A Needs Analysis of Refugee Community Organisations and Refugee Support Groups

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Funded by

Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government
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Executive Summary

Introduction
This report represents the final phase of the needs analysis project of Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) and Refugee Support Groups. The project was funded by the Welsh Assembly Government and initiated by a partnership comprising of Displaced People in Action (DPIA), Welsh Refugee Council (WRC), Refugee Voice Wales (RVW) and the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership (WSMP). The Programme for Community Regeneration, based at the University of Glamorgan, was commissioned to assist the partnership in carrying out the research.

Aims of the research
The aims of the project were to develop a better understanding of the needs of RCOs and Support Groups in Wales, the barriers that inhibit their development and to collect data which would enable the partnership to develop services designed to empower RCOs and Support Groups to become more effective in supporting refugee communities. The research was carried out in two stages:

Research Methods
The project used two key methods for researching the needs of RCOs and refugee support groups in Wales.

- Stage one: a questionnaire sent to all known RCOs in Wales
- Stage two: a set of nine focus groups with RCOs and refugees and asylum seekers.

Summary of Key Findings
An enormous amount of data was collected during the report, some of which related to issues that lie outside of the direct remit of this report. However key findings of this report are:

- RCOs and support groups offer support and services to refugee and asylum seeking communities in the geographical areas where there is a concentration of those communities.

- RCOs and support groups provide a wide variety of support and services to refugee and asylum seeking communities. The evidence collected supports the view that RCOs are well-placed geographically, culturally and in terms of their expertise to provide this support.

- The evidence collected supported the view that the services and support that RCOs offer to their communities are vital to, and underpin, the wider
processes of integration and inclusion. However many RCOs and support groups felt that their contribution was not always recognised by statutory agencies.

- The findings of this report support the view that RCOs and support groups require a wide range of external support in order to sustain their positive role and impact within refugee and asylum seeking communities. Although this support includes advice and training on how to develop and sustain their organisations, and the activities they offer, funding was the form of support identified by RCOs and support groups as vital to their development.

- The report identifies a number of areas of unmet need within refugee and asylum seeking communities which RCOs and support groups are currently unable to tackle without further support.

- There are a number of barriers identified by RCOs and support groups which limit their ability to develop their organisations and meet the needs of their communities. These include:
  
  - Lack of appropriate and accessible funding.
  - Lack of meeting spaces and/ or premises.
  - Lack of access to ICT equipment.
  - Inability to adequately support their volunteers.
  - Lack of childcare to allow women to fully participate.
  - A lack of recognition of, and an unwillingness to fully remunerate RCOs and support groups for the full ‘value’ of services they offer.
  - Lack of access to appropriately delivered educational and training opportunities for members of RCOs and support groups.
  - Lack of a strong ‘voice’ for RCOs and support groups at strategic levels of planning and decision making.
  - Lack of networking opportunities for RCOs and support groups.
  - Lack of a central lobbying and campaigning body for RCOs and support groups.
  - The predominance of ‘tokenistic’ consultation processes with refugee and asylum seeking communities on issues that directly affect them, and poor levels of feedback on the outcomes of those consultation processes.

- The research also points to the existence of number of wider policy and institutional issues that limit the effectiveness of RCOs and which in turn limit the potential of individuals from within those communities to achieve their full potential. These include:
  
  - The rules governing the status of asylum seekers which limit their ability to find work or access educational opportunities.
The barriers that prevent refugees from accessing work.

**Summary of the recommendations:**
The report contains 44 recommendations and it is hoped that these will provide a detailed basis on which refugee sector support organisations can review their current activities and the services they provide to support the development of RCOs. However, a brief summary of the key content of these recommendations is as follows:

- Refugee sector support organisations should work together to develop a comprehensive portfolio of support and training that will:
  - Support RCOs and support groups to review their organisational structures to allow them to fully maximise their sustainability, future financial viability and independence.
  - Support RCOs and support groups to review their governance practices to ensure they are fully representative of their communities and have appropriate policies and practices in place.
  - Support RCOs and support groups to find ways of measuring and demonstrating the value and impact of the services and support they offer to both funders and statutory bodies.
  - Support RCOs and support groups to measure and demonstrate 'need' within their communities.
  - Support RCOs and support groups to access the range of resources they need to support, sustain and develop their activities.
  - Support RCOs and support groups to enable individuals from within their communities to access training and / or paid work that will allow them to contribute more fully to the development of their organisations.

- Where refugee sector support agencies are unable to provide adequate support or training they should provide information on, and signpost RCOs and support agencies to these opportunities.

- Refugee sector support agencies should work together to develop networking opportunities for RCOs and support groups.

- Refugee sector support agencies should work together to develop a campaigning and lobbying group for RCOs and support groups.

- Refugee sector support agencies should facilitate RCOs and support groups to access and input into strategic decision making and planning processes.
Section 1: Introduction

This report represents the final phase of the project ‘A needs analysis of Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) and Refugee Support Groups’. The project aims to understand the needs of RCOs in Wales and to understand the barriers that inhibit their development. This knowledge will enable the development of support mechanisms that will enable RCOs and refugee support groups to become more effective in supporting refugee communities.

The research has been supported by the Welsh Assembly Government and commissioned in partnership by Displaced People in Action (DPIA), Welsh Refugee Council (WRC), Refugee Voice Wales (RVW) and the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership (WSMP). The Programme for Community Regeneration, a research unit based at University of Glamorgan, was commissioned to work in partnership with DPIA, WRC, RVW and WSMP to assist in undertaking the research.

Background

Across Wales there are approximately 32 Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) and 5 Refugee Support Groups providing services and support to refugees and asylum seekers from all over the world. RCOs are run by refugees for refugees, and carry out both an enormous amount and a vast variety of work. Refugee Support Groups are slightly different in that they are run by both refugees and members of the receiving community, but they also act as important vehicles to aid and facilitate the participation of those refugees and asylum seekers that do not utilise RCOs to access services.

The importance of RCOs and Support Groups is recognised in the Refugee Inclusion Strategy (launched in 2008 by the Welsh Assembly Government) as they make a vital contribution to supporting the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in Wales. Most refugees arrive in Wales with no or few family ties, friends or social connections. RCOs and Support Groups can provide a sense of belonging to a particular group or community and are a significant resource in supporting the inclusion and well-being of refugees and asylum seekers. RCOs also provide information, advice and services to many refugees and asylum seekers. RCOs and Support Groups provide a foundation for building bridges with receiving communities, service providers and decision makers.
Policy Relevance

This research addresses many of the issues that arise around the theme of inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers, part of the remit of the Inclusion Unit within the Welsh Assembly Government’s (WAG) Department for Social Justice and Local Government. The rationale for the research is that its findings will enable refugee sector organisations to better meet the needs of RCOs and refugee support groups, thereby empowering them to support refugee and asylum seeking communities. The WAG’s Refugee Inclusion Strategy (2008) recognises that RCOs play a key role in working towards a prosperous future for Wales, by fostering cohesive, plural and just communities that enable all to participate, regardless of physical ability, gender, race, sexual orientation, or language, in activities which complement the WAG’s strategic objectives as set out in One Wales: a progressive agenda for the government of Wales (WAG: 2007).

