Bristol Refugee Rights

Impact Report

2025-2026

bristolrefugeerights.org

Dear Friend,

We are asylum-seekers and members of Bristol Refugee Rights. We have come to the UK seeking safety, protection and a positive future. We are writing because of the rise in anti-immigration feeling in the streets, the media and in politics.

We want people to understand that behind the label 'asylum seeker' are real people. We have families, skills, ideas and values. We really care about being part of the community around us. We want to live ordinary lives; work, pay taxes, contribute to our local areas, support our families and feel that we belong.

The asylum system creates serious daily barriers. Long delays in decision making and being forced to wait for years without the right to work or even study takes a heavy toll on mental health. Many of us feel like we are wasting away with our lives on hold, our purpose taken away. Living in uncertainty, unstable accommodation and with limited access to healthcare leads to feelings of emptiness, anxiety and depression. We are not living in luxury or receiving fast-tracked access to services. Most of the time, we are simply trying to survive each day.

Still, we contribute to society by volunteering, community involvement and caring for each other. We want to do more to add to the growth and development of this country. We want to provide and build a future. It is painful to be judged without being known.

If you remember one thing from this letter, we hope it is this: people seeking asylum are people like you. We have common values with British society and we want to live together in peace. We ask that conversations about asylum be led with care and humanity, not fear. We are asking you to:

- Listen to our experiences and share food and stories together.
- Speak out against harmful and dehumanising language about people seeking asylum.
- Raise our concerns and support fair and humane policies.

We want to walk together and work collaboratively on finding positive futures in the UK. Thank you for taking the time to read our words.

Yours sincerely,

Asylum-seeking members of Bristol Refugee Rights

Danielle Johnson CEO

Why are we here and what do we want to achieve? We want to see a society where refugees and people seeking asylum are welcomed, feel safe, live free of poverty and are able to positively build their lives.

We are sad that immigration continues to be used as a political tool with negativity that has spread through the media into society. There are people at the heart of it, people with hopes and dreams, people who have already seen the worst of humanity. We can now show them the best of humanity. Through our Welcome Centre, our Advice and Specialist Services, we can offer that warm welcome and opportunities to grow and connect to community.

Something that particularly stood out to me this year is a session with our Member Voice Group – which is a group of 12 people seeking asylum. We asked how they were feeling about the political and media landscape. We put signs around the room 'Angry', 'Confused', 'Scared', 'Optimistic'. It was surprising to see almost all of them chose 'Optimistic'. When we asked them to tell us more, they said "We are resilient and will show the world the best of ourselves, even when the picture being painted is negative". They asked us not to be angry on their behalf but to provide practical support. With that in mind, we successfully secured funding to support them to tell their stories and challenge the narratives.

Bristol Refugee Rights has particular strength in being driven by the people seeking asylum we work with. Our strategy and services are shaped by our members and people with lived experience.

We have continued to deliver against our clear and robust 5 year strategy, exceeding even our own expectations, which we have done by being agile, innovative and resilient in the face of challenges.

I continue to be impressed by the staff and volunteers at Bristol Refugee Rights, who work so hard and who are driven by values, creating change to people's lives on a daily basis.

"We are not free, until everyone is free"

Danielle, CEO

Our Members

We are proud to call the people who use our services 'members', as a more empowering term that respects dignity.

Across 2025–2026, we supported 1,519 refugees and asylum seekers. In total, we delivered 15,472 individual support sessions.

Nationality Our members come from 62 countries, where war and civil war, discrimination, repression, political and religious persecution, hate crime and prejudice have forced them to flee.

Immigration Status Our members fall into into three categories:

People seeking asylum	People with refugee status	Other migrants needing protection

An Asylum Seeker's Story

Javed and his family were forced to live in a cramped hotel room for more than two years, taking a heavy toll on their mental health.

Vital BRR Outreach Team support helped the family register with a GP, access medical evidence and secure education for the children, as well as successfully advocating for the family to be moved into appropriate housing. Throughout, BRR offered Javed opportunities to volunteer, helping him feel part of a community. "I feel hope. We were helpless those days, but every time we were worried, you helped."

Now in stable housing, Javed feels confident and connected. His son is excelling at college and his daughter has moved into sixth form. "I tell everyone, go to BRR, they will listen."

Member Survey

Every year we invite our members to take part in a survey to share their experiences with us. This helps us understand how well we are meeting their needs, what is changing for them and how they are feeling. This ensures our services continue to evolve and be shaped by those who use them. We use the results to adapt our services.

felt welcomed and supported by our staff and volunteers

"From my first visit, they treated me with kindness and respect. They listened to me without judgment and made sure I knew where to find help when I needed it. Their support has helped me feel more confident and connected."

