



# Impact Report

## Leeds Refugee Forum 2023–2024

The Leeds Refugee Forum (LRF) is a refugee-led organisation committed to supporting refugees and asylum seekers as they begin new lives in our city.

Despite facing social and economic disadvantages, refugees bring a wealth of experience, knowledge, expertise, and resourcefulness.

LRF harnesses these skills to benefit refugees, asylum seekers and the wider community.

We identify, inspire, develop, encourage, and support members of the refugee community.



# At A Glance



**1304**

new service users



**75**

new volunteers

**£4250**

in food vouchers for  
refugee families

**£7115**

given to people through  
the hardship fund



**675**

ESOL hours



**665**

ESOL students



**75**

ESOL volunteers



**341**

new ESOL  
registrations this year



**200**

Ukrainian  
ESOL students



**32**

STAR conversation  
classes



**67**

STAR participants



**715**

free SIM  
cards given out



**30**

GCSE support students



**40**

Ukrainian wellbeing  
service users



**20**

new men's wellbeing  
group registrations



**32**

new women's wellbeing  
group registrations



**80**

homework  
club students



**386**

advocacy  
appointments



**5**

new advocacy  
volunteers

# Strategic Role

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## This year, we focused on

enhancing our capacity to meet the needs of our service users. Addressing safety issues within refugee communities, especially concerning children, was a priority. We also improved connectivity for asylum seekers in temporary accommodations by providing free SIM cards and lending tablets. These efforts ensured that those living in hotels and other temporary settings could stay connected and access vital services.

Leeds Refugee Forum plays a crucial role in advocating for refugees, providing essential resources, and fostering a supportive community. Our work this year underscores our commitment to empowering refugees and asylum seekers, helping them integrate and thrive in Leeds.

We delivered ESOL classes, wellbeing groups, advocacy appointments, youth groups and led on Leeds Refugee Week.

## Advocating for Refugees

- **Communicating Needs:** Ensuring that organisations and agencies respond effectively to refugee needs.
- **Raising Awareness:** Promoting understanding, empathy, and integration by improving awareness of refugee experiences.
- **Linking to Community Leaders:** Providing a reliable way to identify spokespeople, gather views, and disseminate information within and between communities.
- **Sharing Information:** Offering insights into refugee communities in Leeds, including their cultures and the organisations that support them.

## Providing Resources

- **Accessing Services:** Acting as a conduit to various services available in Leeds.
- **Building Capacity:** Ensuring refugee communities have the necessary facilities and skills to support themselves.

# Achievements and Performance

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**LRF plays a vital role in supporting refugees and asylum seekers in Leeds. We will demonstrate to you here the diversity of provisions provided by LRF and highlights the outstanding efforts of our dedicated staff and volunteers.**

## Integration Efforts

LRF offers English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes and development opportunities for both children and adults, enabling them to achieve their full potential.

## Inputs and Outputs

Our committed staff and volunteers are the backbone of LRF. Their tireless efforts ensure the smooth delivery of our programmes and services. From teaching ESOL classes to providing development workshops, their work has a profound impact on the lives of refugees and asylum seekers.

## Programme Impact

**ESOL Classes:** Hundreds of refugees and asylum seekers have improved their English language skills, enhancing their ability to integrate into the community, access employment opportunities, mainstream services and bilingual advocacy support.

**Development Workshops:** Children and adults have participated in a variety of workshops, gaining valuable skills and knowledge that contribute to their personal and professional growth.

**Community Engagement:** Our staff and volunteers have successfully organised numerous events and activities that foster community engagement and cultural exchange, promoting understanding and empathy between refugees and the wider community.

The fantastic work done by LRF's staff and volunteers has significantly contributed to the successful integration and empowerment of refugees and asylum seekers in Leeds. Their dedication and hard work ensures that our service users have the resources and support they need to thrive in their new community.



# Programme Impact

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## Development Workshops:

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## Community Engagement:

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# English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Project

## Overview

The ESOL project at LRF equips learners with essential English language skills for everyday life in the UK. Additionally, it serves as a wonderful opportunity for individuals to meet new people and engage with the community.

The goal of LRF is to offer classes catering to all proficiency levels, from beginners with little to no English knowledge to intermediate speakers. This includes a weekly self-study group and a drop-in University of Leeds STAR English Conversation Class, which helps students practice their conversational skills.

Addressing the English language barrier is crucial for refugees and immigrants, as effective communication is vital for daily interactions and integration into society. By offering informal education through English language teaching, LRF aims to bridge this gap and facilitate smoother communication and interaction in various settings.







# English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Project

## Project Activities and Achievements

Throughout the project's duration, several key activities were conducted.

**ESOL Classes:** Offered both in-person and online, catering to non-speakers, beginners, pre-intermediate, and intermediate learners. Classes run 4 days a week, year-round, excluding school holidays. Over 11 months, 450 sessions (1.5 hours each), totalling 675 hours and involving a total of 885 participants. From June 2023 - June 2024 341 new learners registered for ESOL classes at LRF.

### Students Action for Refugees (STAR)

**English Conversation Class:** A drop-in session hosted in collaboration with the University of Leeds, 32 sessions (2 hours each), totalling 64 hours and involving a total of 67 participants.

**Leeds City Library Tour:** Lasting 2 hours, organised for 6 ESOL students on June 30, 2023, offering a behind-the-scenes tour facilitated by 1 volunteer.

**ESOL Parties:** Special events for the Christmas holiday season and Refugee Week, 8 hours attended by 50 people.

**Volunteer Engagement:** As part of the volunteer experience programme, various volunteers were engaged across different class levels.

**ESOL Classes:** 56 volunteers.

**STAR English Conversation Class:** 10 volunteers.

**Leeds City Library Tour:** 1 volunteer.

**ESOL Parties:** 8 volunteers.

The ESOL project has significantly impacted the community by providing essential language skills and fostering a sense of belonging among participants. The statistics and activities reflect the project's scope, reach, and the dedicated involvement of volunteers and participants.

# Homework Club & GCSE Support

## Summary

The Homework Club and GCSE support sessions provide vital educational assistance and community building for students.