The One Wales strategy is underpinned by the principles of social justice, sustainability and inclusivity for all people in Wales. The Refugee Inclusion Strategy is seen as one of the ways in which these principles will be implemented and forms part of the strategic approach undertaken by the WAG to realise the broader vision within One Wales. This is a vision of a Wales that is free from racism and discrimination, where everyone is enabled to fulfil their potential, to have fair and equal access to services and participate fully in the political and civil life of the country.

It is further envisaged that the outcomes of this research project will assist the Welsh Assembly Government to work with partners to;

“Support the development of a strong, active and inclusive refugee community organisation sector in Wales. This will include establishing a dedicated funding stream (Refugee Inclusion Strategy, Action Point 23)”.

This research was designed to build upon the knowledge gathered in consultations for the Refugee Inclusion Strategy conducted in 2006-07.

Aims of the research

As the key refugee sector agencies working with RCOs and Support Groups in Wales, the research partners identified a lack of in-depth research into the scope of activities undertaken by RCOs, and the positive impact that they are able to have on their communities. Similarly, it was felt that there was a lack of information on the needs of RCOs and the levers and barriers that helped or hindered their development. Whilst the partners were aware in broad terms of the barriers that these groups face, there was a need to better understand how they operated on a
day-to-day basis. It was acknowledged that before the partner agencies could fully support the development of RCOs and support groups, they needed to have a fuller understanding of the organisations themselves. This research builds upon the knowledge and understanding already present about RCOs but provides the research partners with an evidential and structured foundation on which to develop their support services. A central aim of the research was that the results would enable the development of a clear strategic framework for future capacity building initiatives for RCOs. In addition it was hoped that the research findings would be able to identify and promote good practice in community development for the refugee sector in general.

An added benefit of this research was that the refugee sector recognised the need to work collectively as organisations to support RCOs and Support Groups, and as such this piece of research provided a useful vehicle to develop cross-organisational working. The research findings are intended to be beneficial to RCOs and Support Groups themselves in that it should provide an overview of their own needs and strengths, their collective role as a sector and the impact they can have on service delivery and policy. It was also hoped that the information collected would enable those RCOs participating in the research to further develop their own initiatives in partnership with each other (as appropriate), to further plan services and avoid duplication in the sector.

**Section 2: Methodology**

The project used two key methods to achieve the aims of the research. The data collected via the two research techniques has been combined in this report in order to produce a robust, triangulated understanding of the needs of RCOs and support groups in Wales.

**Phase 1: Questionnaire sent to all RCOs in Wales**

In partnership DPIA, the WRC, WSMP and RVW, developed a questionnaire with the support of the University of Glamorgan, for completion by RCOs and Support Groups. Each refugee sector agency involved in the research supported a certain number of RCOs to complete the questionnaires to ensure they were completed on time.

A total of 32 questionnaires were distributed to all known RCOs in Wales. 28 were returned giving an overall response rate of 87.5%. This response rate is very high and was aided by the diligent efforts of workers from within the research partnership
organisations to contact RCOs and encourage them to respond. The data from the questionnaires was analysed using SPSS. Analysis provided data around a number of key issues that face RCOs in Wales, including organisational structure; organisational support needs; community support needs; barriers to development opportunities; and development of appropriate support structures. In the analysis frequency of response is also included in the tables because the actual respondent sample is small in number, even though it is highly representative. Despite the small number of respondents, the breadth of the data collected via this method allowed the research team to draw a number of conclusions. Some of these were further investigated during the subsequent focus groups.

**Phase 2: Focus groups with key organisations and interest groups**

From the information gained from analysis of the questionnaire a cross-section of organisations was identified and invited to take part in focus groups. The organisations and representatives asked to participate were chosen on the basis of accessing views from a range of nationalities, ages, gender and on the basis of ensuring geographical coverage across Wales.

In total, nine focus groups were conducted as part of the research. Each focus group was approximately 1-1½ hours long, and included at least 7 participants, to allow for a healthy debate and to explore the issues faced by each group. Participants were informed at the beginning of the discussions that all of the opinions expressed would be kept anonymous in the final report; through ensuring confidentiality the research team tried to encourage participants to provide an honest assessment of the support structures they are currently working with.

Groups were prompted to start a discussion around some of the key issues raised by the questionnaire analysis. By triangulating the results of the questionnaire survey with the discussion of the focus groups in this way, the team were able to gain a deeper level of understanding of the issues raised in the initial phase of the research and also to start to explore possible solutions. Areas covered during the sessions included:

- An overview of services and activities that RCOs currently deliver.
- Areas of unmet community need.
- Barriers to organisational development and to meeting community need.
- Potential Support mechanisms to overcome these barriers.
Section 3: Findings

The following section gives an overview of the research findings based on the analysis of both the questionnaire data and of the data collected during focus group sessions. For clarity the findings are broken down into the following sections:

- Organisational details.
- Organisational legal structures, income profiles and governance practices.
- Record keeping and monitoring processes.
- Organisational function and services provided.
- Areas of unmet need within refugee and asylum seeking communities.
- Barriers to meeting need with communities and organisational development.
- Support needs identified.

However it is impossible to delineate exactly between each of the sections and some of the issues are raised in more than one section. Where this occurs we have attempted to cross-reference between the sections.

A: Organisational Details

This section gives a broad overview of the features of the organisations who took part in the questionnaire survey and some of the conclusions we were able to draw from the analysis of data obtained from them.

i. Length of Time Established

The length of time that organisations reported being established varied greatly. The longest established organisation had been running for 16 years and the most recently established organisation had only been running for just over 4 months. The average length of time that organisations had been established was 5.2 years.

ii. Location of Organisations

Table 1: Location of Organisations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number (N) of organisations</th>
<th>% of organisations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cardiff</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>53.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newport</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swansea</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardiff/Swansea</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrexham</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These results show that over half of the organisations surveyed were situated in Cardiff (53.6%). This more or less reflects the actual distribution of refugee and asylum seeker populations across Wales. Those living in Swansea were somewhat underrepresented, and those in Newport, overrepresented. A report by the Centre for Migration Policy Research based at Swansea University\(^1\) reported that 57% of the asylum seeker population lived in Cardiff, with 24% living in Swansea, 16% living in Newport and 3% living in Wrexham. It is likely that the refugee population is distributed in a similar way. The organisations contacted were situated in all of these areas.

