



Refugee and Asylum Strategy

Ongoing support and commitment to
refugees and asylum seekers 2025-2030



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Introduction



In December 2015, Argyll and Bute welcomed its first Syrian refugees through the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme. Ten years on, the Council has built significant expertise in supporting refugees and asylum seekers, shaped by our involvement in national resettlement programmes, strong partnership working, and a focus on community integration.

Our reflections over the past decade are:

- **Need has grown**

Global displacement is at record levels.

By the end of 2024, an estimated 123.2 million people worldwide had been forcibly displaced due to persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations, or serious disruption to public order (source: UNHCR).

- **Complexity has increased**

New arrivals bring diverse needs, experiences of trauma, and varied legal statuses. From our initial role in the Syrian scheme, the Council now also supports the Ukraine Sponsorship Schemes (Homes for Ukraine and the Scottish Government's Super Sponsorship Scheme), the UK Refugee Resettlement Scheme, and the Afghan Resettlement Programme. In addition, we provide support for victims of trafficking and asylum seeking children unaccompanied by parents or guardians.

- **Support is more widespread**

What began in Rothesay has grown into a network of support across towns, villages, islands, and rural areas. Through the Ukrainian schemes we have welcomed people into communities across Argyll and Bute, while Afghan families have been resettled in Helensburgh.



- **This work is a corporate priority**

Refugee Resettlement is recognised within Argyll and Bute Council Priorities 2024-2027 and aligns with national commitments. Resettlement contributes to our overarching aim of growing both the population and economy of Argyll and Bute. We believe in equality, opportunity, and giving everyone the chance to succeed.

- **Opportunities are greater**

Opportunities for reversing population decline, increasing the working-age population, supporting school rolls and enriching community life.

However, we face **competing pressures**: a housing emergency, homelessness challenges, and stretched budgets. Yet the opportunity to strengthen our communities through diversity, skills, and new connections has never been greater. Our Refugee and Asylum Strategy sets out in detail our ongoing commitment to resettlement and our model of integration in a rural context.

Definition of refugees:

The UK is a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (Refugee Convention) and the supporting 1967 Protocol. The 1951 Convention is the key legal document defining who a refugee is, establishing the rights of refugees and setting out the responsibilities of signatory states. Article 1(A) of the 1951 Convention defines a refugee as a person who:

‘owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.’

According to international law, everyone who satisfies this definition is a refugee.

Although international law makes no distinction between refugees and asylum seekers, UK immigration legislation does. As a result, the two groups have different rights and entitlements under UK law. This strategy details our support and commitment for both refugees and asylum seekers in Argyll and Bute, using the term “refugees” to refer to both groups when describing how support is provided.



1. Refugee Programmes



Argyll and Bute Council is currently involved in the following resettlement programmes:

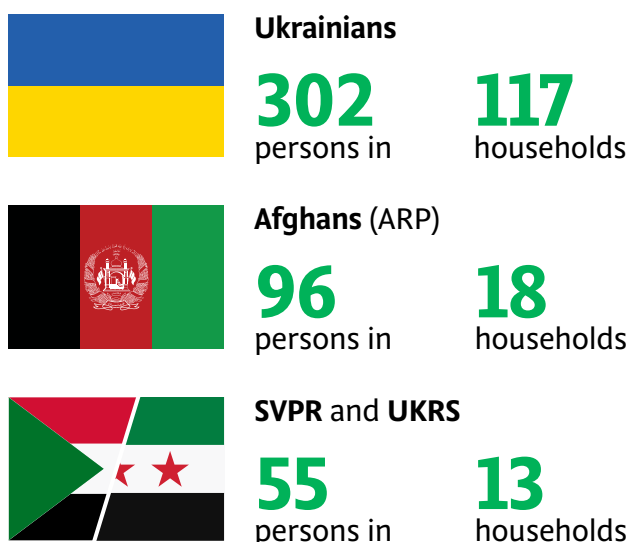
- UK Refugee Resettlement (UKRS)**
 The successor to the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. This Home Office administered programme is fully funded by the UK Government and is currently delivered by the Council in Rothesay.
- Afghan Resettlement Programme (ARP)**
 Previously known as the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy, this scheme supports Afghan citizens who worked for, or alongside, the UK Government in Afghanistan in exposed or significant roles. Eligible individuals and families are offered relocation to the UK, with eligibility determined by the Ministry of Defence and suitability assessed by the Home Office. The ARP programme is fully funded by the UK Government and is currently delivered by the Council in Helensburgh.

- Ukraine Sponsorship Schemes**
 This includes both the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, administered by the UK Government, and the Scottish Government's Super Sponsorship Scheme. Through these programmes, Ukrainian nationals and their families are supported to settle within communities across Argyll and Bute.
- Unaccompanied asylum seeking young people (UASC)**
 Children and young people under the age of 18 who arrive in Argyll and Bute without parents or guardians are defined as unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC). The Council participates in the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) which enables the safe transfer of UASC between local authorities, most notably Kent which is the main entry point to the UK. The scheme operates on a rota basis and enables the safe dispersal of UASC across the UK.

