

## Refugee and asylum seekers

Our conversation starters intend to give community organisations and groups a simple, structured way to discuss subjects and topics related to mental health that impact their work. Conversations should aim to create a safe space where people's contributions and perspectives feel respected and valued without being judged. We suggest:

- Use the discussion starters in small groups of four to eight people
- Set aside 60 minutes of protected time for the conversations
- Begin with a group agreement of how your group will engage together
- Aim to keep contributions relevant and on topic
- Look to identify common ground and develop solutions where appropriate
- Think about how you will use the time effectively. We suggest a few minutes introducing the topic, 20-30 minutes on discussion around the talking points, and leaving 15 to 20 minutes for noting any actions or next steps that can be taken.



### Introduction

**Conversations about refugees and asylum seekers can be confusing and misinformation about the two groups, how they are treated and what support they are entitled to is common.**

**An asylum seeker** is someone who has fled their home because of war, persecution or some other serious threat. In the UK, most asylum seekers are not allowed to work while they are waiting for a decision about their asylum, but will be provided with somewhere to live and a small allowance of between £8.86 - £49.18 a week to pay for essentials, depending on whether meals are provided in their accommodation or not.

**A refugee in the UK** is someone who has had their asylum application accepted and has been given refugee status. They can stay in the asylum accommodation for 28 days, but then will need to find alternative housing and either find employment or claim UK benefits.

Poverty can significantly impact the health and wellbeing of both asylum seekers and refugees and can be exacerbated by pre-existing traumas and the stresses of navigating asylum and refugee processes. They may also struggle to adjust to being in a new country, with experiences of social isolation, language barriers, discrimination, economic hardship, fear of deportation and potential separation from loved ones all impacting on their mental health.

Those working with people seeking asylum and refugees can also find that the emotional demands impact on their own wellbeing too.



## Talking Point:

*Marc works for a community-based project supporting refugees in a large city. People using the service often speak and get upset by past experiences of violence and trauma; concerns over family they are separated from; and negative experiences they face in the community as they adjust to living in Scotland.*

*Staff and volunteers have also said that they find it hard sometimes listening to people talk about bad experiences. It has left them feeling upset and that they aren't making enough of a difference, something that is impacting on their own wellbeing.*



## Discussion:

1. Marc's project is working with refugees. What is your understanding of the difference between people seeking asylum and refugees and how may their needs differ?
2. What ways do you think this project can support refugees and better support its staff and volunteers?
3. What does your project need in terms of time and resources to meet the needs asylum seekers and refugees?
4. What are the support and training challenges for staff and volunteers working asylum seekers and refugees and how can these be met?



## Resources:

[Scottish Refugee Council](#): Offers guides, toolkits, and other online resources to enhance knowledge on the rights and entitlements of people in need of refugee protection.

[Healthcare Improvement Scotland - Community Engagement](#): Provides information on how to engage with refugees and asylum seekers.