**Conclusion A1:** The current spread of RCOs matches patterns of refugee populations across Wales.

### iii. Geographical area covered by organisational activity

As table 2 demonstrates, organisational activity covers those areas where there are concentrations of refugee and asylum seeker populations. The data also indicate that some organisations in the South Wales area provide activities in areas outside of their geographical location.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area covered</th>
<th>N of organisations</th>
<th>% of organisations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Wales</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardiff</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newport</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Wales</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swansea</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardiff and Swansea</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrexham</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion A2:** RCOs’ organisational activity covers areas where there is a concentration of refugee and asylum seeker populations.

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\(^1\) Crawley, H & Crimes, T (2009) Refugees living in Wales: A survey of experiences and barriers to inclusion. CMPR
### iv. Nationalities supported by organisations

Table 3: Nationalities supported by organisations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality supported</th>
<th>N of organisations</th>
<th>% of organisations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudanese</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congolese</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darfuri</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrean</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yemeni</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Africa</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gambian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iranian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurdish</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigerian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Some organisations cover more than one nationality.

These results show that a wide spread of refugee communities are supported by RCOs in Wales. However, although 5 organisations state that they offer support to all nationalities, no organisations currently offer specific support to either Chinese or Pakistani populations, the top nationalities currently seeking asylum. This research can offer no insights into the reasons for this apparent anomaly; however, this may be an issue that organisations based in the refugee sector need to investigate further.

**Conclusion A3:** In terms of nationality, a wide spread of refugee populations seem to be supported by RCOs and support groups. Further research is needed to identify those populations not currently provided for.

**Recommendation 1:** Further research is needed to investigate whether RCOs and support groups adequately cater for the needs of all nationalities of refugee and asylum seeking communities.
v. Age groups worked with

Table 4: Age groups worked with

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>% of organisations</th>
<th>N of organisations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 10</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-20</td>
<td>67.9</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>60.7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-70</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 and above</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most commonly worked with age groups were 20 though to 50 years; only 4 (17.4%) organisations reported working with all age groups. This may broadly reflect the age ranges of typical populations served by RCOs. However, focus group data reveals that young people’s needs are not being met. Work needs to be undertaken at an organisational level to identify gaps in provision, particularly with children, young people, and older populations, to ensure that their needs are met by current service provision.

**Recommendation 2:** RCOs should be encouraged to identify gaps in their provision and supported to develop their work with children, young people and older populations.

vi. Number of people actively involved in the organisation

There was a significant variation in number of people actively involved in the organisation. Totals varied from a high of 45 to a low of 5. The average (mean) number of people involved with organisations was 14.5 people.

vii. Number of people organisations work with

Estimates of the numbers of people who used an organisation’s services varied from 3,000 (in one organisation) to as few as 15. Most organisations work with fewer than 100 people, although there are a significant number in the 100-500 categories. Most organisations are therefore fairly small, but focus group data indicates that some RCOs would like to develop in order to provide services to more people.

Table 5: Number of people worked with

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People worked with</th>
<th>N of organisations</th>
<th>% of organisations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-100</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100-500</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500-1000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The point was made in focus groups that although an organisation's membership might be limited, RCOs and support groups provide a lot of services to their wider community and they needed to develop ways to evidence this (see recommendation 10 section B).

“Most of the functions carried out by RCOs is not necessarily done to an ‘x’ number of members but also for the wider community which needs to be recognised because I think a lot of funders become very sceptical about RCOs, they say how many are you but it needs to be recognised that we can be 100 and be helping many more” (Focus group participant)

viii. Methods of keeping in touch with people who are engaged with the organisation

Results demonstrate that a variety of methods are used by RCOs to communicate with their communities. That word of mouth is a key method reflects the need for RCOs to work closely with their key populations, and to work ‘on the ground’ to develop relationships with the local population. Further to this, the high levels of reported use of technology in the form of telephone, email and text demonstrates that RCOs will need support to develop these electronic means of communication.

Table 6: Methods of keeping in touch with clientele

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>% of organisations</th>
<th>N of organisations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Word of mouth</td>
<td>96.4</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>92.9</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>92.9</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings</td>
<td>82.1</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text messages</td>
<td>64.3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters</td>
<td>60.7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posters</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsletters</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (inc. Door to door knocking)</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: all organisations recorded more than one method of keeping in touch with their client group

Conclusion A4: Although word of mouth is the primary method of keeping in touch with their clientele a high level of use of Information and Communication Technologies is also reported.

Recommendation 3: The importance of the use of electronic and ICT for keeping in touch with their communities in combination with information on the lack of ICT equipment experienced by many RCOs indicates that support is needed in this area.
B: Organisational legal structures, income profiles and governance practices.

This section gives an overview of the information collected on the organisations legal status, structures and governance practices. This information identifies areas where RCOs and support groups need to develop their organisations and where they may need support to do so.

i. Organisation’s legal status and structures

Only 6 organisations reported being a registered charity (21.4%). This result suggests that there is scope for many RCOs to take advantage of the benefits from becoming a charity.

Two organisations reported being a company limited by guarantee (7.1%). As with charitable status this result suggests that there is scope for many RCOs to take advantage of the benefits of becoming a registered company limited by guarantee.

**Conclusion B1:** Results indicate that only a small number of RCOs and support groups currently benefit from the advantages that relate to having charitable status or from being incorporated.

**Recommendation 4:** Where applicable refugee sector support agencies should support RCOs to undertake organisational reviews in order to determine whether their legal status or structure suits their organisational developmental needs.

ii. Organisational Income Profiles

Please note that not all organisations supplied data for this section.

**Past funding:**

- 82.1% (N= 23) of organisations reported having received external funding in the past
- Communities First is the most frequently cited funding agency, with 8 mentions.
- In total, the groups’ report having received an estimated £570,640 in external funding.

**Conclusion B2:** Results indicate that external funding has been critical in the past for RCO’s development with over half a million pounds in funding being reported as having been received.
Current funding:

28.6% (N=8) of the organisations reported currently receiving external funding with 7 different funding organisations being mentioned by respondents. In total, the groups reported being in receipt of an estimated £120,000 in external funding.

**Conclusion B3:** Significantly fewer organisations report being currently in receipt of funding than those who reported having received funding in the past.

Seeking further funding:

89.3% (N=25) of the organisations reported seeking further funding. This indicates that receipt of external funding is still important for RCOs, and could be a factor that is limiting the development of RCOs at the moment.

**Conclusion B4:** Although not all respondents gave data on receipt of funding, information based on those that did indicates that external funding has and continues to be critical to the development of RCOs. Despite its importance less than 30% of RCOs reported being currently in receipt of external funding, although almost 90% of respondents reported that they were currently seeking external funding.