The NTS was mandated in November 2021. Each local authority has a quota currently set at 0.1% of the local authority's general child population. UASC are the responsibility of the local authority and are accommodated and supported under section 25 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. Once a UASC turns 18 they no longer count towards the quota however are considered to be care experienced and therefore can access support from delegated Council services through to 25 years old and continue in their placement until 21 years old.

The support for UASC is jointly provided by Refugee Resettlement and Children & Families Social Work. UASC under the age of 16 must be accommodated in children's services.

Figure 1. Refugee Numbers in Argyll and Bute as of October 2025



Volunteering is a win for everyone

A number of Afghan families have been settled in homes in Helensburgh under the Afghan Resettlement Programme. For many, language has been a significant barrier to finding work and integrating into the community. The Argyll and Bute Refugee Resettlement team found volunteering opportunities where the Afghans can work alongside their Scottish neighbours for the good of all. The first working parties were for beach cleans around Helensburgh. “I am really happy volunteering,” says Abdul. “We enjoy it because we are helping the community and we are learning new skills as well.”

Following their experience with the beach cleans, the Afghan community noticed that the woodlands near their homes also needed a tidy-up and set to work, supported by the beach volunteer coordinator who got the bags of rubbish they collected taken away. Habibullah adds, “After Storm Amy, we went into our local woodland and helped to clear up the storm damage. Any time anyone needs a pair of hands I am ready to go and help!”. Ehsanullah has found the people of Helensburgh very friendly and welcoming. “Now we have moved here we must treat it like our home and help to keep Helensburgh nice.”

“I am really happy volunteering – we are helping the community and we are learning new skills as well.”

About a dozen members of the Afghan community have also recently begun to volunteer at Hermitage Park. Stewart, the park supervisor, is delighted. “Their enthusiasm is off the charts!” he declares. “I am so impressed by their energy and hard work that I have offered them a plot of their own to cultivate.” He finds that each week their English has improved as they have to ask him for tools, or discuss cultivation techniques – many of the Afghans had their own gardens back home, or were gardeners or farmers. “We want to grow Gandana [a type of leek] here,” says Abdul. Once the first crop is harvested, “We want to prepare our national dishes of Bolani and Ashak and share them with the Helensburgh community!” declares Habibullah.



2. Current Service Approach



Our refugee and asylum work is rooted in humanitarianism, partnership, dignity and community cohesion.

We will continue to:

- Deliver rural resettlement programmes tailored to both island and mainland contexts.
- Work with multi-agency partners: including housing, health, education, DWP, police, fire, third sector and, community groups.
- Provide specialist support workers to guide integration and protect wellbeing.
- Prioritise the most vulnerable, including survivors of trauma and children.
- Maintain individual agency empowering people to make their own choices.
- Promote independence, avoiding long-term dependency.
- Treat integration as a two-way process, welcoming communities and engaged newcomers rooted in the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2024.
- Champion welcoming communities across Argyll and Bute.
- Grow our award-winning employability and ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) programmes.

- Support business start-ups and entrepreneurship among new arrivals.
- Embed refugee rights and awareness in schools, underpinned by the UNCRC.
- Enhance EAL (English as an Additional Language) provision in education.

2.1

Rural resettlement programmes

The communities of Argyll and Bute are known for being welcoming, inclusive, kind and safe. Their close-knit rural character has played a vital role in the success of local resettlement programmes. Refugees often speak of the warmth of their reception, the patience shown as they learn English, and the friendliness that helps them rebuild their lives.

Many residents understand what it feels like to be an outsider and respond with empathy, a willingness to help, and a strong commitment to sharing culture and support.

That said, rural life also presents challenges particularly for those on lower incomes. Limited public transport, as well as reduced access to services and shops, can make daily life more difficult.

This is where the Resettlement Team and support workers are essential. They help refugees adjust to new surroundings, manage expectations, develop skills, learn the language, adjust into another culture and integrate into community life. From arrival, each refugee is assigned a dedicated support worker, with assistance tailored to their individual needs. Initiatives such as the refugee travel card, developed in partnership with local transport companies, help refugees familiarise themselves with the local area during their first few months of arrival.

2.2

Multi-agency partnership

Argyll and Bute's Refugee Resettlement multi-agency partnership is well established and brings together a wide range of services and organisations.

Council services include Education, Housing and Homeless, Business Gateway, Employability, Welfare Rights, Revenues and Benefits, Community Development, Finance, and Communications.

Health and Social Care Partnership contributions come from Social Work, Public Health, and Primary Care.