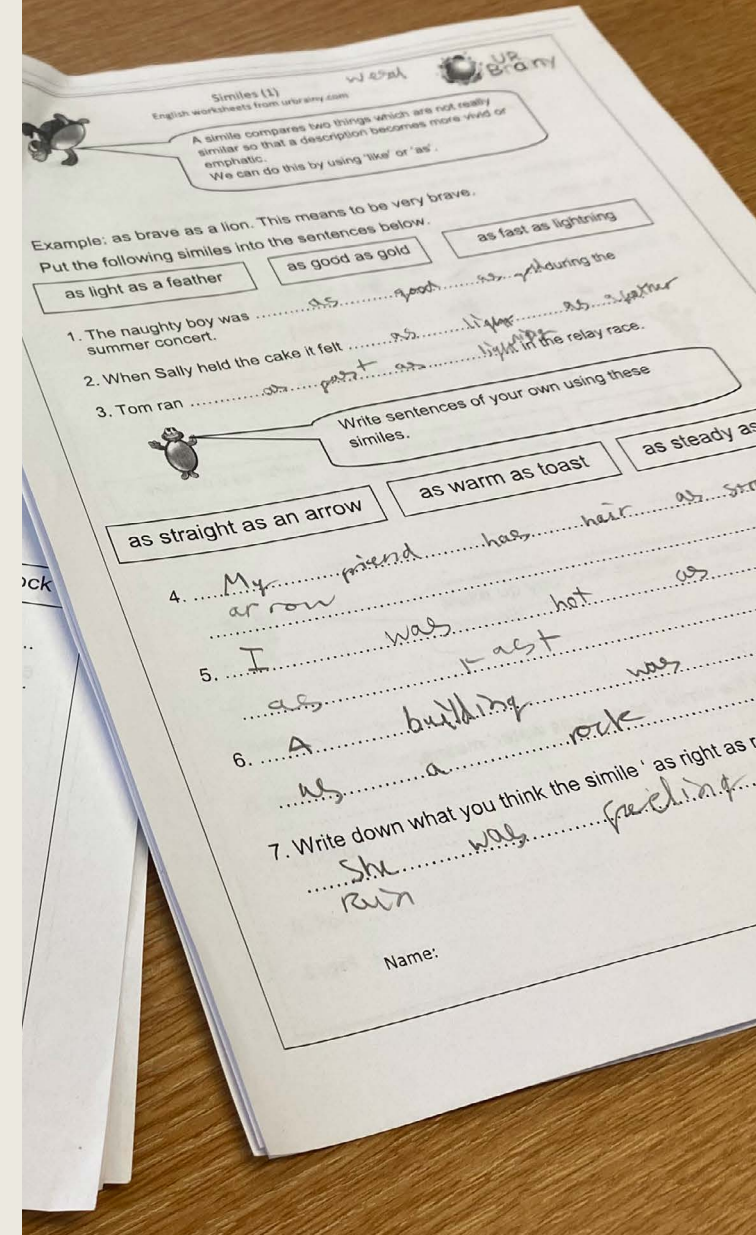
The Homework Club, catering to children from Year 1 to Year 6, focuses on English and Maths while offering a supportive and enjoyable environment. Activities include games and quizzes that help children develop social skills and form friendships. Held every Tuesday and Thursday during term time, these sessions are supported by dedicated volunteers.

The GCSE support group operates on Saturday mornings, targeting Year 10 and Year 11 students as well as mature learners. These sessions offer focused, personalised support for GCSE Maths, English, and Science, allowing students to choose their study topics. The group also fosters teamwork among students.

## Weekly Hours

**Homework Club:** Approximately 4 hours per week (Tuesday 4:30 pm-6:00 pm, Thursday 4:30 pm-6:00 pm)

**GCSE Support:** Approximately 2 hours per week (Saturday 10:00 am-12:00 pm).





# Homework Club & GCSE Support

## Beneficiary Count

The Homework Club registered approximately **80** students for the June 2023 to June 2024 period, doubling from the previous year. Consistent retention has led to noticeable improvements in students' confidence, social skills, and academic abilities. The sessions also provide free childcare, enabling parents to connect and support one another.

The GCSE support group has around **30** registered users, primarily aged 14-16, with a separate section for mature students. Although retention fluctuates due to exam completions, recent sessions have focused on one-to-one tutoring for Year 10 students. Additionally, Saturday sessions now offer ESOL Level 2 and 3 support for young Ukrainian students, enhancing their English skills.







# Homework Club & GCSE Support

## Volunteer Involvement

Volunteers are integral to these programmes. The Homework Club's WhatsApp group includes **31** volunteers, with **5-6** attending regularly.

Volunteers assist with academic tasks, games, quizzes, and special activities like Refugee Week celebrations. Their interaction with students significantly boosts the children's confidence and social skills.

For the GCSE support, retired professors and teachers volunteer, providing specialised knowledge. Collaborations with other project officers have led to tailored support, such as recruiting a translator for students who speak English as a second language.

## Project Outcomes

The sessions have led to improved academic performance and positive feedback from parents. Mature students in the GCSE support group have appreciated the tailored revision materials, which have bolstered their exam confidence.