**Recommendation 5:** Refugee sector support organisations need to develop ways of supporting and enabling RCOs to access funding.

Earning direct income from activities:

Two (7.1%) organisations reported earning direct income from their activities. There may be scope for many RCOs to take advantage of the benefits from earning money through events and other forms of social enterprise.

**Conclusion B5:** Only 2 RCOs reported earning income from their activities. In the context of reductions in the number of funding pots available to Third Sector organisations, earning income is a way that RCOs can potentially develop and sustain their organisations. As part of a process of organisational review RCOs should be encouraged to investigate their potential to develop sustainable income streams.

**Recommendation 6:** Refugee sector support agencies can help RCOs to identify ways in which they can earn income and also in developing opportunities for RCOs to earn income from their activities. Refugee sector support agencies also have a role in signposting RCOs to external agencies involved in the development of social enterprise activities.
### iii. Governance Practices

**Governance Practices**

**Governing document and policies**

100% of the organisations surveyed reported that they had written constitutions or other forms of governing documents. This indicates good governance practice.

53.6% (N=15) of organisations said they had some written policies (e.g. Health and Safety, Child Protection, Equalities, Environmental policies)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7: Types of written policies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equalities policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidentiality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public policy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion B6:** Although 100% of RCOs report having written governing documents, only half report having written policies in place to support their activities. There is a need for some RCOs to develop more formalised policies.

Having sufficient policies in place is often a pre-requisite for receipt of funding. Given the general finding that lack of access to funding is a major developmental barrier for RCOs (see section E), efforts need to be made to ensure that RCOs are in the best position possible to access funding.

**Recommendation 7:** Although 100% of RCOs reported having written governing documents, there is a clear role for refugee sector support agencies to facilitate the development of written policies to underpin the operations of RCOs and support groups.

**Management Committees**

100% of the organisations surveyed stated that they had a management committee. Questionnaire data indicate that members of these committees are either appointed or elected at meetings and AGMs.

- Elected at meetings: 17 organisations (65.4%)
- Appointed at an AGM: 9 organisations (34.6%)

**Conclusion B7:** The majority of committee members are elected; this represents good governance practice in the majority of RCOs and support groups who responded to the survey. The processes of appointing committee members were not
explored so some further investigation may be necessary help to determine how transparent governance processes are in some RCOs.

**Gender balance on management committees**

There was a great deal of variation in the responses given in relation to this issue. Many organisations had a roughly equal gender balance, with between 40 and 60% held by either gender. Overall, the balance is in favour of male committee members. Some outlying results include:

- Only 1 organisation was 100% female.
- 3 organisations reported having a 99/1% ratio of men to women
- 4 organisations reported having a 90/10% ratio of men to women.

**Conclusion B8**: RCOs should be encouraged and supported to review membership of their boards to ensure gender parity is achieved and maintained.

It is good practice to review and renew governance processes in order to ensure they adequately serve the needs of the organisation as it develops.

**Recommendation 8**: Refugee support sector agencies should develop ways of supporting RCOs to review their governance procedures to ensure transparency in the way in which committee member are elected and to ensure greater gender parity on their management boards.

**Audited annual accounts**

14.3% (N=4) organisations reported having audited annual accounts. This low result indicates that there is a need for many RCOs to assess the need to develop more formalised financial procedures and to develop good financial management practices. Being able to produce audited accounts is a pre-requisite for the receipt of many sources of grant funding, and given the evidence that many RCOs rely on receipt of grant funding it is important that they develop procedures which allow them to take advantage of funding opportunities that may arise.

**Conclusion B9**: There is a need for the majority of RCOs to review their financial management practices to see if they meet the needs of their organisation.

**Recommendation 9**: There is a role for refugee sector support agencies to support RCOs and support groups to facilitate the development of more formal financial management procedures, should they identify that these would help them achieve greater organisational sustainability.
iv. Record keeping and monitoring use of organisation

The majority (96.4%) of organisations stated that they kept a register of people actively involved with their organisation. This shows good practice, and demonstrates a degree of good governance practice within the RCOs surveyed.

Table 8: Keeping records of people actively involved in the organisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Register</th>
<th>% of organisations</th>
<th>N of organisations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>96.4</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recording Clientele’s use of the organisation and its activities

As Table 9 demonstrates, over half of the organisations who responded stated that they recorded their clientele’s use of the organisation and its activities. Although this shows the presence of good practice within a large proportion of the RCOs surveyed, there is demonstrable room for improvement in this area. Monitoring use of the organisations is a vital component in being able to demonstrate impact, and the ability to do this adequately is often essential when applying for funding.

Conclusion B10: Although RCOs are good at keeping records of the people who are actively involved in running their organisations, they are less adept at monitoring the use of their organisation by community members.

Table 9: Recorded clientele use of organisation and activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Record use of organisation</th>
<th>% of organisations</th>
<th>N of organisations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recommendation 10: Refugee sector support agencies should support RCOs and support groups to develop ways of monitoring the use of their organisations and of demonstrating their impact to potential funders.

C: Organisational functions and the services they provide to their communities

i. Overall function of the organisation

Table 10: Function of the organisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>% organisations</th>
<th>N of organisations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support Group</td>
<td>96.4</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural and social Group</td>
<td>92.9</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results clearly indicate that the majority of RCOs describe their core function as either a support group or cultural/social group or both, although 10 groups indicated that they covered all of the above functions. Just under 1/3 of respondents described themselves as ‘faith groups’.

**Conclusion C1:** The provision of support services and the provision of social and cultural activities are central to the role of RCOs and support groups. Although significantly fewer groups describe themselves as faith groups, this is still an important function for a significant proportion of those organisations who responded.

**Recommendation 11:** Refugee sector support agencies need to enable RCOs and support groups to sustain their provision of support services and the holding of cultural and social events within their communities as these constitute their main reported function. Support should also be provided to allow those organisations that act as faith groups to continue doing so.

**ii. Activities and services organisations provided**

As demonstrated in Table 11, the most commonly stated activities and services provided were:

- The holding of social events
- Referral to other agencies
- Social support
- Interpretation services

Findings from the questionnaire demonstrated that the RCOs deliver a wide variety of services within their communities and this conclusion was backed up during focus group discussions. Many of the services provided are specific to the refugee populations, such as language support, interpretation and the giving of advice and support on asylum procedures. These services are identified as central to the needs of those populations and RCOs will require continued support to develop those. However, there are also a number of more general services provided that are also provided by generic community development initiatives, i.e. social events, and by external agencies, i.e. health support and benefits advice.