Partner organisations include Argyll Community Housing Association, West Highland Housing Association, Dunbritton Housing Association, Fyne Homes, the Department for Work and Pensions, Social Security Scotland, UHI Argyll, Live Argyll, Police Scotland, and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

Third sector partners include Argyll TSI, Argyll and Bute Citizens Advice Bureau, Bute Advice Centre, and InspirAlba.

Together, this partnership is committed to supporting refugees to build independent and fulfilling lives. Coordinated by the Refugee Resettlement Team the partnership works to signpost services, share timely and accurate information, and ensure that refugees receive the right advice at the right time. This coordinated approach helps to reduce confusion, ease stresses, and supports a smoother adjustment to life in the UK.

2.3

Argyll and Bute Councils Role

Argyll and Bute Council is funded to deliver the refugee and asylum programmes we participate in. The scope of the delivery and duties are defined in the annual Funding Instructions prepared by Governments.

Initially supporting refugees in Argyll and Bute was an emergency short term response to crisis. Over time, with experience and responding to ongoing need, arrangements are changing, and the emergency response has become more mainstream as part of the Council's overall governance and corporate structure.

2.4

Refugee and UASC Support Workers

The Council employs a small team of Support Workers who play a vital role in ensuring successful integration across Argyll and Bute. Their approach is person-centred, taking into account each individual's culture, language, priorities, and needs.

No two people receive the same support. The team are there from day 1 and communicate regularly with clients to provide support and assistance with welfare and benefits, access to employment, education and English language learning, health services, and housing advice.

Working closely with a team of community interpreters, the Support Workers also ensure that interpretation and translation are available, helping to remove barriers and enable refugees to fully engage with their new communities.

2.5

Supporting the most vulnerable

While refugees bring many strengths, skills and experiences with them, all refugees have a history of loss, with many experiencing violence, oppression, trauma, torture and suffering. Refugees who have been restricted and persecuted can face barriers to participating in society because of a continuing fear of trusting people and not being aware of specialist support services. Some children and young people have had traumatic experiences in their formative years. They may also have missed significant amounts of education, which can be challenging, particularly if they are having to learn a new language. Supporting integration, therefore, has to begin with an awareness of trauma and conflict, and be rooted in a respectful, restorative, human rights based approach.

Our person-centred resettlement support prioritises the needs of the most vulnerable. However, Support Workers must remain mindful not to provide an excessive level of assistance, as this can create dependency rather than foster independence. Support should always be carefully balanced and tailored to the individual circumstances of each person.

2.6

Maintaining agency and promoting independence

The long-term goal of our refugee resettlement programs is to ensure that resettled refugees in Argyll and Bute have equal access to the same high-quality services as local residents, and that they feel fully integrated into their new community. In the initial stages after arrival, however, refugees often require intensive support that can place significant demands on existing services. For Argyll and Bute's Resettlement Team, true success is achieved when our support is no longer needed.



2.7

Integration as a two-way process

Integration is not just about giving refugees the support to be able to succeed and fit into their new lives and community but also about removing the barriers that stop them from doing so. In Scotland's [New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy: 2024– gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/publications/new-scots-refugee-integration-strategy-2024/pages/introduction/) integration is described as an inclusive approach that takes place through equitable interactions between people from diverse cultures through dialogue and respect. Refugees bring with them languages, global connections, music, games, stories and many other intangible resources that they contribute as they set up new homes in Argyll and Bute.



2.8

Championing welcoming communities

The success of refugee resettlement in Argyll and Bute would not be possible without the support of our communities. It is within our towns, villages, and neighbourhoods that resettlement has the greatest impact. While policy documents set out the framework, true integration happens at the local level. Communities play a vital role in welcoming and supporting resettled refugees, ensuring they can access resources and engage with local services. This support helps prevent social and economic marginalisation, while mutual understanding and respect between refugees and the wider community foster social cohesion and harmony.

2.9

Employability and ESOL

Refugees come from many different backgrounds. Some refugees are qualified professionals such as doctors or teachers, who need support to have their qualifications and professional skills validated. For others, Argyll and Bute may be the first place where they have the chance to learn to read and write.

Our English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses are interlinked with our Employability programmes. ESOL provision is delivered by the council's ESOL tutors within the Resettlement Team and when possible, linking into local college provision. Supporting refugees into a pathway of meaningful and sustainable employment is a key objective. The delivery of accredited ESOL with learners taught in small classes in person or online helps build confidence that careers can be returned to and new opportunities once aspired to achieved. With a curriculum which helps with the preparedness for work and specialist employability support and coaching from Third Sector and within the council's Employability Services, individual programmes of volunteering, work experience and supported employment are tailored to the needs of the individuals.

Support can be provided to employers with access to interpretation services and advice on rights and entitlements. With this programme in place, we are pleased to see high levels of employment reducing the time spent on benefits.



