment with, limited and problematic access to health services and dispersed to highly deprived areas where individuals are isolated, vulnerable and subject to harassment and physical attacks.

Basic Rights

1. Recognition of the inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace;
2. Especially vulnerable members of refugee communities to be treated with the same care and respect as those from host communities expect and where children are involved, the rights of the child must be paramount;
3. Appropriate provisions to be made for refugees and asylum seekers with special needs, such as unaccompanied minors and disabled refugees and asylum seekers;
4. Service providers within Manchester to recognize that they have a responsibility to ensure that all refugee policies are compassionate, ethically sound and consistent with international legal standards;
5. Recognition of the right to adequate legal representation to enable us to have a fair and just asylum hearing;
6. Recognition of the crucial importance of advice and interpretation services in enabling us to realise our rights and contribute to our host community;

Healthcare

7. Recognition that we should have the same access to healthcare as our host community;
8. Asylum seekers and refugees with mental health needs to have these met appropriately and sensitively and to promote good mental health in acknowledgement of the fact that many of us have been traumatised in our country of origin and that our lives are still stressful and uncertain;

Housing

9. The right to safe, appropriate accommodation. This should be suitably located, well managed, in good repair and with adequate support to enable us to resettle and rebuild our homes;
10. The recognition that enforced destitution is an inhumane policy which is harmful and dangerous for the victims and damaging for the host communities;

While refugees and asylum seekers have different entitlements under British law, we ask that the rights in the law be upheld and that our basic, universal human rights be respected. Immigration policies often run contrary to other government objectives including reducing rough sleeping, encouraging employment and creating an inclusive society.

We exert all possible effort to positively contribute and integrate with our host communities. There is a long history of refugees and migrants making a significant contribution to the life of the city, and current refugees must be recognized as continuing this contribution.

Integration is a dynamic and two way process, placing a demand on receiving societies and the new communities.

In order for us to rebuild our lives and fully integrate into society we call for:

Education

11. Schools and colleges to encourage integration through valuing each child regardless of background and recognising that each child and young person can play a fundamental role in educating others and promoting greater understanding of the issues affecting refugees;
12. Recognition of the emotional needs of refugee children and the importance of a stable and safe environment in order to assist in their development;
13. Appropriate provision to allow adult learners to access education, especially ESOL courses;

Employment

14. Recognition that we want to work, and have no desire to become an economic burden, and that current legislation, which prevents asylum seekers from working, has a detrimental effect both on the individuals concerned and the city as a whole and on community cohesion and integration;
15. Encouragement and promotion of full scale participation in employment preparation and personal development for asylum seekers;
16. Encouragement and promotion of appropriate training and employment opportunities for refugees to enable them to participate in the economic, social and cultural life of the city;

Community Cohesion and Social bonds

17. Respect as law-abiding people who should not be suspected or accused of a crime due to our immigration status;
18. The right to live in safety without fear of persecution or physical attacks from racist abusers;
19. Recognition that irresponsible media coverage hurts real people and that media representation should therefore be sensitive, fair and truthfully reflective of the positive contribution we make to our host community; and
20. Support for our community organisations and refugee organisations to increase peoples' confidence and ability to integrate on equal terms, to promote respect for the cultures, arts and languages that we bring and to increase inter-cultural understanding.