"I used to feel lonely, but feel happier now with the team supporting. I was losing sleep and finding it difficult living in the hotel. I am less lonely now."

felt less stressed because of BRR

said they have been supported to find services and opportunities through BRR

"BRR helped me connect with important local services like healthcare, housing advice and English classes. They also told me about community groups and volunteering opportunities, which helped me feel more involved and confident."

"BRR helped me understand the asylum process and what steps I need to take. They explained things in a way that was easy to understand and supported me in preparing for important appointments and paperwork."

felt confident to ask for help or advice

What BRR members value the most:

Reliable and accurate advice and information	Staff kindness and being listened to	Meeting new people

Services for people seeking asylum and refugees

Strategic Goal 1: Ensure services are impactful, accessible and designed to meet our members' needs.

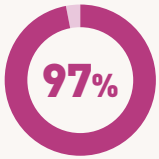
Across all our services, we supported **1,519 people**

Welcome Centre

Bristol Refugee Rights Welcome Centre is all about a warm welcome and weekly drop-ins that are open to all. It's a hub of social and community support, where people can build connections, learn, volunteer, socialise and access support.

864 individuals visited

3,280 attendances in total (including those who visited multiplied times)



feel welcomed and supported by the people around them at BRR

We served **1,372 hot meals** and **1,089 breakfasts**

200+ free haircuts and **more than 250 visits** to our arts and crafts tables

342 help desk sessions complementing our advice offer by supporting with access to health, travel and other essential needs

Advice Service

Our advice service works to empower people seeking asylum with the knowledge they need to navigate the complex asylum system and access their rights. For all members, we help them understand their options and empower them to take control of their immigration and support options. In more complex cases, or where individuals have higher levels of need, ongoing casework supports members to access their rights, avoid crises and stay safe.

660 people received support from the Advice Service

468 people received legal advice and guidance relating to asylum and immigration

81% of complex cases were housing related with a focus on preventing homelessness and ensuring access to safe and appropriate accommodation

We provide toolkits containing key legal information, to help members understand how they can take control of their legal situation with the aim of empowering members to know their rights and be able to make informed choices about their options.

Outreach in Hotels

BRR's Outreach Team makes weekly visits to asylum seekers, meeting them where they live to make sure they get the right support at the right time. Outreach workers offer information on the asylum system, casework around asylum support, signposting to wellbeing services and proactive welfare support.

445 people were supported by our Hotel Outreach project

We developed a programme of cultural awareness workshops and ran sessions in hotels on topics that ranged from UK culture, parenting, sexuality and consent, wellbeing and UK laws.

We prevented 100% of the most vulnerable residents from losing access to vital local services when the hotel they were living in closed and we made sure they were moved to replacement accommodation in an appropriate location.

Specialist Services

Complex Needs

The Complex Needs project works holistically with a caseload of members with complex intersectional needs, such as mental and physical health struggles combining with other needs – of the 36 supported in the year:

94% are now engaging with immigration advice/solicitor

69% are now accessing mental health support

75% are now in safe accommodation

Case Study Ahmed has severe mobility issues, but was housed in Home Office accommodation where he couldn't climb the stairs to access the bathroom. We advocated for a Care Act Assessment from Bristol Social Services and for him to access support from carers. We also worked to request that he was moved to appropriate ground floor accommodation that met his needs. Our Complex Needs caseworker also wrote supporting evidence for his asylum appeal and supported him to attend. He has since been granted refugee status and has been able to move forward with his life.

Pride Without Borders

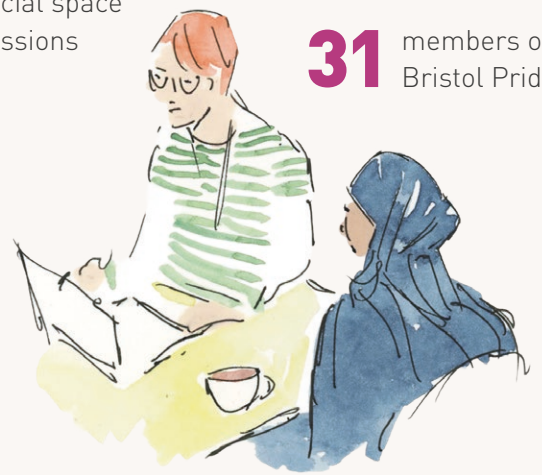
Pride Without Borders runs a social support group for LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers as well as doing wrap-around casework to support members.

156 members engaging with the project

17 members have had successful asylum claims, PWB providing supporting evidence

27 social space sessions

31 members of PWB attended Bristol Pride to celebrate!



Supporting Children

We supported 46 children and young people who were either homeless or in unsafe accommodation. 43 of them stated they were children but were judged to be over 18 by the Home Office – causing an Age Dispute.