2.10

Business start ups

Refugee-led start-up businesses have become a real success story in Argyll and Bute. Refugees bring resilience, determination, and an entrepreneurial spirit, often seeking to take control of their futures in the UK by setting up and running their own enterprises. From cafés and coffee shops to barbershops and car washing, refugee-run businesses are now a vibrant part of our High Streets, enriching communities and sharing culture. Business Gateway has played a vital role in this success, offering advice and guidance to help refugees navigate the complexities of UK business regulations, which can differ greatly from those in their home countries.

2.11

The UN Convention on Rights of the Child

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has now been incorporated into Scots law, ensuring that children's rights are central to policy and decision-making, including the development and implementation of this strategy. Under Article 22 of the UNCRC (refugee children), any child seeking refuge or holding refugee status must be provided with appropriate protection and assistance by governments, enabling them to fully enjoy all the rights set out in the Convention.

Argyll and Bute Council's education strategy, [Our Children, Their Future Thriving Together](#) outlines our vision for empowering all young people to learn, develop, and grow now and in the future regardless of their country of origin, immigration status, or previous educational experience.

The Education Service supports the understanding of children's rights to all school communities through the engagement of Rights Respecting Schools. This work has ensured that 100% of our schools have been awarded a UNICEF status for Rights Respecting Schools at either Bronze, Silver or Gold. The Education Service has also actively engaged in Education Scotland's Building Racial Literacy Programme. This work informs approaches to curriculum developments and allows us to offer appropriate training and advice to schools.

2.12

Education

With many smaller primary and secondary schools across the authority, the Education Service have adopted a Hub School model to better support refugee pupils and their families. By focusing on a smaller number of schools and building skills and expertise throughout the school community, our Hub Schools provide a welcoming and supportive environment for newly arrived refugee pupils to learn and thrive.

The Refugee Resettlement Team supports schools by organising training sessions that raise cultural awareness and deepen understanding of refugees and asylum seekers, including the circumstances that brought them to the UK. Community Interpreters are available to assist schools, support enrolment and facilitate meetings with parents.

English is taught through EAL (English as an Additional Language) provision in schools, with ESOL classes also available and supported by additional staff funded through resettlement budgets. Recording English language acquisition is helping us develop a more accurate understanding of the support needs of pupils with English as an additional language over time. Additionally, staff training is being enhanced to build capacity and ensure we effectively meet the needs of all EAL learners.

The emotional support in school is as important as the language support. Refugee pupils' attendance can be impacted by language barriers, trauma and mental health, frequent moves, instability and cultural differences. Refugees can be at high risk of falling behind if interventions are not well targeted. Attendance is closely monitored with appropriate interventions introduced (see table 1).

Table 1. Pupils' attendance rate

Sector and Refugee Status	Attendance Rate (%)			
	2022	2023	2024	2025
Primary	92.76	92.97	93.57	94.42
Non-Refugee	92.76	93.00	93.56	94.42
Refugee	92.08	90.87	93.90	94.09
Secondary	87.91	87.32	87.29	87.64
Non-Refugee	87.91	87.34	87.26	87.66
Refugee	88.83	85.57	89.25	86.01

Monitoring learning progress is important so schools can respond dynamically. Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence levels (ACEL) data records performance in literacy and numeracy for all pupils in Primary 1, Primary 4, Primary 7 and Secondary 3 classes. For refugee pupils the percentages of primary and secondary pupils achieving the expected curriculum levels continues to improve across all stages (see table 2).

Attainment has also improved over time with an increasing number of pupils from refugee and asylum backgrounds achieving SQA qualifications in a wide variety of subjects (see table 3).

Positive destination data is also captured with multi-agency partnership support committed to supporting our young people from refugee and asylum backgrounds into further study, training or employment after leaving school.

Table 2. Percentage of refugee pupils achieving expected curriculum levels

	Achievement Rate (%)					
	Year	Listening and talking	Reading	Writing	Literacy	Numeracy
P1 ,4, 7 combined	2022-23	17	17	13	4	52
	2023-24	46	27	27	21	46
	2024-25	54	42	42	35	65
S3	2022-23	20	40	20	20	80
	2023-24	33	50	42	25	83
	2024-25	73	64	55	55	100

Table 3. Pupils' attainment rate

Type	A-D Pass Attainment Rate (%)			
	2023	2024	2025	LA Comparison 2025
National 5	66.7	82.4	94.6	89.9
Higher	-	100.0	100.0	89.9
Total	66.7	85.0	95.3	89.9

We can all learn from each other

Kateryna arrived in Scotland with her husband and son in June 2022 under the Homes for Ukraine sponsorship scheme. They spent three months living with a host family in mid-Argyll. “I never thought that people would open their house and hearts to strangers,” Kateryna says of this time. “We felt part of their family”. She remains in close contact with the host family now that she and her family have been found a home of their own. “I am so pleased to be living in mid-Argyll. People have been so welcoming and I have had a lot of support from the Council”, she says.