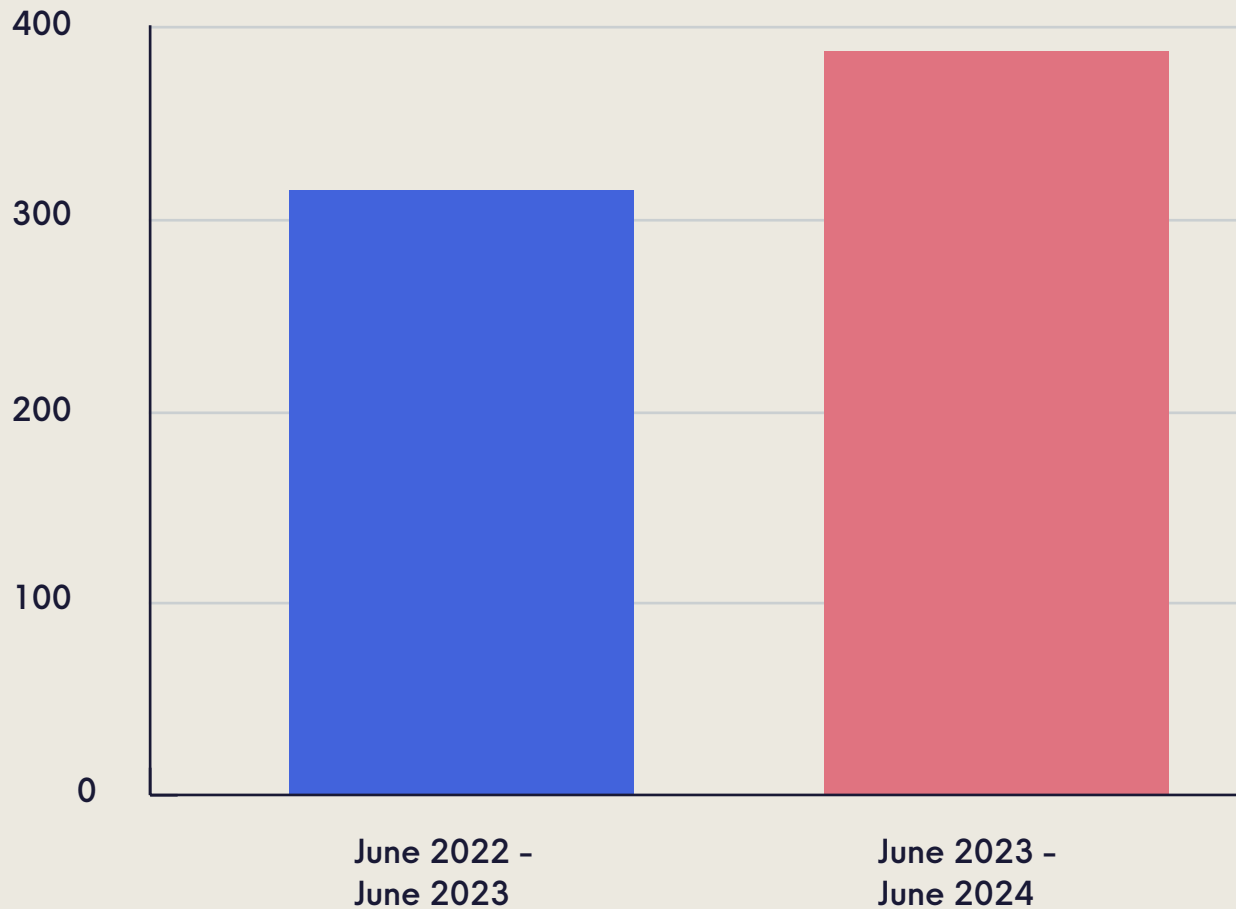
The incorporation of wellbeing activities alongside educational support has encouraged students to celebrate their achievements and strengths, boosting engagement and motivation. Wellbeing checks, where children discuss their interests and strengths, have further enhanced their motivation.

Overall, these sessions have not only fostered academic growth but also nurtured a supportive community, promoting both educational and personal development for all participants.



# Bilingual Advocacy Service

## Advocacy Drop-In Appointments



## Overview

LRF's Bilingual Advocacy Service assists refugees, asylum seekers, and local community members in accessing services and engaging with organisations. Our advocates ensure clients' voices are heard and rights are upheld, assisting with:

- completing forms
- contacting service providers
- accessing health and education services
- housing and welfare issues
- complaints and local government contacts
- reporting hate crimes.

## Impact

**Service Usage:** From June 2023 to June 2024, 386 appointments, up from 318 the previous year.

**Volunteer Growth:** Increased from 2 to 7 active volunteers, with improved training and support, including courses from Advonet, Voluntary Action Leeds, and Refugee Action.

# Bilingual Advocacy Service

## Weekly Hours

DWP Social Justice Team: 6 hours per week (Mon 10am-4pm) for benefits advice.  
Advocacy: 16 hours per week (Tues-Fri), with 2 staff members each working 12 hours per week.

## Volunteer Involvement

Active Volunteers: 7 volunteers providing 1:1 advocacy support, 4-6 hours per week or ad hoc. Languages: Arabic, Tigrinya, Kurdish Sorani, Azerbaijani, German, French.

Community Interpreters: 20 additional volunteers available as needed, speaking languages including Ukrainian, Turkish, Amharic, Italian, Spanish, Russian, Pashto, Farsi, Dari, and Urdu.

## OISC Registration

Now registered to provide Level 1 Asylum and Protection advice, with plans to expand to Level 1 Immigration. 2 staff and 1 volunteer are registered, with more training underway.

