

Supporting the mental health and wellbeing of migrants in vulnerable circumstances

Guidance to support integrated mental health and wellbeing provision at Place across the North East and Yorkshire and Humber

March 2024



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1. Introduction

This document is aimed at any organisation working at Place level to support the mental health and wellbeing of migrants in vulnerable circumstances¹. It has been developed by a task and finish group under the [North East and Yorkshire Migrant Health Network](#). The task and finish group had representation from ICB, OHID, NHSE, local authority and VCSE. It was established to facilitate improvements in meeting the mental health and wellbeing needs of vulnerable migrants. This relates to promoting good mental health and wellbeing and preventing mental health issues occurring as well as interventions for those requiring more specialist support for their mental health.

For further information contact:

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- NEY NHSE Mental Health Team england.ney-mh@nhs.net

2. Why develop this guidance?

People belonging to inclusion health groups, tend to have very poor health outcomes, often much worse than the general population and a lower than average age death. This contributes considerably to increasing health inequalities.

They are more likely to be economically disadvantaged, live in over-crowded conditions, and live and meet socially with other at-risk groups. More specifically, some migrants may be at increased risk of mental health problems because of their experiences prior to, during, or after migration to the UK. Risk factors do not only relate to their country of origin but also their journey to the UK and even once here. There is also the issue of stigma around mental health in some [cultures](#) and a lack of understanding amongst professionals of their needs with few dedicated pathways to support better them.

More vulnerable migrants come to the UK through various routes which can have a significant impact on their mental health. Some may arrive on small boats to seek asylum and some will arrive in a more planned way under the [various government funded schemes](#). Data on many of these schemes for Yorkshire and Humber can be found [here](#). Many people arrive having fled war and conflict or faced persecution because of their sexuality or beliefs, they often do not know anyone, may not speak English and spend several months accommodated in shared housing or a hotel with little money to spend on activities or travel to visit new places.

It is important that organisations work collaboratively to not only ensure access to specialist mental health support but also to ensure refugees and asylum seekers are able to access safe spaces to socialise, learn new skills and build resilience.

¹ Asylum seekers, refugees, trafficked migrants (someone who has been moved to the UK to be exploited through forced labour, slavery or sex work), Undocumented migrants and unaccompanied asylum seeker children

3. Things to consider in supporting migrants' mental health and wellbeing

3.1 Local authority public health (mental health and/or migrant health lead), migration lead and the ICB (mental health and/or migrant health lead) can work together to map existing mental health and wellbeing services and if they are **available and accessible** to refugees and asylum seekers against the [WHO pyramid framework of optimal mix of services](#) (**figure 1**). NB: Places may wish to do separate ones for adults and children

This should not only capture commissioned mental health support but also the wellbeing activities that are **available and accessible** to vulnerable migrants. **Figure 1** has been adapted to include service examples and how each tier is commissioned.

