

Getting started: building an asylum integration strategy

Photo showing a group of refugees participating in a workshop

Key information

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Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Working definition of social integration](#)

[Strategic aims, integration outcomes and KPIs](#)

[Borough of Sanctuary Status](#)

Introduction

Local authorities need to set out a clear overarching strategy for how they will meet their statutory obligations and provide a framework for welcoming and integrating people seeking asylum into their community. Having a strategy will then enable local authorities to adapt to the current fast-changing external environment.

This starts from developing guiding principles and outcomes which can shape responses and adaptations to changes in central Government policy and the population size, and which set a direction and organisational clarity to deliver an ambitious, holistic system of service delivery.

Key lessons in this section

1. Design and ideally formalise a working definition of social integration for people seeking asylum, to be used across the borough.
2. From this, consider objectives, outcomes and measurable Key Performance Indicators to shape a strategic framework, as well as methods to evaluate progress toward these. This can be adapted around changing circumstances and national policies, while maintaining stable goals and working toward fixed outcomes.
3. Working toward Borough of Sanctuary status can galvanise buy-in across a borough to support a more strategic approach to asylum and refugee resettlement.

1. Working definition of social integration

- One of the first steps in building an asylum strategy should involve formulating a working definition that sets out ‘what does integration look like for people seeking asylum’. This in turn can be used to determine key objectives and outcomes.
- A working definition can be set up internally for use among staff in an asylum team, to be referred to when designing new initiatives for people seeking asylum. Better still, more comprehensive asylum strategies can formalise definitions of integration at a council level, for use across departments, helping to mainstream an asylum integration lens into work borough-wide.
- There are a variety of different definitions for ‘social integration’ and specific definitions for the integration of people seeking asylum. However, definitions tend to frame the concept as a two-way process, involving newcomers being able to function well, and becoming active and thriving members of their community; and hosts and institutions helping to welcome and support arrivals to settle and lay down roots in their new home. It should be noted that integration is distinct from the concept of forced ‘assimilation’ into a majority culture. Instead, integration requires responsive and equitable policy and services, and a shared sense of community and a respect for differences between people from diverse backgrounds.

Local authorities may wish to refer to the [GLA definition of social integration](#) as a template:

- 'Social integration is the extent to which people positively interact and connect with others who are different to themselves. It is determined by the level of equality between people, the nature of their relationships, and their degree of participation in the communities in which they live. The Mayor’s work on social integration has four parts:
 - Relationships – promoting shared experiences
 - Participation – supporting Londoners to be active citizens
 - Equality – tackling barriers and inequalities
 - Evidence – improving London’s evidence base to measure, evaluate and share findings on the state of social integration.'
- When deciding on a definition, and on strategic objectives, senior leads should consider what integration means from the perspectives and lived experiences of people in the asylum system. Ideally, this should involve a consultation or co-design exercise with asylum seeking residents to incorporate their ideas and centre on their needs. See our [Coproduction and consultation](#) page for more detail and case studies on how local authorities can engage in consultations.

Barnet: Understanding that people seeking asylum are 'long term residents'

Barnet has noted the advantages of framing their asylum strategy around a commitment to see people seeking asylum as ‘long term residents’ in the borough.

Results and lessons:

- This has helped the borough to design its services within a perspective of providing welcoming support over multiple years (rather than months), reflecting the experiences of many asylum-seeking residents impacted by the current backlog in application processing.
- The framing has also encouraged the borough to develop its strategy with a view to supporting residents to spend their lives in London once they receive refugee status, encouraging a focus on initiatives that help residents become active members of their local area, forming social connections in their community.

2. Strategic aims, integration outcomes and KPIs

A working definition of integration can then be used to identify a range of more specific and measurable outcomes, and then aims and objectives for activities to facilitate the social integration of people seeking asylum.

During this exercise it can be helpful to see integration as a process that takes place across a variety of different domains in a person's life. Somebody may hence be socially integrated in one domain (for example having social connections in a community) while not in others (for example struggling to open a bank account and integrate economically).

The table below, drawing on research by British Future, highlights key 'foundations', 'facilitators' and 'connections' that help enable social integration to take place.

Foundations: Equality and inclusion are crucial components of social integration. Our basic needs must be met to enable people seeking asylum to have the agency and access that enables them to become active members in their new community.

Facilitators: We need to put in place the conditions that encourage social integration, where people from different backgrounds can come together, find common ground and respect differences. Importantly, this requires leadership to organise and sustain initiatives that can help people from all backgrounds to meet, mix and thrive in their boroughs.

These in turn can help build:

- Bonding connections – with people who we see as having similar qualities to ourselves.
- Bridging connections – relationships that span in-group out-group divides across society.
- Linking connections – between people and institutions, for example, between local councillors, borough staff, GPs or ESOL providers and people seeking asylum. These connections help build institutional trust and enable people to access resources, rights and entitlements.