Of 43 children going through age disputes:

25 cases were resolved

18 are receiving ongoing support

Some cases involved sibling support to ensure a holistic approach. We also retain a close relationship with Bristol City Council and ensure early action and safeguarding support.

Two of these cases needed specialist immigration advice and received support from solicitors, resulting in indefinite leave to remain or British Citizenship.

Experts by Experience

Strategic Goal 2: Empower and work in solidarity with people with Lived Experience

Bristol Refugee Rights has a strong culture of lived experience leadership.

45% of our Trustees have lived experience of forced migration

30% of our staff have lived experience of forced migration

Lived experience engagement

In partnership with the University of Bristol, we delivered trauma informed workshops for our Community Interpreter volunteers, forming a new Community of Practice.

We worked to improve organisational inclusivity and recruitment alongside staff with lived experience, training them to sit on recruitment panels. Staff and volunteers with lived experience formed a sector-wide Peer Support Network. This has contributed to further development of inclusivity and equity across the city.

Member Voice Group

We strengthened the role of our Member Voice Group (MVG) within BRR to ensure the voices of members are at the centre of organisational decision making. A Trustee MVG representative ensures member perspectives are brought to the Board.

The Member Voice Group shaped and influenced in the following ways:

- Met with the local MP to share their thoughts on the government asylum reforms.
- Wrote a letter to decision makers and people in power to share their thoughts on the anti-immigration media and policies.
- Took part in the BRASP campaign for free bus tickets for asylum seekers.
- Guiding BRR funding priorities.
- Contributed directly to BRR's new 5-year strategic plan.

Organisational Wellbeing

Strategic Goal 3: Be sustainable and invest in the wellbeing and resilience of our people and organisation.

Bristol Refugee Rights Staff

We had seven vacancies during the year. Of these, 3 were offered to people with lived experience of forced migration.

We work to ensure recruitment processes are as inclusive as possible, so people are supported through the process and are given information and guidance if they need it. We have worked closely with the Experts by Experience Employment Network to support people to apply for roles and with mentoring and leadership development support.

Volunteers

We have a deep appreciation for our volunteers, whose commitment, generosity and dedication make our work possible. Over the year, **118 volunteers** contributed an outstanding **19,324 hours**.

Local Bristol people and asylum seekers volunteer together to create a warm welcome. Volunteers cook delicious and healthy meals, provide games and arts and crafts activities, help with translation and English language support, support people with their immigration cases. Volunteers support our Pride Without Borders project and work on admin, communications and fundraising.

We were proud to achieve the Investors in Volunteers Award, the UK quality standard for excellence in volunteer management. This accreditation followed a rigorous assessment process and recognised our high-quality volunteer experience and good practice across the organisation.

Volunteering has rewards

"I look forward to it every week."

"Being a part of a welcoming and supportive community and meeting new people."

Volunteering gives back

95% tell us they feel confident in their roles

97% found training was a real benefit

Partnerships

Strategic Goal 4: Use partnerships to increase impact and resilience

We are proud to be part of BRASP (Bristol Refugee and Asylum Seeker Partnership), a collaboration of 14 sector organisations which ensures we work together, avoid service duplication and harness expertise.

We work across 4 key areas with BRASP:

Coordinated services & responses: regular forums and networks allow for service updates to be shared and for new services to be planned collaboratively. Responses to policy changes, protests and other risks are also collaboratively developed.

Lived Experience Leadership: The partnership has developed a peer support network for staff with lived experience, as well as sharing best practice on shifting power to people with lived experience.

Campaigning and influencing: Choosing joint campaigns – multiple partners' voices on the same topic is more impactful than separate campaigns.

Shared resources: A BRASP regional mapping website (Kompasi) is a key tool for organisations to find up to date information to signpost people seeking asylum. Translated shared leaflets listing key information for members are also kept up to date. Shared training on key topics is also regularly organised.

South West Immigration Alliance (SWIA). We continue to be part of a collection of partners across the South West, focused on legal support andadvice, led by Bristol Law Centre. We work collectively to tackle the advice desert in the South West, sharing advice models and increasing our IAA (Immigration Advice Authority) accredited staff.

Action for Change

Strategic Goal 5: Raise our profile to influence others

System Change

We want to get to the root cause of the issues faced by refugees and people seeking asylum. We worked with BRASP partners to survey members to ask what systems impact their lives and where they'd like to see change. 130 members were surveyed, and choose two priority areas:

→ Free Bus Travel local campaign

We are working in partnership with City of Sanctuary and other BRASP partners on a campaign to influence bus travel for asylum seekers in the city. We have supported our members to engage by attending influencing meetings, sharing their stories of transport struggles, meeting MPs and contributing to the influencing campaign and public letters.