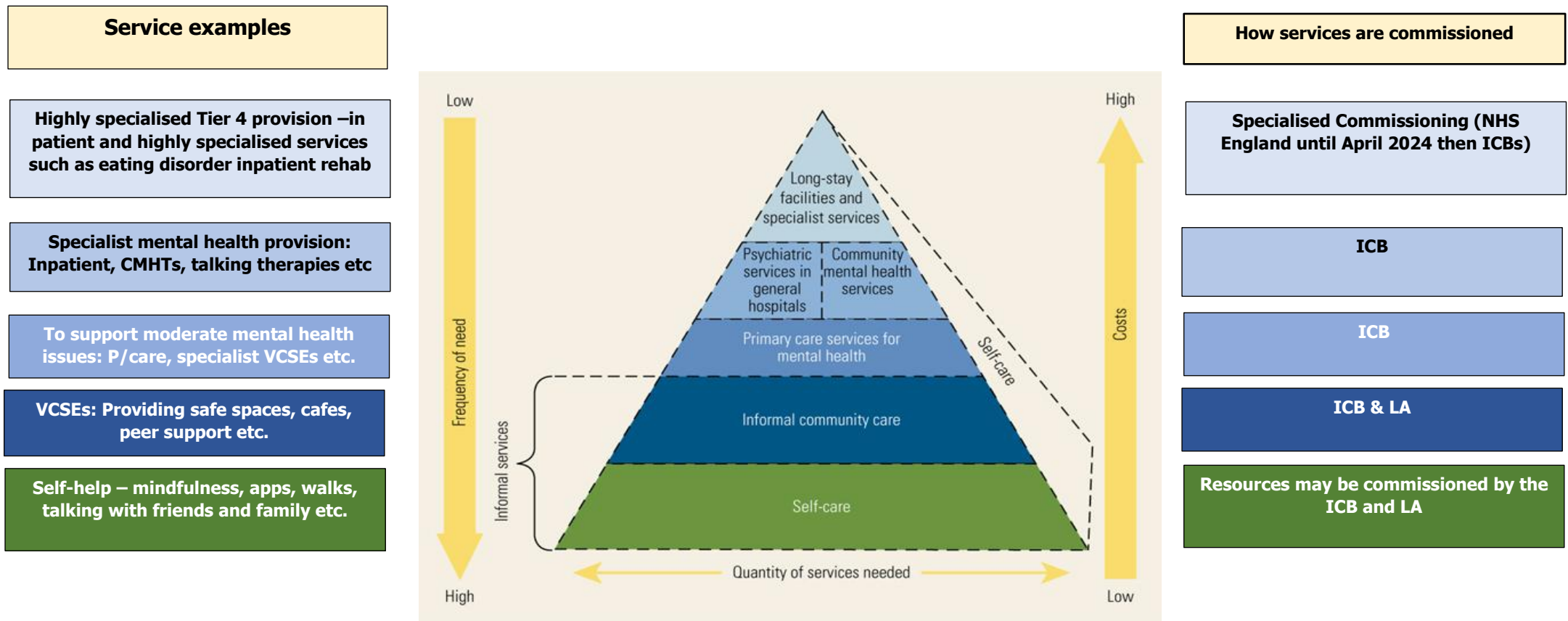


Figure 1: [WHO pyramid framework of optimal mix of services](#)

Figure 2 below details the work that was done in Sandwell which shows how the pyramid can be populated at Place level.

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Sandwell Adult Mental Health Support Services for Refugees & Asylum Seekers
(Based on the WHO Service Organisation Pyramid for an Optimal Mix of Services for Mental Health)