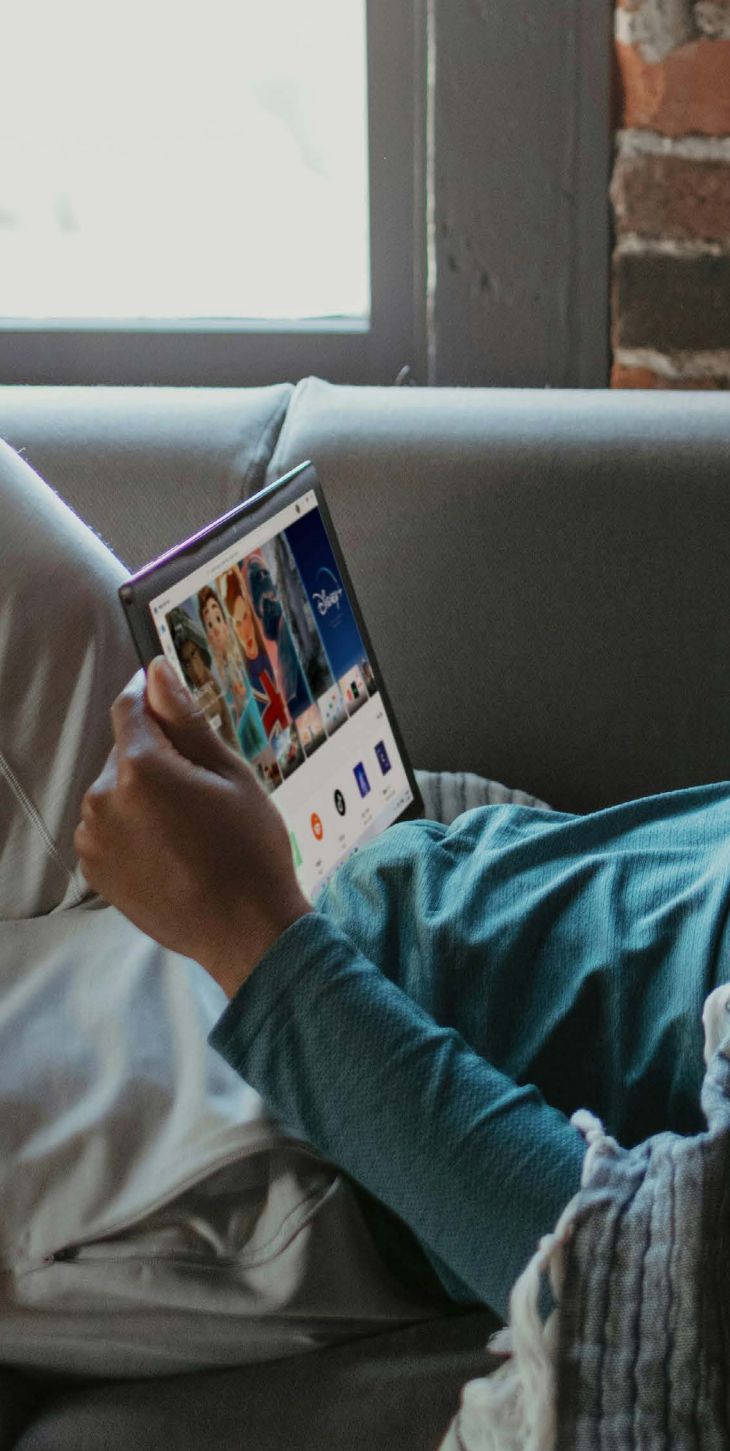
## Client Feedback

Positive feedback highlights gratitude for face-to-face support and assistance with overcoming language, cultural, and system barriers.

Overall, the service has seen increased capacity and volunteer involvement, contributing to significant support for the community.







# Tech Lending Project

## Overview

The Tech Lending Project aims to address digital isolation by providing tablets, mobile data, and digital skills sessions to people in temporary accommodation. Officially concluded in 2024, LRF continues to run the project as a Tablet Lending Bank with **200** tablets. The project collaborates with **13** organisations in Leeds supporting asylum seekers and refugees.

## Service Provision

As of June 2024, **172** tablets are in use, with **14** broken or lost, and **14** available for lending.

## Impact

The project improves digital access for vulnerable individuals, including unaccompanied young refugees, women seeking asylum, abuse victims, and asylum seekers in hotels. The tablets enable educational pursuits, and housing applications, and facilitate communication with family and friends. Participants show enthusiasm and gratitude, fostering community and self-sufficiency.

## Issues

Communication with several partner organisations has been challenging due to staff changes. This has led to missing tablets and necessitated an investigation by a new staff member to track down the devices and recruit new participants.

# Phone Line Support Project

## Overview

The Phone Line Support Project runs two weekly SIM Card Drop-ins for refugees and asylum seekers in Leeds. The SIM cards, provided by the Good Things Foundation's National Digital Inclusion project, offer 25GB of data, unlimited calls, and unlimited texts monthly.

## Service Provision

From June 2023 to June 2024, 715 service users received SIM cards and vouchers, enhancing digital inclusion, saving money, and improving access to online services, education and applying for jobs.

## Issues

Some service users lost their phones or SIM cards but were unable to receive replacements due to policy restrictions. Others ran out of data mid-month and were reminded of their plan's limits and next voucher dates.

## Conclusion

Both projects have significantly impacted digital inclusion for vulnerable individuals, promoting education, self-reliance, and community connections. Despite challenges in communication and resource management, the projects have provided crucial support and demonstrated the importance of continued digital access initiatives.







# Wellbeing Project for Refugee Women and Men

LRF has successfully facilitated a wellbeing project aimed at supporting refugee women and men through various activities designed to build community, enhance skills, and support mental health and trauma recovery.

This report highlights the project's achievements, challenges, and collaborative efforts.



# Wellbeing Project for Refugee Women and Men

## Project Overview

### Women's Wellbeing Group:

Focused on sewing, the Women's Wellbeing Group quickly evolved to include a broader range of activities. Attendance initially fluctuated as participants adjusted to the expanded offerings, but the group eventually stabilised with strong participation.

The group fostered a familial atmosphere, encouraging members to support each other both within and outside the organisation. Activities built confidence, leading some participants to take on leadership roles and volunteer positions. The group's development has been remarkable, with members now ready to start their own businesses and showcase their work on social media.

