

Quick Guide to Integration into UK Society.

The three core things that make for good integration are –

1. The ability to speak good English.

Being able to speak good English is key to communication, social inclusion and finding employment.

Between 2008 and 2018 funding for ESOL classes in the UK was cut by almost 60% in real terms. Although there have been suggestions in parliament and the media that English – even fluent English – should be a prerequisite for being accepted into the UK, it is difficult to see how that can happen if ESOL courses are not easily accessible for asylum seekers. It is too late to wait until they have refugee status, and expect them then to be able to find employment. Currently there are no free government funded ESOL classes available for asylum seekers until they have been here for six months, and even then they are limited.

The situation is different for refugees who come on resettlement schemes. They are eligible for eight hours of free tuition for the first year, and four hours in Year 2.

To help with the gap in provision, many churches have set up their own English classes. Inevitably, because they are using volunteers, these may only be for a few hours a week – often not enough to promote the rapid learning that asylum seekers need. One professional and sustainable model that has successfully overcome this problem is at Action Foundation in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. [Action Language](#) cross-subsidises free tuition for those with no recourse to public funds by charging those who can pay, like foreign students and business people.

It doesn't always require such an extensive business model to help asylum seekers and refugees become proficient in English. The City of Sanctuary movement has been pivotal in launching many conversation clubs across the UK that serve the dual purpose of enabling sanctuary seekers to practice their English while at the same time meeting local people in a relaxed social setting. You can find out about these and many other useful ESOL resources [here](#) on the City of Sanctuary website.

Finally, there is an exciting new project being promoted by Faith Action called [Creative English](#). It uses a drama-based method to teach English to those with few or no language skills, so is particularly valuable for those less educated new arrivals. It is also great fun! Since its inception it has helped over 10,000 people learn English through interactive soap-opera style scenarios run by trained volunteers from local communities.

2. Engaging with the British population.

Being able to mix freely with the native population is essential to learning any language.

There is a range of ways of facilitating this in the UK. Local [City of Sanctuary](#) groups organise conversation clubs, social events, trips out, walking tours of the city, allotment projects, cycling classes and a whole host of other activities that contribute hugely to integration and the overall wellbeing of sanctuary seekers. You can find out if there is a group in your town

or city and what they are doing [here](#). If there is no City of Sanctuary group where you live, then why not start one, if you have sanctuary seekers in your town or city?

3. Understanding the laws and culture of the host country.

Many new arrivals find their integration badly hampered simply because they do not understand how things work in the UK. Those that come from very different cultures find it hard to cope with the western way of life, or misunderstand the freedoms that they experience. It may be simple things like the British culture of queuing, which is not common across the world, or the way that women dress and may be perceived as a result.

Without help these differences can lead to disastrous consequences. Although the vast majority of sanctuary seekers are law-abiding, when the law is different and has not been explained, problems are much more likely to occur. Most asylum seekers in the UK are young men from cultures where women do not have equal rights, and may even be considered subservient. It is not hard to see why sexually inappropriate behaviour can occur in our morally lax society.

It is equally important to understand laws regarding employment, taxation, healthcare, driving, benefits and health and safety. The UK is far more regulated than any of the countries that sanctuary seekers come from.

There are no courses that cover these issues adequately – certainly not for those still in the asylum system – yet not knowing what to do will seriously affect those who gain refugee status when they have just 28 days to leave their accommodation, claim benefits and start looking for a job and a place to live. There is no substitute for a British person getting alongside and taking them through the process. Accompanying someone to the Job Centre is worth ten phone calls or letters. Having an advocate with them in person may be the difference between someone getting their benefits on time or being sanctioned because they cannot apply for five jobs due to their lack of English.

Even opening a bank account can be hugely problematic, especially if the bank insists on a permanent address. Without a bank account the refugee cannot access benefits, yet one of the proofs of address is a letter from the Benefits Office! Here are some helpful tips on [opening a bank account](#) from City of Sanctuary.

This transition period to refugee status is fraught with difficulties, and is the time when many sanctuary seekers need the most practical help. The British Red Cross has produced a report called *Still an Ordeal: the move-on period for new refugees* that explains in detail what happens in this period and what needs to change. You can find a summary and the full report [here](#).