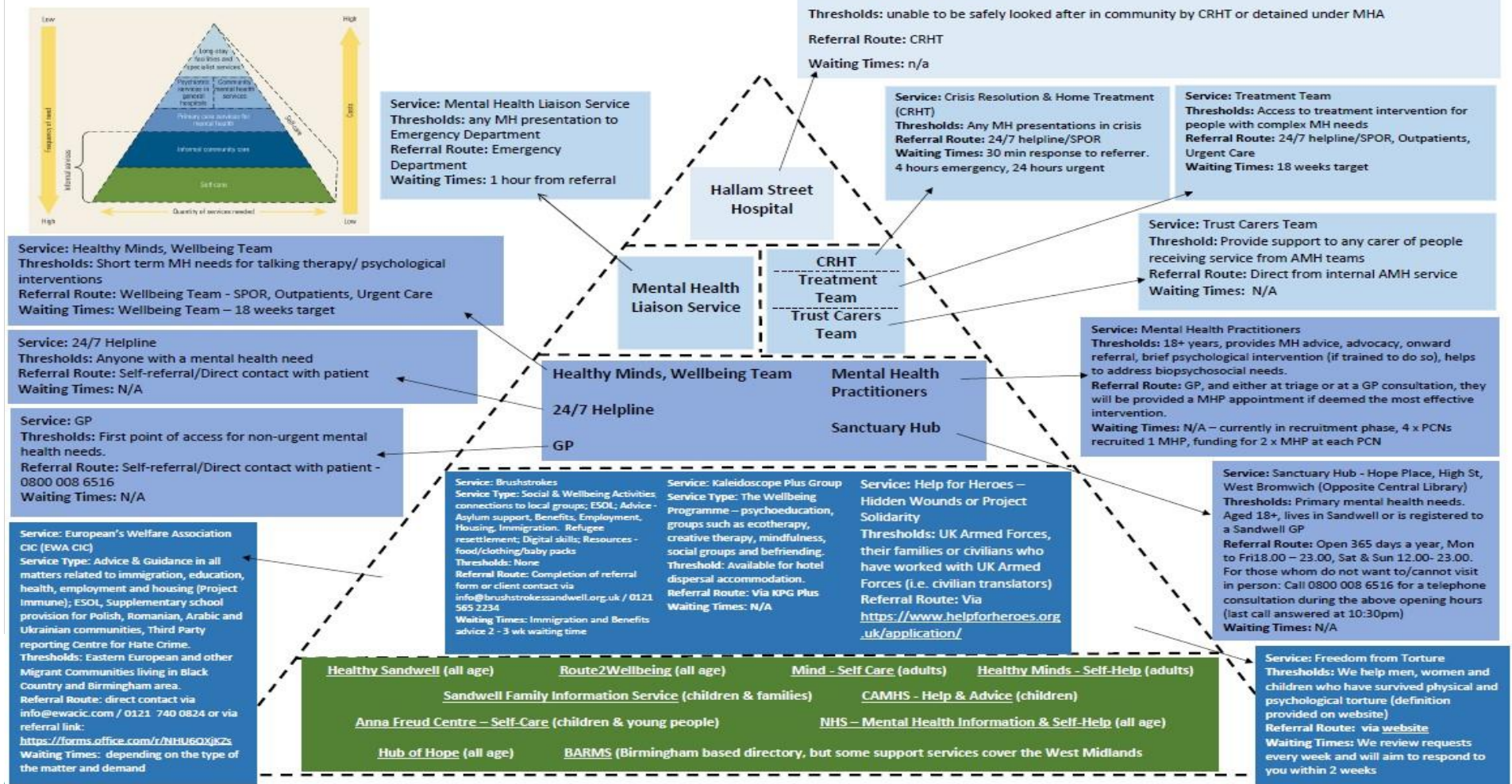


Figure 2: Sandwell mapping based on the WHO pyramid.

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3.2 Use the mapping as a resource locally to discuss with stakeholders² and identify any gaps as well as examples of good practice.

Consider the following questions:

Commissioned mental health services

- Are refugees and asylum seekers using the service and are their outcomes comparable to non-refugee clients?
- How many referrals are received for refugees / asylum seekers and how many are accepted / declined.
- Are they addressing the needs of vulnerable migrants?
- Are refugees and asylum seekers consulted on the model of service in place?
- Is the service model accessible to refugees and asylum seekers – can people travel to it without funds? Are materials translated and available at venues such as community/religious settings, GP practices etc? Is interpretation support offered at the service?
- Are there clear pathways for asylum seekers and refugees that take account of the fact that they may not live in an area for long?
- Is support being offered to asylum seekers living in local contingency accommodation?
- Are the needs of children, young people and adults being catered for?
- Are staff trained in cultural competency and the needs of refugees and asylum seekers?
- Is there an identified 'champion' in the service who is well informed about the needs of asylum seekers and refugees?
- Is there any reflection on why refugees and asylum seekers are not accepted, don't engage or don't get a comparable outcome?

Primary care

- Are primary care practices signed up to [Safe Surgeries - Doctors of the World](#) which provides training and support for all staff around meeting the needs of migrants?
- Are staff trained in cultural competency and the needs of refugees and asylum seekers?
- Is there an identified 'champion' in the service who is well informed about the needs of asylum seekers and refugees?
- Are materials available in translated versions and is interpretation support offered?
- Are there clear pathways for asylum seekers and refugees to access mental health support?
- Is social prescribing actively promoted to asylum seekers and refugees and are they making use of it?

² Stakeholders should include local VCSE services (both generic and ones with a refugee focus), mental health providers, generic health providers such as primary care, people with lived experience and others as appropriate.