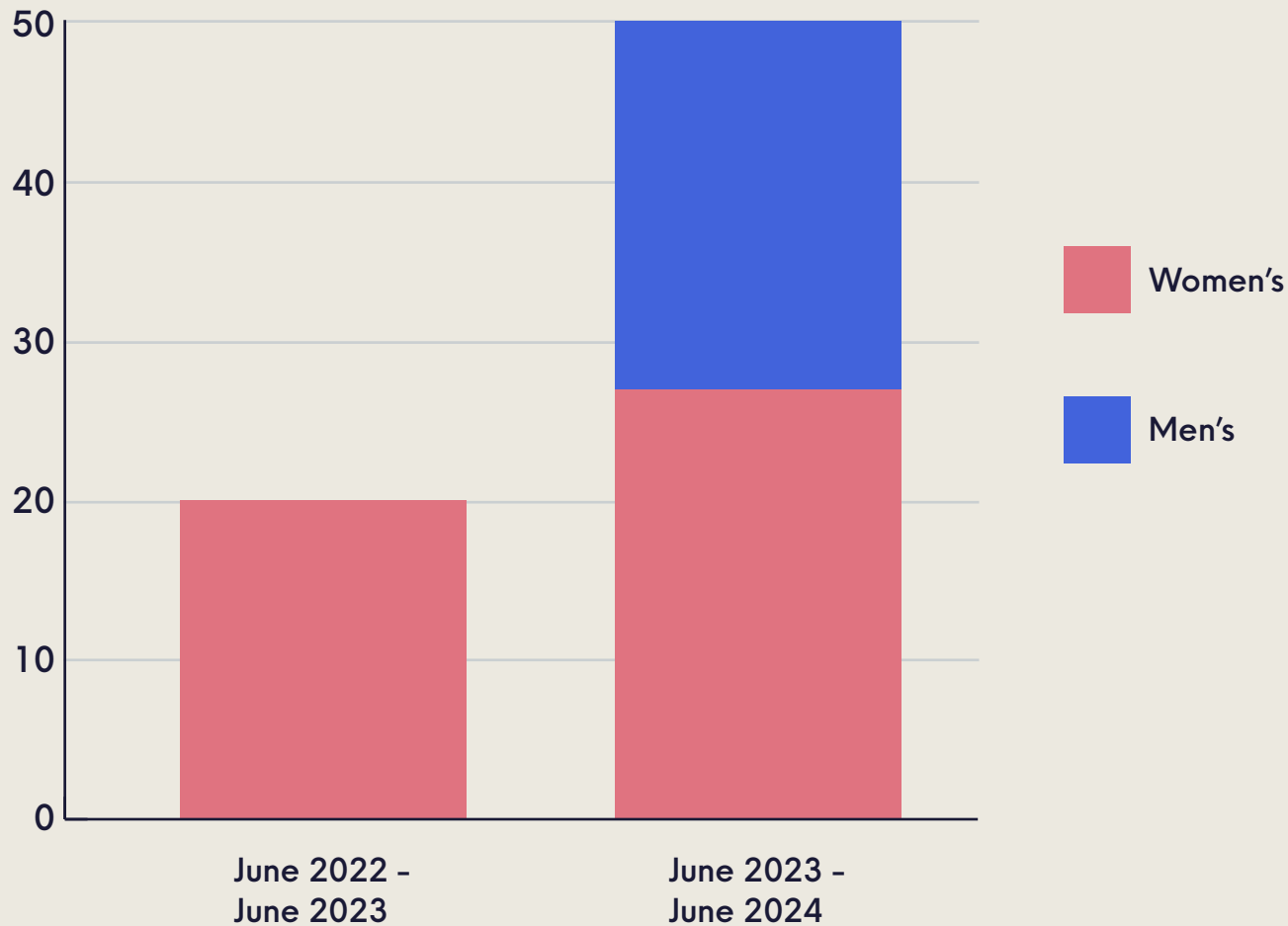
**Men's Wellbeing Group:** Following the success of the women's group, a Men's Wellbeing Group was launched, offering weekly two-hour sessions to build community and support among male refugees.

Participants have open discussions about the issues they face in their lives. We have tea, cake and work on art projects together. We are looking for more wellbeing opportunities with partner organisations.





# Wellbeing Project for Refugee Women and Men



## Registrations

In the year from June 2023 - June 2024, **32** new members registered for the Women's Wellbeing Group and **20** for the Men's Wellbeing Group.



# Wellbeing Project for Refugee Women and Men

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## Key Activities and Achievements

### Community and Cultural Events:

Activities such as a Halloween party, Iftar events, and International Women's Day celebrations fostered cultural exchange and community bonding.

**Skill-building Workshops:** Participants engaged in beauty sessions with professional stylists, cooking sessions, and print workshops with artists, enhancing their creative and practical skills.

### Health and Wellbeing Support:

Collaborations with MESMAC Leeds, NHS health checks, and the Job Centre helped address health and language barriers while improving overall wellbeing.

**Entrepreneurial Development:** A cultural day during Refugee Week empowered women to start and market their own businesses. The men's group created an eagle puppet exhibited in London, symbolising support for animals and the environment.

**Exhibitions and Public Engagement:** The Leeds University Exhibition showcased the group's creativity, and various community projects, including partnerships with the West Yorkshire Police. Paint donations from Seagulls and Dulux enhanced visibility and community integration.



# Wellbeing Project for Refugee Women and Men

## Challenges and Development

The project faced several challenges, including language barriers, health issues, transportation difficulties, and marketing needs. Despite these obstacles, the group managed to create a supportive environment that facilitated personal and professional growth.

## Future Plans

The Women's Group aims to involve more diverse communities, collaborate with local artists, and participate in Leeds events to boost confidence and community engagement. Focus areas will include wellbeing, fitness, and skill exchange, particularly with the Ukrainian community. The Men's Group will work on building attendance and addressing specific needs.

## Volunteer Involvement

Volunteers have been crucial to the project's success, with 16 volunteers helping run activities. Moving forward, the project plans to recruit skilled volunteers from various backgrounds to further support the groups.

## Conclusion

The wellbeing project has successfully transformed participants into a supportive, confident community ready to engage with broader society and pursue professional opportunities. Through strategic partnerships and a diverse range of activities, LRF continues to address trauma and mental health issues, fostering a resilient and inclusive community for refugees in Leeds.





# Hardship Fund

The fund has provided financial assistance to destitute asylum seekers (Hardship Fund payments) through cash payments and vouchers for refugee families.

Cash payments are directed towards immediate needs such as shelter, food, and essential services. Vouchers are also distributed to support families, ensuring access to necessities like groceries, clothing, and other essential items. This approach aims to provide direct relief to those in need while ensuring that resources are allocated effectively to address the diverse needs of asylum seekers and their families.

The Hardship Fund has implemented a referral system in collaboration with other organisations within the Leeds sector. This system facilitates the identification and support of individuals and families facing financial hardship, particularly destitute asylum seekers. This network makes referrals to ensure that assistance reaches those who need it most.

An assessment process is typically employed for families supported by food vouchers, primarily targeting individuals receiving benefits. This assessment helps determine the eligibility of individuals and families for support through distributing food vouchers. By utilising assessment forms, the fund can ensure that resources are allocated efficiently and effectively to those in need within the community.

We started 27 September 2023 and ended on 27 March 2024.

Thank you M&S for your food donations.





# Hardship Fund

## Cash Payments

<b>Total People Supported</b>	<b>94</b>
Families	3
Single Male	77
Single Female	11
Payments Made	279
<b>Total Spent</b>	<b>£7115.00</b>

## Vouchers for Refugee Families

<b>Total People Supported</b>	<b>75</b>
Households	75
Individuals	269
<b>Vouchers Given Out</b>	<b>75</b>
Aldi	175
Morrisons	20
<b>Value of Vouchers Given Out</b>	<b>£4750.00</b>
Aldi	£4250.00
Morrisons	£500.00



# Leeds Refugee Week 2024

Refugee Week 2024, coordinated by LRF, celebrated the theme *Our Home*, encouraging conversations about the meaning of home. This year's events spanned culture, training, socialising, and celebrating achievements, culminating in football tournaments to unite communities.

