

Policy Briefing

Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme:

Learning from the Syrian Resettlement Scheme

2021



The Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme must be shaped by the learning from and experience of supporting refugees in NI

About Barnardo's Northern Ireland

We are the largest children's charity in Northern Ireland. We work with approximately 18,000 children, young people and families annually across more than 45 different services and programmes. We have over 25 years' experience supporting minority ethnic and newcomer children, young people and families in Northern Ireland, in particular through our Barnardo's NI Refugee Support Service.

Our experience

In 2015, the **Barnardo's NI Refugee Support Service (NIRSS)** was established to support refugee families arriving through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme with their arrival in Northern Ireland. The service is provided in partnership with Extern, the British Red Cross and Bryson Intercultural. NIRSS provides intensive support to refugees placed in Northern Ireland, supporting families and children both to cope with past trauma and to integrate successfully into Northern Ireland. Since December 2015, 1,815 Syrian refugees have been resettled in Northern Ireland through this scheme and of those, Barnardo's NIRSS has supported 239 families.

A key component of NIRSS work involves linking families with local services, including health, education, and welfare, as well as supporting them with their integration in local communities. The central focus of the Barnardo's NIRSS approach to working with Syrian refugees is to support families in understanding the support they are entitled to and how to access it, ultimately being able to do so independently.

Our research

In 2020, Barnardo's NI published '[A New Life for Me: Integration Experiences of Syrian Refugee Children and their Families](#)'. This report outlines how family dynamics and experiences at school influence refugee children's integration processes, and the support provided to families by the Barnardo's NIRSS. The report findings highlight many positive experiences of resettlement, but also the multiple challenges faced by refugee children and their families as they adapt to a life in a new culture and society. These challenges can include difficulties accessing housing and health services, navigating the education system, language barriers and experiences of racism.



Our calls

- The Barnardo's NIRSS has been a key delivery partner of the UK Resettlement Scheme since 2015. In that time, our work in this area has grown significantly, with our expertise in children's social care readily applicable to the experiences of children and families arriving from Afghanistan.
- We must use the lessons learned from the delivery of previous UK Settlement Schemes to ensure we provide the best support to children and families arriving in the UK from Afghanistan. This will allow us to support children and families with both past trauma and integration into life in the UK. Our research recommendations included:
 - *Children should be a particular focus when considering integration:* The role, challenges and needs of refugee children, and the impact on the entire family must be considered.
 - *Model of support:* Families should be supported in the environment in which they are most comfortable. A strength of Barnardo's NIRSS model of resettlement support is the capacity of key workers to build relationships with refugee families in the informal setting of the home environment.
 - *Integration is a two-way process:* Local communities must be encouraged and supported to better understand the nature and trauma of seeking asylum and resettlement in another country, and understand the benefits, responsibility and pride the UK should have in offering this sanctuary to some of the most vulnerable children and families in the world.

About Aqila and Ajmal

The case study below shares the story of Aqila* (15-year-old girl) and Ajmal* (13-year-old boy). Their story highlights the cumulative trauma and adversity that many refugee children experience, including violence, family bereavement, and interrupted education. **Names have been changed to protect their identity.*

Aqila and Ajmal witnessed and experienced a high level of violence and trauma in Syria. When she was 8, Aquila witnessed the army taking away local people. On another occasion, Aqila and Ajmal were with their family when they witnessed shootings. The whole family were shaking with fear. Shortly after, their baby brother, who had stopped feeding, suddenly died.

The following year, Aqila and Ajmal's youngest sister was killed as a result of bombing. She was five years old. Aqila witnessed her sister dying. Aqila and Ajmal miss their sister and brother a lot. Their mum worries about them because of the immense trauma they have suffered.

It is with these memories and experiences that Aqila and Ajmal have been adjusting to their new life in Northern Ireland. Both have embraced the opportunity to attend school and have been studying hard. They each received excellent first reports, despite Aqila having missed six years of education while living in Lebanon. Ajmal excelled on sports day, taking home gold and silver medals.

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