Table 11: Activities and services organisations provided

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities and services</th>
<th>% of organisations</th>
<th># of organisations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social events</td>
<td>96.4</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral to other agencies</td>
<td>92.9</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social support</td>
<td>82.1</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation services</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health support</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee/ asylum seeking processes</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Conclusion C2: RCOs currently provide a wide range of support services for their communities, many of which are central to the needs of their communities.

### Conclusion C3: RCOs have a role in accessing further support for their communities via interaction with community regeneration programmes such as Communities First.

Focus group discussions revealed in greater detail the extent of the range and value of support that RCOs and support groups provided to their communities. The following part of this section gives an overview of those discussions and centres on the roles of RCOs in the following areas:

- Providing a buffer against the impacts of poverty and social exclusion
- Providing supportive environments within the community
- Providing opportunities for cultural integration
- Providing general advice and information services
- Providing specific support for new arrivals to the UK
- Providing interpretation services

The final part of this section gives a summary of participant’s views on why RCOs and support groups are particularly well placed to provide these services.

**Providing a buffer against the impact of poverty:** RCOs and support groups offer a significant amount of practical help to members of refugees and asylum seeking communities, particularly to those individuals suffering from the compound effects of poverty and social exclusion. Through these efforts, RCOs are providing a safety-net and buffer against further exclusion. However it was generally thought that statutory agencies did not recognise the value of these activities and they can be difficult to evaluate.

Their presence within refugee communities means that RCOs are well placed to use community development approaches that involve door-to-door consultation and participation within the community. The importance of reaching out to those who are in most difficulty or are hardest to reach was emphasised during many of the discussions, as it is they who are most likely to be missed by conventional approaches undertaken by statutory agencies.
“Most of the time, we're in the office, we need people to come into the office. But most of our people-if we go on this door-to-door approach, we can visit them and pass some hours with them. And we will learn more about their problems and what kinds of solutions we can find for them.”

(Focus Group Participant)

**Provision of supportive environments within the community:** The focus groups indicated that a major objective of RCOs is to provide supportive environments and meeting spaces for refugee and asylum seeking communities. These, allied to the provision of cultural events, were thought to play a key role in providing the basis for development of community networks and were important hubs for information dissemination and the offering of mutual support. The provision of informal personal and emotional support was seen as an important function for RCOs and support groups and helped alleviate the issue of isolation for many members of refugee and asylum seeking communities.

**Conclusion C4:** The provision of personal and emotional support is a central function of RCOs and although the impact of this function is difficult to evaluate, statutory agencies need to recognise the value of these functions.

**Providing opportunities for cultural integration:** Most focus group participants cited the running of cultural support events as a central role for RCOs. Cultural events are cited as being important for refugee and asylum seeking communities for three key reasons:
- providing a focus point for community cohesion,
- ensuring that there is a cultural link with the home country/region, and
- providing an opportunity for integration with receiving communities where there is joint-planning, hosting, or attendance at cultural events.

Many participants believed that it was important to sustain and to expand the provision of cultural events, in order to aid the processes of integration into the receiving community.

**Conclusion C5:** The holding of cultural events has a dual purpose in that they provide opportunities for members of refugee and asylum seeking communities to meet and maintain links with the cultures of their home countries. In this way they can help ease the transition from home countries into receiving communities. They also provide opportunities for integration with receiving communities, opportunities for cultural exchange and developing greater mutual understanding.

**Provision of general information and advice services:** Acting as a source of information and advice was perceived as one of the most vital roles that RCOs fulfilled. Participants linked this issue to RCOs’ ability to empower individuals and support them to integrate more easily. The proximity of RCOs to their communities,
their ability to talk the home language, their cultural knowledge, and their first-hand experience of many of the issues that refugees and asylum speakers face, mean that RCOs are seen as more approachable than many statutory agencies.

In many cases it was thought that RCOs had higher levels of expertise and better understanding of the particular issues that face refugee and asylum seeking communities than workers in more generic advice centres.

Some participants reported feeling bemused when they had first been faced with the diverse number of options available for accessing support, particularly that from statutory organisations and mainstream services. Participants had faced difficulties in terms of knowing where to go or who to ask in order to enquire about some services. RCOs have a role in gathering this information, and acting as signposting organisations.

“The important thing is languages and information about housing, hospitals. Need to know where to access courses, who to contact in local health authorities and local authorities.” (Focus group participant)

**Conclusion C6:** RCOs are well placed to provide information and advice services for refugees and asylum seekers as they are a ‘visible’ presence in the community, as well as being a community level point of contact. Services are provided through a variety of activities including, signposting to other agencies and information dissemination. An important aspect of this is that they are able to provide support in their member’s home language.

“I think an information centre is important. Because information is power.” (Focus Group Participant)

**Conclusion C7:** A key role of RCOs is referring /signposting community members to other agencies. They provide an advice and gateway service for communities that may have limited access to some of these resources.

**Recommendation 12:** Refugee sector support agencies should aid RCOs to find funding to help them maintain their current range of essential activities and services as well as enabling them to develop their activities and earn income directly from opportunities such as developing service level agreements with statutory agencies.

**Recommendation 13:** Refugee sector support agencies should support RCOs and support groups to develop ways of evaluating their impact in the areas of provision of advice and support, easing integration into receiving communities and the provision of a ‘safety net’ for members of their communities.

**Provision of support for new arrivals to the UK:** Participants highlighted the issues experienced by many asylum seekers on arrival in the UK. They stated that some RCOs had been created due to negative first experiences, which had
prompted volunteers to develop structures to help support new arrivals. The need for such support is clearly important at a personal level, particularly the receipt of support from other people of the same nationality, as going through the asylum seeking process represented a highly transitional and therefore stressful period for many people.

“When we arrive there in the beginning, there’s not the basic information about the UK, the police etc. So when something happens somewhere- you don’t know what to do.” (Focus Group participant)

RCOs could be developed to provide a first point of contact for new arrivals and ease the adjustment to the UK. Participants felt that RCOs played an important supportive role in the first days after arrival. It was noted that many statutory agencies were not always adequately performing this role.

“I remember when I first came to the UK, and I went to social services. And everything that they were saying to me, they were all talking to me in English and my first language is Swahili. So I was just ‘yeah, yeah, yeah, nodding my head, I couldn’t understand anything. But if people come here for the first time, they might be from Angola or the Congo. And they don’t know where to turn to....if they can find someone to help in their own language that would be very, very helpful.” (Focus group participant)

The focus groups recognised that the creation of ‘day one’ packs and support for new arrivals had helped to alleviate many of the stresses caused by a lack of understanding of the culture and official procedures in the UK. However it was thought that these packs were not localised enough.

**Recommendation 14:** Although information packs are available for new arrival to the UK, it is important that RCOs are given the chance to contribute to the design of these packs, and that the packs are localised and targeted to needs of different communities.