The **Burmantofts Community Festival and Cultural Day** featured traditional folk dance, music, cultural displays, belly dancing, a traditional costume fashion show, and national food, with agencies providing information.

RETAS organised a **photography exhibition** in Harehills, showcasing portraits of locals reflecting on the theme of home.

**Women's Health Matters** hosted a **Women's Celebration** event, where the Rainbow Hearts group shared food and music from various countries.

LRF's wellbeing groups hosted a **Mind Well session**, discussing the concept of home.







# Leeds Refugee Week 2024

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**Carefree Calligraphy** offered an alternative evening out to learn modern calligraphy.

The **Calling Harehills Our Home** exhibition encouraged community members to enjoy picnic food, music, and games.

The **MEGA Conversation Café** at Leeds Playhouse provided an opportunity to meet new people over hot drinks and games.

The **Community Kitchen Takeover** featured food from around the world prepared by members of the Theatre of Sanctuary programme, available on a pay-as-you-feel basis.

The **Sanctuary's Got Talent** event at Leeds Playhouse showcased local talent.

The **Ten Years of Sanctuary gala** celebrated a decade of sanctuary with performances by Asmarina Voices women's choir, Harmony Choir, Headingley Voices Choir, and other guests.

The **LRF ESOL Class Party** honoured students from diverse backgrounds with fun and games.

**Opera North** hosted a special concert for World Refugee Day with Maya Youssef, offering pay-what-you-can tickets to ensure accessibility.

The **Advocacy for Inclusion** event celebrated a year of support and training for refugee and asylum-seeking communities.

The **Light of Refugee Week** event, hosted by the Women's Wellbeing Group, combined Eid and Refugee Week celebrations with food, dancing, and music.

The **LRF Homework Club Party** featured cultural games, flag colouring, face painting, and dancing.



# Leeds Refugee Week 2024

The Refugee Week Flourish Party by Mafwa Theatre celebrated with performances, stalls, activities, and workshops exploring the theme of home.

The Refugee World Cup brought together 18 men's teams and 4 women's teams, with the Eritrean team winning the trophy, in a fun, inclusive environment with refreshments and family entertainment.

Overall, Refugee Week 2024 in Leeds fostered a sense of community, celebrating diverse experiences and the shared concept of home through a variety of inclusive events and activities.







# Ukrainian Support Project

## Project Overview

The Ukrainian Project at LRF has significantly supported Ukrainian refugees through various services and activities. Since June 2023, ESOL classes have expanded to serve 200 students across four levels, with online classes for intermediate learners.

**Integration visits** to Bolton Abbey and Blackpool, facilitated by Karmand Community Centre, involved 90 participants. Three Latte Art sessions with Starbucks led to employment for 2 Ukrainian women. Weekly yoga classes since December 2022, and handmade classes starting April 2024, have fostered physical and mental wellbeing.

**Safeguarding training and employment support sessions**, including collaborations with Smart Works, Reed in Partnership, and Generation UK, have provided critical employment guidance.

**Housing training** with the Red Cross and NHS healthcare talks addressed practical living and health concerns.

**Cultural Day** and a robust **WhatsApp support group** further enhanced community integration and support.

Overall, the project has created a comprehensive support network for Ukrainian refugees in Leeds.

The project's key services include ESOL classes (both online and offline), a wellbeing group featuring yoga and handmade classes, advocacy support, employment and self-employment coaching, and a volunteer experience programme.



# Ukrainian Support Project

## Key Services

**ESOL Classes:** 200 participants engaged over 11 months.

**Wellbeing Group:** Yoga (47 sessions) and handmade classes (8 sessions), serving 18 and 12 participants respectively.

**Advocacy Support:** Assistance with forms, GP registration, college enrolment, and signposting to other essential services like food, clothing, and housing.

**Employment Support:** Coaching for employment and self-employment, including sessions with Smart Works, Reed, and Generation UK.

**Volunteer Experience Programme:** Offered training and volunteer roles, providing valuable UK references for 40 participants.

**Information Hub:** Acts as a central point for information on local classes, activities, and support services.

## Community Engagement

**Trips:** Blackpool trip (50 participants, 8 hours), Bolton Abbey (40 participants, 7 hours).

**Cultural and Training Events:** Latte Art session with Starbucks (31 participants, 6 hours), Safeguarding training (16 participants, 2 hours), NHS Healthcare talk (8 participants, 1 hour), Housing training with Red Cross (25 participants, 4 hours), Culture Day (30 participants, 4 hours).

The project successfully facilitated the integration of Ukrainian refugees into the Leeds community, helping them access vital services, gain employment, and build social connections. Through continuous support and engagement, the Ukrainian Project has significantly contributed to the wellbeing and settlement of its participants.





# Social Media and Graphic Design

## Importance of Social Media:

Social media is essential for raising awareness, fundraising, advocacy, and direct assistance for our organisation. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter allow us to educate the public and share refugees' personal stories, providing timely updates during crises to drive urgent actions.

Social media also facilitates targeted donation campaigns, connecting with local communities to request specific items such as clothing and household goods, often pairing users with donors within days. This contributes to a zero-waste society and strengthens community bonds.