→ Access to Legal Support national campaign

Bristol Refugee Rights has delivered a legal advice service for 18 years and across that time we have delivered legal guidance to more than 10,000 people.

The South West has become what is recognised as a 'legal advice desert' as described by Justice Together's report 'No Access to Justice, 2025'. In response, BRR formalised our Advice Service, now holding Level 2 accreditation in Asylum and Immigration law from the Immigration Advice Authority. This means we can deliver intensive, long-term advocacy that enables our advice caseworkers to move beyond simple guidance to helping members navigate appeals and directly tackling complex legal processes.

This year we have provided comprehensive consultation responses to the government's asylum reform proposals, which would negatively impact refugees and asylum seekers as well as wider community cohesion. We have highlighted how the proposals impact the most vulnerable people (women, children, disabled people, those with health conditions or caring responsibilities).

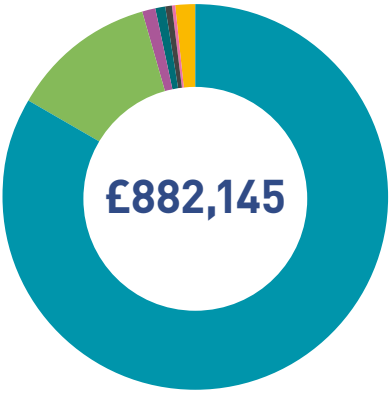
Finance

Our financial accounts show that we brought in income of **£882,145**, but a proportion of that was for the following year (restricted funds that we couldn't spend in-year). Our expenditure was **£952,036** (including BRASP, who we host). We ended the year with a deficit of **£69,891**.

Bristol Refugee Rights' income comes from grant making trusts and foundations, Bristol City Council, corporate supporters, legacies and wills, and the generous giving of many individual donors. This support means we're a financially resilient charity that can continue to be here for our members. We thank all donors and funders for supporting us. A full copy of our accounts for the year are on our website and the Charity Commission website.

Income

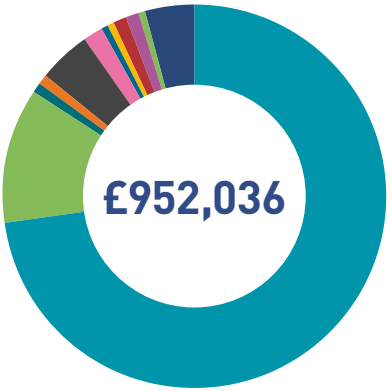
£737,332 Grants
£106,076 Subscriptions & Donations
£11,118 Gift Aid
£7,352 Gifts in Kind
£555 Membership Fees
£3,834 Charitable Activities
£1,601 Trading Activities
£14,277 Investments



For every pound we earn, just under 90p is spent on direct support for people seeking asylum and refugees

Expenditure

£692,979 Staff Salaries
£110,776 IT & Other Office Costs
£7,641 Fundraising
£6,564 Hardship Payments
£41,911 Interpreting
£16,355 Grants Payable
£6,689 Welcome Centre Meals
£4,335 Governance
£10,230 Training & Trauma Support
£11,621 Room Hire
£4,278 Volunteer Expenses
£38,657 Professional Fees & Other Costs



Thank You

To everyone who has supported Bristol Refugee Rights to do our vital work, a huge Thank You. That's from us and the people seeking asylum and refugees we work with.

The support we receive from people who give regularly and generously, as well as those who make one-off donations, organise fundraising events for us or run sponsored long-distance events is truly humbling. It's a reminder of what makes Bristol the city it is. We are also hugely grateful to the funding organisations that support us, from the small to very large and their grants are a very real and generous commitment to caring for some of the most vulnerable people living among us.

More than 100 people volunteer for Bristol Refugee Rights; without them we couldn't do our work. To all of you, a very big Thank You!

Many thanks to Chris Woodward and Jon Fletcher for designing our Impact Report and to Niki Groom for the beautiful illustrations featured throughout.

Be part of our story and support Bristol Refugee Rights. As hostility towards refugees and people seeking asylum increases, we need your help to deliver essential services.

You can support us in a variety of ways:

Make a **donation online**

Set up a **regular monthly donation** by Direct Debit

Fundraise for us

Leave a **gift in your will**

Your business can support us through donations, fundraising and volunteering

Sign up to our free quarterly newsletter or **follow us** on social media

Contact Us

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Wellspring Settlement,
43 Ducie Road,
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BS5 0AX

Call our helpline – 07526 352 353
(Mondays & Tuesdays 10am–1pm)
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Immigration Advice Authority

We are a Living Wage Employer

Registered with FUNDRAISING REGULATOR

Registered charity no: 1126646 Registered company no: 566920

Throughout this report, all member names have been changed