“I never thought that people would open their house and hearts to strangers.”

Learning of Kateryna’s Ukrainian teaching qualifications, the Argyll and Bute Refugee Resettlement team found a mentor to help her to continue to use her professional qualifications in Scotland. Kateryna was soon working as a classroom assistant at Lochgilphead Joint Campus providing language support at both high school and primary level to Ukrainian pupils in order to gain valuable experience of the Scottish education system: “I really value the nurturing aspect of teaching in Scotland. I would love to see this adopted in Ukraine,” she says. Kateryna was signposted to the General Teaching Council for Scotland, who have a clear process for converting qualifications obtained abroad for use in Scotland. Kateryna then gained teaching experience in Ardrishaig Primary School. “It is good for the children to see diversity, but I am never asked about my accent,” Kateryna comments. “They are curious about Ukrainian culture, and enjoy learning our language and trying some of our classic dishes”.

Now, Kateryna works as a supply teacher for the local authority. This year, her pupils will send cards and letters, for the third year running, to a Ukrainian school at Christmas. Kateryna spends her spare time reading about aspects of teaching which are new to her, such as classroom engagement. “I am so happy to be able to continue in my profession in Scotland!”

3. Commitments for the Future



3.1

Strengthening Community Cohesion

We are committed to supporting community cohesion and the creation of stronger, more connected communities within Argyll and Bute where people from diverse backgrounds feel valued, respected, and able to thrive together. This involves continuing to build positive relationships across cultures and generations, strengthening social bonds, reducing inequalities, and fostering a climate of acceptance and mutual understanding.

We are committed to:

- **Help to develop a greater understanding of the rights and entitlements of refugees and asylum seekers**

Raising awareness within local communities about the legal rights, responsibilities, and entitlements of refugees and asylum seekers is key to reducing misinformation and preventing negative perceptions. Many misconceptions stem from a lack of understanding about what support refugees and asylum seekers are legally entitled to receive, and what barriers they face when accessing employment, education, healthcare, and housing.

By providing clear, accessible information to share through council communications channels, communities can better understand the realities of refugees and asylum seekers in Argyll and Bute. This not only helps to dispel myths but also builds empathy and trust, ensuring that local residents see refugees as equal members of society who are navigating complex systems.

Equally, supporting refugees and asylum seekers to understand their own rights and entitlements empowers them to advocate for themselves, access services effectively, and participate confidently in community life. This two-way process strengthens cohesion by fostering fairness, transparency, and mutual respect.

- **Promoting a deeper understanding and shared experiences**

Encouraging dialogue and collaboration between communities through cultural celebrations, interfaith activities, festivals, school events, and public engagement initiatives. These opportunities create spaces for people to learn from one another, challenge stereotypes, and appreciate the richness of diversity.

- **Encouraging participation and representation**

Supporting refugees to participate in community life, local decision-making, volunteering ensuring that their perspectives are valued and recognised. When refugees are seen contributing alongside local residents, it builds mutual respect and highlights the strengths they bring to our communities.

- **Supporting refugee and migrant voices**

Provide resources and capacity-building opportunities for refugee led groups and community organisations. By empowering these groups to connect with wider society, collaborate with other organisations, and actively contribute to decision-making, communities can grow stronger and more inclusive.

- **Fostering long-term resilience**

Cohesion is not a one-time effort but an ongoing process. We all need to work together to support and adapt to the evolving needs of our communities. By building networks of trust and cooperation, Argyll and Bute can foster communities that are both diverse and united.

3.2

Housing and Homelessness context

Refugee Resettlement in Argyll and Bute and our future commitments to supporting refugees has to take cognisance of our current housing position and the steps being taken to address the housing emergency. The Resettlement Team will continue to work with RSL partners to address housing shortages while prioritising fairness across all residents.

For newly arrived refugees discussing housing options and provide information on their rights to social housing and benefits will remain a priority of the support workers.

3.3

Health and Social Care

The lived experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in Argyll and Bute are helping to inform the [Child Poverty Action Plan 2024-2025](#). The vision for the plan being “We want an Argyll and Bute where no-one lives in poverty. Everyone should be able to achieve their potential and feel healthy, happy and valued. We want to be a place where everyone understands that tackling poverty is a shared responsibility. We believe that if we act locally, and in partnership, we can make a difference”. Child poverty reduction and refugee integration are therefore interconnected goals.

The refugee resettlement support model, which emphasises prevention and early intervention through proactive support, reduces the likelihood of crisis interventions within social work and health. Refugee and UASC support workers act as cultural mediators between service users and health professionals. With the additional funding available to primary care offered with some, but not all, of the refugee programmes helping to support the increased uptake of primary and mental health services. This increased capacity and a deeper understanding of trauma and the strengthened collaboration with the Resettlement Team and the wider multi-agency partnership is leading to improvements in health and well-being.