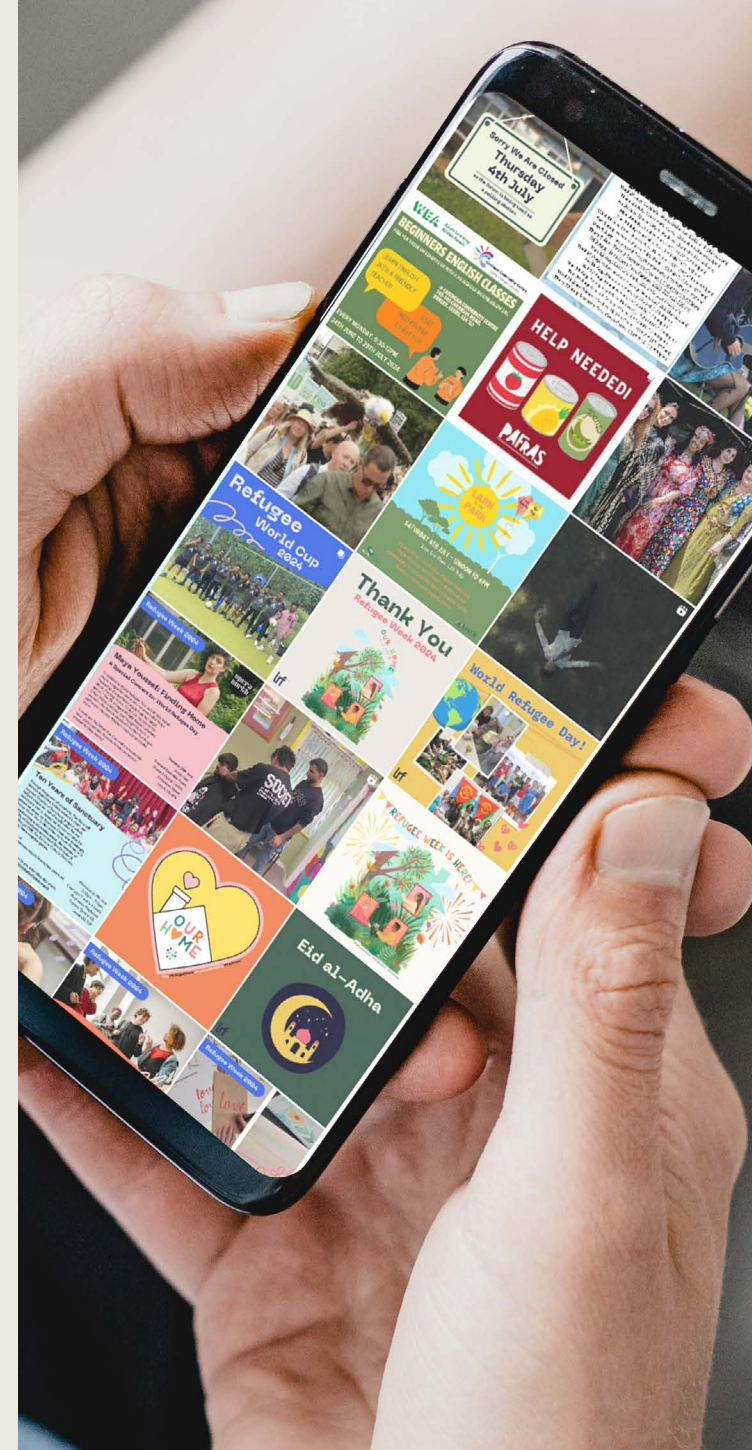
Cost-effective compared to traditional media, social media allows us to allocate more funds to our activities. It enables collaborations with other organisations, expanding our reach and impact while signposting relevant services and events.

We provide critical information about legal assistance, employment, healthcare, and recreational activities, fostering a sense of community among refugees. Regular updates build trust and transparency by showing how donations are used and the positive outcomes achieved. Social media also offers a platform for direct feedback from beneficiaries and supporters, refining our approaches and building credibility.

## Content Strategy:

We post important community information, event photos, and videos, with donation call-outs achieving an almost 100% response rate. Our social media advertises classes and groups, ensuring maximum attendance.

We share events and schemes of interest, like Mafwa theatre events and food banks. Showcasing event pictures and videos helps dispel anxieties about attending, highlighting the efforts of our staff and volunteers.



# Social Media and Graphic Design

## Branding:

We developed and refined branding guidelines, ensuring professional and recognisable outputs. New staff are trained on these guidelines to maintain consistency.

## Physical Design and Marketing:

We design posters and flyers for events and services, ensuring appealing and easy-to-understand information. We connected with Leeds Volunteer Centre, distributing flyers to community spaces and engaging with organisations like Leeds Mental Wellbeing Service to raise awareness of our offerings.

## Statistics:

All of these stats are higher than last year, with Instagram growing the most by 40%.



**6000+**

Over 6000 monthly  
online views



**1058**

Instagram followers



**2244**

X (formerly Twitter)  
followers



**838**

Facebook followers



# Social Media and Graphic Design

## Video Production:

We are producing a video showcasing LRF's work, including interviews and testimonials, with careful attention to consent policies and the safety of under-18s. The video will be shared on our website and social media.

## Website

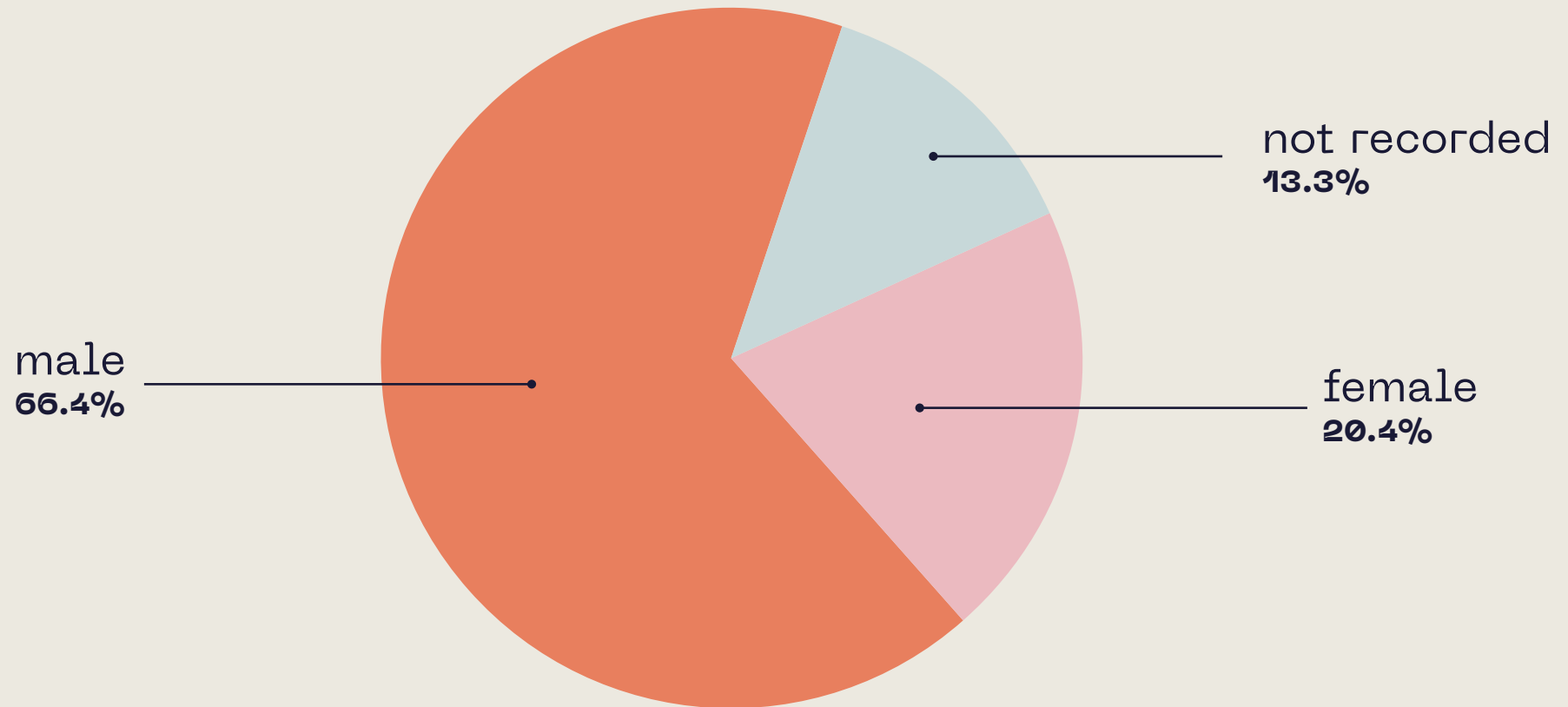
### Modernisation:

We collaborated with Queer Web Design, a local business, who kindly donated a free website update. We refreshed the website design to align with our branding, creating a bright, welcoming, and easy-to-navigate site. Continuous updates will keep the content relevant.



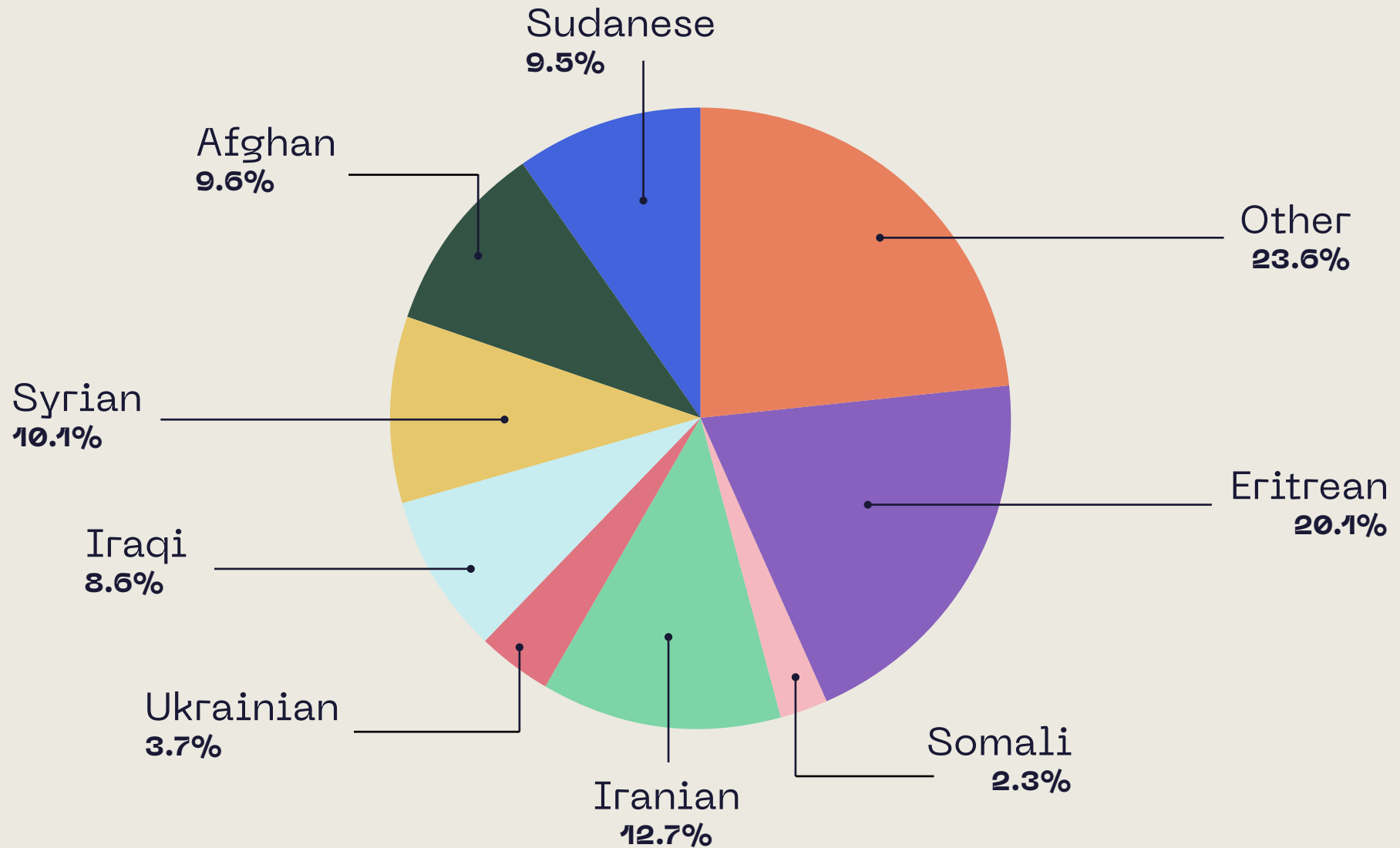
# Gender of Service Users Registered June 2023 – June 2024

For June 2023-June 2024:  
**70** nationalities (service users)  
**1304** new registrations (service users)  
**75** volunteer applications





# Nationalities of Service Users Registered June 2023 – June 2024



# Thank You.

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A huge thank you to all of our service users,  
volunteers and staff who have made Leeds  
Refugee Forum what it is today.

Without your dedication, passion and hard work  
we couldn't achieve everything we do.