**Provision of interpretation services:** The translation of official documents and of interviews related to the asylum process was raised in the context that this is a key support role that could be filled by volunteers/workers from RCOs, if supported to do so.

“I think here is the first place that people come here. When people come here, they don’t speak much English. But here they can get help with translation.”(Focus group participant)

Many RCOs reported providing informal translation services for members of their communities, an invaluable resource but one for which they were generally not paid.
They also reported having to provide these services because statutory agencies were unaware of the official facilities provided.

“The Health Authority still uses the children to interpret - there is a telephone line but they don’t use it. They have used a young boy to interpret about women’s health issues. I have to intervene and take the mum to the GP to tell them to use language line.” (Focus group participant)

The accessibility and immediacy of translation services provided by RCOs was seen as important. Statutory agencies and support groups that relied on paid workers were often closed at weekends whereas RCOs provided help as and when required.

“Asylum seekers- they might have a letter. WRC-it is open on Monday and you can come. But until it is open, if you can help with translation, it’s very important”. (Focus group Participant)

Focus group participants pointed out that RCOs already provide a lot of informal services for statutory providers, but that this was not generally recognised.

“It’s interesting that a lot of agencies when they hit a wall with say depression or with a client that is really desperate they do call on RCOs for community support or they do call on RCOs to explain why a person is acting in a certain way, so in a way they do consult us but that is not recognised at all.” (Focus group participant)

**Conclusion C8:** RCOs should be supported to work with statutory agencies in order to help with translation and provide flexible support for language and cultural barriers when they emerge. This work should be remunerated accordingly.

**Recommendation 15:** RCOs should be supported to maintain and develop their activities that:
- Provide support for new arrivals to the UK
- Provide information and translation facilities for refugees and asylum seekers
- Develop cultural events and integration strategies

**Recommendation 16:** RCOs should be supported to develop a network of community champions, consisting of individuals and groups that can work as intermediaries between statutory agencies such as the police, local authorities and benefits agencies. Cultural differences may be helped by working as interpreters and liaising between police, other agencies and refugee and asylum seeking communities. Through working as cultural intermediaries, community champions may enable more effective delivery of services.
iii. Summary of participants views on why RCOs and support Groups are the most appropriate providers of services to refugee and asylum seeking communities

Participants believed that RCOs have a key role in delivering key services and support mechanisms for a number of reasons. These included,

- That RCOs have the language skills that are required to help deliver services to clients that it would otherwise be difficult to reach;
- That RCOs have a position of trust in the community and are well placed to provide services for those people that may have had negative experiences with statutory agencies;
- That RCOs have substantial cultural knowledge that allows more appropriate activities and service delivery patterns;
- That members and workers within RCOs have experience of interaction with statutory service providers and understand the difficulties refugees and asylum seekers face; and
- That many members of RCOs have direct experience of arrival in the UK, and are well placed to understand the issues faced by new arrivals.

**Conclusion C9:** RCOs can draw upon the first hand experience of their members, and this underpins the key role RCOs have in delivering many of the activities and services highlighted by the focus groups.

**Recommendation 17:** Refugee sector support agencies should work to raise awareness and recognition within statutory agencies of the added value that RCOs first-hand experience gives to their ability to deliver assessable and appropriate services to members of refugee and asylum seeking communities.

D: Areas of unmet needs within refugee and asylum seeking communities and areas those communities need developing

This section gives an overview of the research findings relating to unmet need within refugee and asylum seeking communities and the areas of support that RCOs identified as requiring development in order to be able to meet that need.

i. Instance of unmet need within refugee and asylum seeking communities.

100% of the organisations surveyed stated that there were needs within their communities that they were currently unable to meet.
ii. Areas of unmet need within refugee and asylum seeking communities

Table 12 demonstrates results for the categories of unmet needs as identified by analysis of the questionnaire data. Responses were categorised by the research team. As the majority of organisations had included more than one response to this question, the first 4 responses were included in the analysis and then combined. In all 20 categories of unmet need were identified.

Table 12: Reported categories of unmet community need

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Unmet Need</th>
<th># of organisations reporting the category</th>
<th>% of overall responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial support/ funding</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office space/ premises</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning materials / access to training courses / Education</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT /Equipment</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESOL</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing advice / access to advice general</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health advice / counselling</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports facilities / activities</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social events</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid staff</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Centre/ meeting place</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal help</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>resources to develop organisational activities</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural activities</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreters</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lobbying decision makers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from the variation in the categories identified, some respondents replied to this question in terms of the unmet needs of their communities and some in terms of the unmet needs of their organisations. This may be due to the perception that the two are the same; however this is one of the areas the team decided to further investigate via the focus groups to achieve clarity on this issue.
**Conclusion D1**: Financial support/ access to funding, access to office space and premises for meetings, access to learning materials and training opportunities and lack of IT equipment were the main forms of unmet community need reported. These are practical needs which relate equally to organisational development.

**Recommendation 18**: Refugee sector support agencies groups need to design initiatives to support RCOs to find solutions to the many practical issues they face which would enable them in turn to provide more effective support for their communities.

**iii. Identifying the support needs of the community**

Organisations were also asked to identify the support needs of their communities and in many ways these corresponded with the unmet needs as identified in focus group discussions. Respondents gave more than one response to this question so the research team allowed for 3 responses per organisation and combined the results; responses were categorised by the research team; 17 categories were identified as demonstrated in table 13.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Support needs</th>
<th># of organisations giving this response</th>
<th>% of overall responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Premises/meeting places</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education/Training</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance/funding</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal access to services/ equal rights / equal status/ fairer systems</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESOL</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid staff</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits advice</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice (general)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice (asylum)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to IT / IT training</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal support</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Equipment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social support</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child protection</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results indicate that issues such as funding and premises are as essential for the communities that RCOs work with, as they are to the on-going development of their organisations and that development of the two are in some ways seen as inseparable. However, there are also many support needs that are related to individual and to broader community development. These include access to education and training and access to advice and legal support, as well as much broader issues such as improved equality of access to services and facilities. Some of these needs correspond to categories of support already being delivered by RCOs and support groups (see section C) and some correspond to the following discussion on unmet need within communities.

**Conclusion D2:** Given support RCOs should continue their current range of activities such as offering direct formal and informal advice, acting as a point of referral to other agencies, provision of interpretation services, providing counselling support and informal support.

**Conclusion D3:** RCOs should look for ways that they can develop their services to support the unmet needs of their communities. Refugee sector support agencies should support them in this process.

**Unmet Needs**

The following part of this section gives a summary of focus groups discussions that explore in more detail some of the areas of unmet need identified through the analysis of the questionnaire data as well as identifying some addition areas. The summary focuses on the discussion that took place around the following areas:

- Access to educational opportunities and resources.
- Access to appropriately delivered ESOL courses.
- Childcare.
- Community meeting spaces.
- Meeting spaces and support groups for women.
- Support groups for men.
- Provision for young people.
- Access to services such as appropriate housing.