In line with Scottish Government Guidance the Health and Social Care partnership will work with the Resettlement Team to support a trauma informed and person-centred approach to access and deliver care in accordance with joint strategic priorities and in meeting our regulatory role. [Healthcare for refugees and asylum seekers | NHS inform](#)

3.4

Self-Evaluation and impact

The Refugee Resettlement Team uses best practice models and academic review to regularly assess integration outcomes for resettled refugees. This includes gathering insights through community engagement, health and well-being feedback, employment data, and educational progress guided by both this and the New Scots strategies. Central to this approach is the voice of refugees themselves, ensuring their feedback both shapes and adapts support to meet evolving needs. Reports will be prepared on the outcomes of this strategy for Community Services Committee.

3.5

Funding and Resourcing

The Refugee Resettlement Team was established in 2015 to coordinate and deliver support for refugees arriving in Argyll and Bute under the Syrian Resettlement Programme and successor programmes. The team has gone on to support Ukrainian and Afghan refugees arriving under their respective programmes. In 2023 support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking young persons transferred to a programme jointly delivered by Resettlement and Social Work. The refugee programmes are fully funded by UK Government, all with a different set of funding instructions and per person tariff. In addition, Scottish Government has provided funding to Local Authorities for the delivery of the Ukrainian Sponsorship Schemes.

The Resettlement Team actively explores all additional funding opportunities and has a track record of success in securing additional funding for projects and key pieces of work to support our refugee communities.

3.6

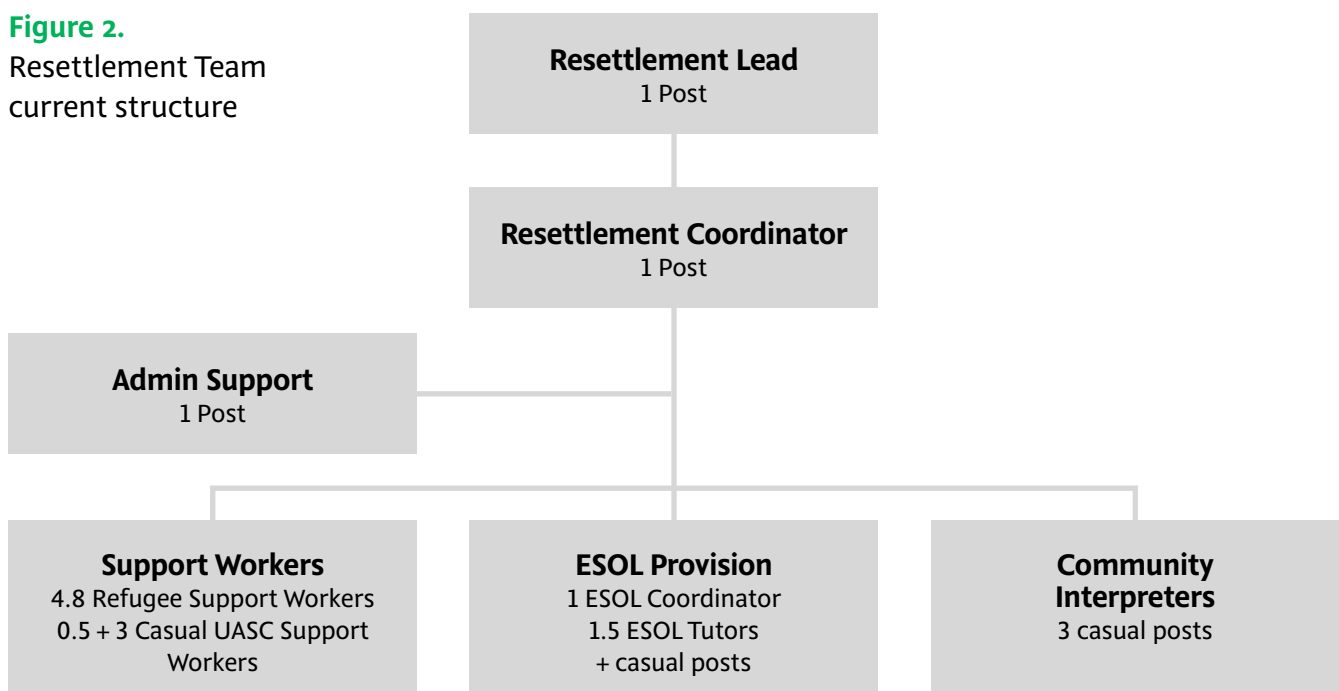
Resettlement Team Future

The delivery of Resettlement support has created job opportunities for existing council employees and new employees from a diversity of backgrounds, many with lived experience as refugees themselves. Argyll and Bute Council benefits from the sharing of knowledge, experience and culture of the team however all posts are temporary due to the nature of the funding.