Table 1: Foundations, Facilitators and Connections for Social Integration

Foundations	Facilitators	Connections	Result
Work	Leadership	Bonding connections with people like ourselves	Shared identities
Housing and public space	Unifying moments	Bridging connections across social divides	Shared norms of behaviour
Income and basic needs	Participation	Linking connections between people and institutions	Trust
Education	Communication		Respect for difference
Local infrastructure	A healthy democracy		Empathy and kindness

Template Strategic Aims and Outcomes

The following strategic aims and outcomes are examples produced by London boroughs during the Design Lab process, which may be useful exemplars for strategic discussions.

1) Aim - Integration: People currently seeking asylum are likely to integrate successfully in future.

Outcomes:

- People seeking asylum increase their own independent agency, autonomy and independence.
- People seeking asylum are resilient to sudden shocks (and longer-term issues e.g. neglect), socially, economically, and relating to their mental and physical health.
- People seeking asylum are safe and supported.
 - Protection and safeguarding concerns are raised and addressed properly.
- People seeking asylum transition without crisis when they get a positive decision on their application and have to move on.
- Children and young people develop fully as they should.

2) Aim - Entitlements: People seeking asylum can effectively access required services for and obtain their entitlements and rights (including dignity and safeguarding protection).

Outcomes:

- People know what their entitlements are.
- People can access the services and support they are entitled to.
- People can access help/advocacy when they are not getting their full entitlements.
- Standards are maintained/sustainable over time (monitoring and evaluation methods are in place).

3) Aim - Value through partnership: The different local authority teams Clearsprings Ready Homes and hotel staff, NHS and other statutory bodies, VCS and lived experience-led organisations complement each other, e.g. in activities and sharing information, to ensure best value from limited resources.

Outcomes:

- Local authority and other staff in partners are informed and confident of the strategic direction of the borough.
- Staff are learning from voices of people seeking asylum.
- Different staff and stakeholders communicate effectively with each other regularly and feeding back progress to people seeking asylum.
- Joined up services can respond to rapid changes and ambiguity in national policies.
- Once target outcomes and strategic aims and objectives have been drafted, these can be used to identify and shape the practices, actions and service delivery of an asylum response. The next sections of this toolkit examine in more detail how local authorities can prioritise, initiate and expand their service delivery after establishing a strategic framework.
- Crucially, look to build in methodologies for evaluating these outcomes against objectives at a service design stage.
- A number of practical toolkits and information briefings are available to support the process of evaluating initiatives, measuring social integration and tracking success towards objectives and key performance indicators:
 - The [GLA Social Integration Measurement Toolkit](#) is a helpful starting point with advice on data collection and a full index of social integration measures.

- Local authorities may also wish to refer to the Government DLUHC briefing pack on [Measuring Outcomes for Integrated Communities](#), which also includes a list of integration indicators and examples on how to collect data to track changes in these over time. Similarly, the [Home Office also provides a list of indicators of integration](#).
- Our page on [Coproduction and consultation](#) furthermore provides guidance and examples of consultation with people seeking asylum, to inform those wishing to gather feedback directly from service users.

3. Borough of Sanctuary Status

The development of an asylum integration strategy can also form an opportunity for local authorities in London to pursue ‘Borough of Sanctuary’ accreditation through the [UK City of Sanctuary scheme](#).

Through a combination of checklists, accreditation requirements and tailored one-to-one support, the borough of sanctuary programme helps support local authorities to create a more joined-up and strategic approach to their welcoming programme, focused on ‘creating a culture of welcome’ for refugees and people seeking asylum.

[Reference:1](#)

This includes through supporting boroughs to:

- Offer a positive vision of a culture of welcome and hospitality to all.
- Create opportunities for relationships of friendship and solidarity between local people and those seeking sanctuary.
- Recognise and encourage partnership working and network development across localities.
- Identify opportunities for practical action and work on common cause issues to effect change within and across communities (turning empathy into action).
- Celebrate and promote the welcome contribution of people seeking sanctuary.
- Engage people seeking sanctuary in decision making processes at all levels and in all activities promote understanding of asylum and refugee issues, especially by enabling refugee voices to be heard directly.

Many of the boroughs in the Design Lab noted that the process of working toward certification had acted as a useful galvanising mechanism and unifying objective, helping unlock political buy-in at a council level and across multiple teams to support a more co-ordinated asylum and refugee strategy.

Lambeth - Borough of Sanctuary accreditation

Lambeth was awarded Borough of Sanctuary Status in 2022 and attributes the scheme as helping the borough to improve co-ordination and outcomes in its asylum and resettlement strategy.

Results and lessons:

- The process of participating in the scheme has enabled the borough to develop a [Borough of Sanctuary Strategy](#) from 2022-25.
- Their accreditation has also helped the borough secure buy-in to have a dedicated Sanctuary Services team.
- The scheme has supported the borough to establish a ‘Sanctuary Board’, comprising refugees, people seeking asylum and people with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). The team consults the board to gather lived experiences on the needs of ‘sanctuary seekers’, using this data to design and implementing

new initiatives that support and welcome new arrivals to successfully settle and become active in their local community.

[Previous](#)

[Next](#)

[Back to table of contents](#)

References

- [Reference:1](#) See City of Sanctuary requirements: <https://cityofsanctuary.org/>. Accreditation requires political involvement of council members, beginning with a full Council motion and integration into the local authority's strategic objectives.