**Access to educational opportunities and resources:** The discussions within focus groups clearly demonstrated the need for access to educational opportunities. It was felt that access to educational opportunities, such as ESOL courses, FE college courses and Higher Education, would greatly improve the quality of lives of refugees and asylum seekers, and would offer greater opportunities for integration and meeting the requirements for jobs and entry to the labour market.
"If you would like to give any chance to any member, to any families here, you need to get them to get in touch with education and training. That's very important...it's not about giving people money, education is more important." (Focus group participant)

Lack of access was perceived as limiting opportunities for refugees, asylum seekers and others in need of support, to actively and positively contribute to society. This was seen as having a highly negative impact not only on the individual and their circumstances but also whole communities and eventually on wider society.

**Conclusion D4:** Lack of access to educational opportunities impacted negatively on the ability of individuals from refugee and asylum seeking communities to fulfil their potential and contribute to their community.

Lack of funding to allow travel to educational opportunities was also cited as a major barrier. Focus groups raised examples where refugees and asylum seekers were not allowed access to subsidised or funded travel to educational opportunities.

**Recommendation 18:** Refugee sector support agencies should support RCOs and support groups to research the barriers to accessing education opportunities for individuals from refugee and asylum seeking communities and help RCOs lobby providers and policy makers to find solutions to some of these barriers.

Specific issues were raised in relation to the provision of ESOL courses. Participants expressed the view that current provision did not meet demand for ESOL courses, leaving many individuals in refugee and asylum seeking communities unable to participate in suitable courses. This was a major issue because of the huge negative impact the lack of ability to speak English had on individual's quality of life.

"Language is a huge issue, if people don't speak English - how can they explain themselves." (Focus Group Participant)

There was a clear sense from the focus groups that current ESOL provision was not flexible enough to meet the needs of refugee and asylum seeking communities. Flexible delivery, including provision of classes during evenings and weekends would help to improve access to ESOL for refugee and asylum seeking communities.

"We have ESOL in the college, but the way it's taught- it's in a kind of academic way. But when someone, for example, is working, they need some kind of community class for evening time or the weekend." (Focus Group Participant)

Evidence from the focus groups highlighted the need to provide ESOL courses in suitable premises that require the least travelling for learners. The focus groups also
highlighted the need for learners to be taught (where appropriate) through their home language, and not to rely on provision based solely in English.

**Conclusion D5:** Findings from this research indicate that current ESOL provision is not currently meeting the needs of refugee and asylum seeking communities in terms of either availability of classes or appropriateness of delivery.

**Recommendation 19:** There is a need to develop a range of opportunities to access ESOL courses and to provide the courses in ways that are most accessible and appropriate for refugees and asylum seekers. RCOs have a role in helping design provision of ESOL courses.

There was a clear feeling that should more effort and support be put into enabling refugee and asylum seeking communities to access the language skills they needed, that this would help integration, and make it easier for statutory agencies to engage effectively with refugee and asylum seeking communities. The focus groups also highlighted the potential role for refugees and asylum seekers to work as trainers/ESOL teachers or to work as volunteers to support classroom-based activities as part of the training process.

"The DPIA pays for teacher to do some teaching, but not to support volunteers. The volunteers not able to do this because they are not qualified. We need to signpost towards possible teaching. We could do a lot more in terms of language development." (Focus Group participant)

**Recommendation 20:** Refugee sector support agencies should work with RCOs to identify, support and find training for individuals willing and capable of learning to deliver language support to refugee and asylum seeking communities.

**Childcare:** The issue of a lack of childcare to enable the fuller participation of women was a major point of discussion in the majority of the focus groups. Women reported instances of them being unable to attend meetings, training sessions and educational opportunities because they either had no one to help them with childcare, or they could not afford to buy it in. When women could attend meetings or social events they often reported having to interrupt their attendance to take care of the children that were there.

"Child care and training should be same. I want to do training - for example Breast Cancer’s Train the Trainer. I lost that place as there was no child care... It is harder in certain cultures as husbands will not look after the children for women to attend training. We need to lobby other organisations to provide the child care." (Focus group participant)

"Childcare is a massive barrier- and funders need to know that. If people had to choose between their children and coming to classes, they would..."
stay at home... it's about chasing for funding for childcare.” (Focus group participant)

Lack of childcare had a huge impact on women’s ability to participate in many areas of activity. Focus groups members expressed the view that unless this issue was tackled many women would be prevented from reaching their full potential causing gender inequalities within their communities to persist.

“We cannot say that women are not infringed within the community or within the wider society because we take care of the children, we take the larger burden than men - it’s important to recognise that within RCOs there is a lot of support whether it’s with childcare support or emotional support or just generally even if its counselling. We need recognition of the role of the women in these communities play, which I think is undermined because the general perception is that women don’t contribute.” (Focus group participant)

**Conclusion D6:** Lack of childcare is a major barrier to the full participation of women within their communities and within RCOs.

**Recommendation 21:** Refugee sector support agencies should work to support RCOs to find the resources they need to provide childcare at their meetings and events allowing women the time to participate more fully in their activities.

**Recommendation 22:** Refugee sector support agencies should ensure that childcare is provided for all of their training events, and that they lobby other agencies to provide crèche facilities at training events also.

Lack of childcare and crèche facilities is a common problem experienced within many community settings and finding solutions to it requires investment in training and facilities. One solution discussed in focus groups was that RCOs and refugee sector support agencies should assist community members to find training and employment as childcare workers within their own communities.

**Recommendation 23:** That refugee sector support agencies work with RCOs to identify, support and find training for individuals willing and capable of training to deliver childcare services within their communities.

**Community meeting spaces:** Focus group discussions highlighted the importance of availability of community-based meeting spaces in which refugee communities could hold meetings, run events and network. Finding and paying for the hire of appropriate venues was problematic and often groups had to meet in people’s homes.
“We have a [nationality] club every Saturday, pay for the hire from our own pockets. It’s not easy for the committee meeting either, we are all volunteers and usually meet in house, a family have to move out of the room to use it for the meeting. Also if someone needs help they have no place to go to speak to the community.” (Focus group participant)

“We want to have regular drop-ins for advice - offices like the Refugee Council are often fully booked so we can’t use the space...Community members have to wait for advice, they’ve nowhere to go.” (Focus group participant)

Participants were keen to point out that having their own community meeting spaces or premises within the community was a vital component in the process of inclusion. Access to these spaces was particularly important in the time following arrival in the receiving community when individuals faced a multitude of difficulties.