The structure of the Resettlement Team will be reviewed in 2026 to ensure its size aligns with the service needs and the level of support required to fulfil the duties and responsibilities of each resettlement programme. Funding for the Resettlement Team will continue to come from the UK and Scottish Governments and as humanitarian programmes evolve, the team will adapt accordingly. The Council will require to give consideration as to where the Resettlement Team is best placed within the corporate governance and organisation structures.

Figure 2.

Resettlement Team
current structure



Business as usual

“I’m now training to become a lecturer in barbering and hair-dressing. I want to bring classes here to Rothesay.

Zakaria, a barber, and his family arrived on Bute from Syria in January 2020 – “It was indescribably beautiful! We were made very welcome,” he says. Abdulhadi, his son, adds “What we found in Rothesay was very familiar! A community that looks out for each other, always willing to help each other out, just like we do in Syria.” But just two months later, the first Covid lockdown made integrating into the community seem impossible.

With the help of the Argyll and Bute Refugee Resettlement team, Zakaria began to visit care homes, offering free barbering and haircuts to residents. As the world opened up post Covid, Zakaria decided to open his own barbershop, Brandanes, in Rothesay.

By then, Rothesay had adopted the family as their own, and the community helped the business to become established by all coming in for a haircut in the early days, with many regular customers continuing to come in to this day. Zakaria has been helped by English language classes geared towards his needs and in chatting with his customers.

Abdulhadi studied barbering under his father, obtained Scottish qualifications at college and now works alongside Zakaria in their shop. “Dad is ‘old school’, and I’m for the younger customers,” Abdulhadi explains. He also works one day a week at a high-class barbers in Glasgow, having been headhunted after being highly placed in a national competition. He has many plans for his future in Scotland, as he has recently got engaged to a girl he met at school. “I’m now training to become a lecturer in barbering and hair-dressing. I want to bring classes here to Rothesay. At first island life was a bit weird because we used to live in a big city, but now we love it. If you said we could move back to a city we wouldn’t want to. This is home now!”



Conclusion



Argyll and Bute Council's commitment to refugees and asylum seekers is not only a matter of compassion and legal duty – it is an investment in our future. By welcoming those in need, we strengthen our economy, enrich our culture, and build more resilient, inclusive communities for generations to come.

The legacy of our participation in refugee resettlement programmes is one of inclusion and opportunity. Through sharing the stories of refugee experiences and wherever possible influencing policy makers to shape refugee and asylum policy at a local, national, and international level with the lived experiences of rural resettlement, we hope that Refugee Resettlement will remain a corporate priority, that funding to deliver support will be sustainable and we continue to welcome refugees to Argyll and Bute for the next 5 years and beyond.



Appendix



Argyll and Bute Council Refugee and Asylum Delivery Plan

Refugee resettlement and asylum support in Argyll and Bute has to date been considered an emergency response to global crises. The Argyll and Bute Refugee and Asylum Delivery Plan has been developed with the intention to move to a “business as usual” model of support less reliant on temporary arrangements and temporary resource whilst still providing the support as detailed in the strategy.

Outcomes	Actions	Responsibility	Timescales
Normalising Support Refugee resettlement in Argyll and Bute is delivered as a sustainable, person-centred programme, supported by a specialist team and embedded within council corporate organisation and governance arrangements. Proactive and trauma-informed approaches understand culture, language and lived experience, with coordinated partnership working. The programme relies on ongoing UK and Scottish government funding to ensure both early intervention and long-term support for refugees and asylum seekers.	1 Review the Resettlement Team structure with a view to right sizing to meet current demand and funding. 2 Initial exploratory work be undertaken by officers to undertake a detailed options appraisal and formulate proposals for permanence and report back to Council (or a designated Committee) 3 Undertake a project to implement the preferred model for ongoing resettlement support in Argyll and Bute.	Executive Director with Responsibility for Refugees	1 Apr - Sep 2026 2 Oct – Nov 2026 3 Jan – Mar 2027
Housing Refugees and asylum seekers are supported to access and sustain appropriate housing, with current and future needs planned for in a sustainable and deliverable way that accounts for wider housing pressures. Refugees and asylum seekers understand their rights and entitlements, sponsorship opportunities are well-managed and supported, and the risk of homelessness among refugee households is reduced.	1 Collaborate with the Home Argyll partnership to identify the current and future housing needs of refugees. 2 Reduce barriers to private rental opportunities through initiatives such as the Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme. 3 Collect and analyse data on housing needs to inform future policy and strategic planning. 4 Provide guidance to support those not eligible for statutory housing or homelessness services, helping to prevent destitution.	Housing Services/ Home Argyll partnership/ Resettlement Team	1 Annually 2 Monthly 3 Monthly 4 Autumn 2026