Broader wellbeing support

- Are refugees and asylum seekers able to access local leisure facilities free of charge?
- Does the council have a scheme to allow individuals access free bus travel?
- Is there a local information pack which details local provision available to new refugees and asylum seekers as well as other resources to support their mental wellbeing?
- Is there good access to free [ESOL classes](#)?
- Are existing VCSE and assets (not migrant specific) accessible/targeted for asylum seekers and refugees so they can engage in meaningful activities that are culturally appropriate, e.g. community kitchens, walking clubs, park runs etc.
- Are there opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers to volunteer?

Local forums, networks and strategies

- Are the needs of refugees and asylum seekers addressed in existing health-related networks and forums, e.g., networks focusing on mental health, trauma informed practice, exercise, nutrition, primary care etc?
- Do local needs assessments and strategies reference refugees and asylum seekers, e.g., ICB plan, Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, Health and Wellbeing Board strategy, suicide prevention plan etc?
- Is there a need to establish a place-based forum to look specifically and the broader health and wellbeing needs of refugees and asylum seekers as well as other inclusion health groups?

Various

- Do local systems seek the views of refugees and asylum seekers on what would help their wellbeing?
- Are there opportunities for people to offer peer support to individuals and communities through community champion and other schemes?

4. Practice examples to support the health and wellbeing of asylum seekers and refugees

Yorkshire & Humber

- [City of Sanctuary groups](#) are in place across Yorkshire and Humber and the North East. They are locally organised refugee support and solidarity groups that are working collaboratively to make sure their 'Place' is welcoming to those seeking sanctuary. They often provide different wellbeing activities, for example [Wakefield District City of Sanctuary](#) provide a range of [wellbeing support](#) to those seeking sanctuary including a 'Thursday social', creative crafts, food store and English classes. Likewise, [Harrogate District City of Sanctuary](#) offer friendship and support as well as social activities and [Sheffield City of Sanctuary](#) work collaboratively with a number of organisations to provide support around integration.
- [The Children and Families Wellbeing Project](#) provides specialist refugee mental health support to children and families to address the complex trauma faced by some that can impact on their family life, school attendance or behaviour and ability to integrate. A collaboration between Migration Yorkshire, [Refugee Council](#) and [Solace](#) the service is for those arriving in Yorkshire and Humber under UK resettlement schemes.
- [Solace](#) is a Leeds based charity which provides mental health and wellbeing support to asylum seekers and refugees in Yorkshire and Humber.

West Yorkshire

- [Bevan](#) offer primary care support to refugees and asylum seekers and provide a multi-disciplinary service which includes a nurse, occupational therapist and a peer led wellbeing service.
- [St Augustine's, Calderdale](#) offer a range of activities to support the wellbeing of refugees and asylum seekers such as gardening, sports and exercise sessions and art and music workshops.

- **Leeds Five Ways to Wellbeing Support:** Based on local mapping against the [5 steps to wellbeing](#) model, the Migration Team at Leeds City Council have developed a directory of provision available to asylum seekers. Under each step (Connect, be active, keep learning, give and take notice), the guide outlines a range of services, activities and resources available in Leeds which relate to the step to wellbeing and are accessible for any Leeds resident including people who are seeking asylum.



Shareable Version -
Toolkit - Leeds Service

North Yorkshire and Humber

- **[York and Selby Talking Therapies](#)** offer narrative exposure therapy for refugees and asylum seekers. This is offered in addition to their usual interventions and for more complex presentations.
- **[Refugee Action York](#)** provide various wellbeing activities for refugees and asylum seekers and also provide activities for children and families in the hotel.
- **[Tigers Trust and Hull Culture and Leisure – Active Through Football project](#)**: This project aims to deliver engagement opportunities to all Hull and East Riding contingency accommodation sites, with a focus on football and physical fitness. Weekly football sessions are ongoing on-site and off-site
- Mears work collaboratively with **[Welcome House](#)** and **[Hull Help for Refugees](#)** to offer a range of activities for asylum seekers living in Hull and East Riding including, ESOL sessions, group meals and cooking classes, painting and craft sessions and trips.
- In Hull, **[Fenchurch Childrens Hub](#)** offer family support in hotel sites as well as free tickets to activities in the city such as skating, [trampolining](#) and free swim sessions.

South Yorkshire

- **[Sheffield COMAC](#)** run a scheme whereby bikes are provided to asylum seekers so that they can get around. They also help those using them keep the bikes on the road and in good condition.
- **Sheffield's [New Beginnings Project](#)** provides refugees and asylum seekers with information, advice and guidance to help them access opportunities in education and training, volunteering, employment and participation in social activities.
- **Doncaster Mind's Settle Project** supports the mental health of refugees in Doncaster by offering a safe space in which to practice spoken English, learn about

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local culture, share and teach homeland culture, participate in peer support and wellbeing activities, and access one to one mental health support when people are ready.

This groupwork provides the foundations for strong and trusting relationships with the local VCSE sector that facilitate settlement and feelings of belonging and is the first step in a phased approach to integration into services that are accessible by all. Contact: office@doncastermind.org.uk

North East

- **[The Comfrey Project](#)** is a place where people's mental and physical health – and overall wellbeing – improves through taking part in meaningful activities, learning, and through contact with nature, other people and the local community.
- **[Freedom from Torture](#)** offer one-to-one therapy, group activities and other support including for physical pain. Services are offered to men, women, children and young people, as well as to families and couples.
- **[The Solace Project \(Tyneside & Northumberland MIND\)](#)** supports refugees and asylum seekers and also works with [Rainbow Home](#) to offer specialist support to asylum seekers who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community.
- **[Arrival Medical Practice](#)** in Stockton provide tailored services for asylum seekers and refugees which includes mental health and wellbeing support. The Red Cross also offer appointments at Arrival every Wednesday offering various services including emotional support.

Resources

For professionals

- [Solace provide two free e-learning](#) courses – one is generic focussing on understanding refugee and asylum seeker mental health and the other is more specialist looking at effective therapeutic support. Solace also provides other more bespoke training [here](#). Also useful [resources and information](#) for refugees to help manage stress and understand what they might be experiencing.
- Yorkshire and Humber Mental Health Clinical Networks and Solace are creating a network of mental health champions to support refugee and asylum seekers. Clinicians are invited from Early Interventions in Psychosis, Community Mental Health Teams and NHS Talking Therapies and Primary Care Networks to join regular support sessions and equip clinicians with skills and awareness. For further information:

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- [City of Sanctuary Mental Health Resource Pack](#) for professionals.
- [Mental health of refugees and migrants: risk and protective factors and access to care \(who.int\)](#)
- [The Mental Health of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in the UK](#), The Mental Health Foundation, 2024: This report looks at the role of government and the social and economic conditions in which refugees and asylum seekers live, not just pre migration but also post-migration which have a powerful influence on their mental health. Experiences of poverty, financial insecurity, unemployment, lack of adequate housing, social isolation, loneliness, prejudice, stigma, and discrimination are all wider determinants of mental health that need to be addressed.
- [Mental Health Needs of People Seeking Asylum and Refugees](#), Connected Voice, 2024, A summary report which outlines a comprehensive list of themes extracted from in-depth conversations and focus groups with people seeking asylum and refugees living in Gateshead.
- [DHSC guidance](#) on improving the mental health of babies, children and young people. This framework explicitly references refugees and asylum seekers and can be used by stakeholders to guide promotion and prevention activities. It details modifiable factors where there is scope to intervene to create the conditions that help keep children and young people mentally well.

For asylum seekers and refugees

- [Barnardo's Boloh Helpline](#) provides a helpline to support the mental health and wellbeing of adult asylum seekers across the UK
- [Mental health support for refugees and asylum seekers - Refugee Council](#)
- [Royal College of Psychiatrists translated mental health information](#)
- [Six Ways to improve your wellbeing](#) translated materials (Doctors of the World)
- The Refugee Council's [Moments for Mindfulness](#) self help guide offers mindfulness practices to aid in decreasing stress and promoting a positive attitude. The guide can be used individually or in group sessions.