Outcomes	Actions	Responsibility	Timescales
Health and Social Care Refugees and asylum seekers living in Argyll and Bute experience equitable access to culturally aware, trauma-informed health and social care services that promote wellbeing, foster inclusion, and support their full participation in community life.	1 Ensure that staff receive any specific training required to increase awareness of need and cultural diversity. 2 Receive assurance that staff are fully aware of pathways into care and support and linking with Resettlement Team where required. 3 Ensure staff are aware of any clinical and cultural issues which may affect patient choice in their care. 4 Identify locality champions to support knowledge exchange and long-term development of integrated practice.	Resettlement Team/HSCP	1 Annually 2 Quarterly 3 Quarterly 4 Summer 2026
Employability Refugees are supported to access and sustain meaningful employment, with their qualifications, skills and experience recognised; pathways such as volunteering, work experience and mentorship are available. Employers are supported through interpretation and translation where required; and refugees are assisted with welfare advice and budgeting to ensure a smooth transition from benefits into paid work.	1 Collaborate with the Employability Partnership to ensure programmes are tailored to the unique needs and experiences of refugees. 2 Support refugees in developing personalised employability plans that align with their aspirations, qualifications, experience, and transferable skills. 3 Identify and facilitate volunteering and work experience opportunities that align with employability goals, focusing on skill development, language improvement, and community engagement. 4 Deliver a "Preparedness to Work" course for asylum seekers alongside English language learning, reducing reliance on benefits for those granted positive decisions. Cont'd over...	Resettlement Team/ Employability Partnership/ Welfare Advice Services	1 Annually 2 Quarterly 3 Monthly 4 Summer 2026

Outcomes	Actions	Responsibility	Timescales
Employability <i>Cont'd.</i>	5 Work with Welfare Advice services to ensure sustainable employment, helping refugees transition from benefits to paid work without negatively impacting household finances, including guidance on budgeting, rights, and entitlements. 6 Provide guidance and support to employers, offering information on refugee and asylum seeker rights, sharing successful case studies, and addressing perceived or actual barriers to workplace access.	Resettlement Team/ Employability Partnership/ Welfare Advice Services	5 Monthly 6 Summer 2026
Education Refugee and asylum-seeking children and young people are supported to engage fully in education, with their attendance and attainment promoted; schools and communities respond with understanding and empathy to the impact of trauma, upholding the principles of the UNCRC.	1 Continue the model of Hub Schooling to develop capacity and specialist support for refugee and asylum pupils. 2 Provide support and training opportunities to increase skills, knowledge and understanding of Refugee Resettlement within school communities. 3 Monitor school attendance with an understanding and awareness of the barriers affecting pupils from refugee and asylum backgrounds. 4 Review attainment data ACEL and SQA performance and positive destinations with a view to improvement. 5 Engage with CAMHS, Educational Psychology and Resettlement Team to better understand the impact of trauma. 6 Promote opportunities for adult learning in schools to support ESOL and Employability outcomes.	Education Service/ Resettlement Team	1 Termly 2 Termly 3 Termly 4 March Annually 5 Monthly 6 Monthly

Outcomes	Actions	Responsibility	Timescales
ESOL Refugees and asylum seekers are supported to learn English and achieve recognised qualifications, with opportunities to develop IT skills; participation in classes strengthens community connections, and learning is linked to pathways into employability.	1 Deliver ESOL programmes leading to SQA qualifications (National 2 to National 5), prioritising face-to-face classes where possible and providing online options as needed. 2 Provide additional support for learners with low literacy in their home language, to ensure equitable access to learning. 3 Integrate IT skills and employability development into ESOL programmes, linking language learning to practical "Preparedness to Work" outcomes.	Resettlement Team/UHI Argyll/Live Argyll	1 7 courses per year 2 Quarterly 3 Annually
Community Engagement Refugees and asylum seekers are empowered to actively engage, participate, and build connections within their communities, contributing meaningfully to local life. People with lived experience are central to decisions about their integration, participating in advisory groups, surveys, and forums. To ensure full engagement, interpretation and translation services are provided so that language is never a barrier. Refugee and asylum seeker voices, stories and experiences are recognised and valued, creating a lasting legacy within Argyll and Bute.	1 Involve refugees in decision-making on programmes and services, ensuring their experiences directly shape policies and practice. 2 Facilitate community engagement projects where refugees can showcase skills, culture, and experiences, fostering mutual understanding. 3 Establish a feedback mechanism for refugees to contribute insights and experiences on services, programmes, and local issues. 4 Document and preserve refugee experiences in reports, case studies, or multimedia formats to create a lasting legacy and learning resource. 5 Promote success stories that highlight achievements, resilience, and contributions of refugees to the local community.	Community Development/Resettlement Team/Communications/Scottish Refugee Council	1 Annually 2 Annually 3 Summer 2026 4 Quarterly 5 Quarterly

Many thanks to everyone who has contributed to the development of this strategy.

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