“One of things that I am keen to point out is that although there is this thing that we should have our own place where we come and network we are not being exclusionary - I think that once you feel settled it’s easier to go out but when you first come you are very unfamiliar with everything, when you are new it’s good to get information in your own language - it breaks down a lot of the barriers - it can only promote inclusion it doesn’t advocate exclusion.”(Focus group participant)

**Women-only meeting spaces:** Allied to the above issue, many participants also identified the need for women only meeting spaces. The view was expressed that having women-only meeting spaces would help to develop community and friendship networks for women that were otherwise lacking. Although such spaces often existed informally, participants felt that women needed some separate provision; specifically a space in which they could create a supportive environment, preferably with some childcare, where women could meet, network, access information from other women and also (when appropriate) receive training.

“We need premises. A place that women can come and get advice, it’s a simple need. Normally there is male workers in the community, women feel isolated and if they want to call us they can- we are the only women in the committee.” (Focus group participant)

**Recommendation 24:** Refugee sector support agencies should work with RCOs to help them identify potential meeting spaces within their communities and find the resources to secure their use. The need for provision of appropriately resourced women-only meeting spaces should be recognised and made a priority to enable women participate more fully in the lives of their communities and avoid isolation.
Support groups for men: A lack of support groups specifically aimed at men was discussed, particularly in the context of loss of status and inability to work. These support groups could help to identify and address some of issues faced by men going through the asylum process and provide support and counselling.

“One thing that is not really high up in our priorities is the impact of the asylum process on men. For example, loss of status or even an independent bread maker finds themselves in a situation...where they're not allowed to provide for themselves. And the psychological impact on people like that I'm sure, is very devastating. I've seen people crushed...the shame of not being able to do that anymore is crushing for some people.” (Focus group participant)

The needs of young people: Discussions indicated that although many young refugees and asylum seekers integrated well into their receiving communities, their needs are not always met by the mainstream groups within that community and were often not consulted on what their needs were. In particular, it was suggested that there were young people in refugee and asylum seeking communities living in isolation for a lot of the time, due to language barriers or as a consequence of family poverty which stopped them from joining in activities and limited their integration.

Conclusion D7: RCOs have a role in helping to meet the needs of young people within refugee and asylum seeking communities. Young people should be supported to formulate their own programmes of activities. In addition young people should be allowed representation on the committees of RCOs and allowed to participate in their development.

Recommendation 25: Refugee sector support agencies have a role in supporting RCOs to audit and assess community need and identify gaps in their provision of services. Where necessary they should then be assisted to plan the development of appropriate services and develop funding strategies to support the delivery of these services.

Access to appropriate housing: One of the specific service areas that focus groups felt was a fundamental issue faced by refugee communities was that of housing. The difficulty of accessing suitable housing was raised in some of the focus groups although this is a wider policy issue and as such this issue can be difficult for RCOs to address directly. However, focus group discussions indicated that there is a potential role for RCOs in helping to find suitable housing and accommodation for refugees. RCOs could provide information, and help refugees to access suitable accommodation through their contacts and networks. Through the networking opportunities created by RCOs, there are also informal housing arrangements that can be facilitated by RCOs and refugee sector support agencies.

“When [people] have problems with housing we liaise with the refugee council.” (Focus group participant)
Data from the focus groups indicated that refugees and asylum seekers sometimes left receiving communities to go to other areas where they either had friends or thought that there may be better housing available. This had a negative impact on community cohesion and the stability of refugee and asylum seeking communities.

“Housing is also a major reason why people leave [area]. Especially if they are single, they are told they are not a priority and so they decide to leave.”...” they will go to somewhere that they have a friend.” (Focus group participant)

**Conclusion D8:** RCOs have a general role to play in providing information and advice in order to assist community members to access services. Helping community members find suitable housing is part of this role and is one of the ways that RCOs can work to alleviate the impacts of homelessness and poverty that can be associated with refugees and asylum seekers, particularly for those who are not a priority need or are destitute (see recommendation 16).

**E: Barriers to meeting organisational objectives, aspirations, and community need**

There is evidence from the focus groups that RCOs and support groups are currently unable to meet many of the areas of need outlined in section D. In response to the identification of unmet need, RCOs were asked to identify their organisational objectives. The evidence indicates that the provision of external support is essential to enable them to overcome some of the barriers to organisational development and meet some of their objectives and aspirations. Major support needs are discussed in more detail in section F of the report. Recommendations for specific forms of support are included, where appropriate, in this section.

**i. Organisational objectives**

Organisations listed more than one objective so the research team allowed for three responses to this question and combined the results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th># of organisations giving this response</th>
<th>% of overall responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help people to develop / education/training</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote culture / social events</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellbeing of members</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress relief / support</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop office space/ premises</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical advice/ support / advocacy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support asylum seekers and refugees</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to FE/ Universities</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generate income / sustainability</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of organisation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lobbying / campaigning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid staff</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build service level agreements</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As table 14 demonstrates a varied number of objectives are outlined by RCOs. These can be divided into some key categories:

- Promoting societal integration
- Promoting wider societal change (e.g. lobbying)
- Development of members (e.g. via access to education & training)
- Providing specific and practical advice and support for members
- Providing social and cultural support for members
- Organisational development, growth and sustainability

**ii. Need for external support to achieve objectives**

96.4% of the organisations surveyed said they need external support to achieve their objectives.

**Conclusion E1:** RCOs feel unable to overcome barriers to their development and achieve their objectives without external support. This is an indication of the high degree of negative impact that the barriers discussed in this section have on RCOs ability to meet the needs of their communities.

**iii. Barriers to organisational development**

This section of the analysis assesses in some details the practical barriers, processes and dynamics that limit the current effectiveness of and developmental opportunities for RCOs. Discussion covers the areas of:

- Limits on organisational capacity.
- Problems of accessing appropriate funding.
- Lack of premises.
- Inability to support volunteers, including provision of transport.
• Inability to employ paid staff.
• Community instability.
• Lack of meaningful consultation and input into policy development and decision making processes.
• Lack of a centralised lobbying and campaigning group.

Wider structural barriers are also discussed such as:
• Lack of status for asylum seekers.
• Lack of opportunity to work and barriers to finding work for refugees.
• Non recognition of qualifications.

Limits on organisational capacity: Many participants raised the issue of limited organisational capacity. Limitations were thought to be due to a combination of factors which included:
• Too heavy reliance on volunteers to run their activities (see discussion below);
• The rationale for the formation of some RCOs, (many RCOs had formed as a group of friends to do something, but had not really developed beyond this point);
• The number and breadth of the issues faced by their communities (which meant they could not solve all the issues raised)
• Lack of ability to develop the organisation (see further discussion on Barriers to organisational development)

“We had very ambitious aims when we started.... and so we wanted to give practical help, friendship, and campaign on education, destitution, the fact that people were being sent back wrongly. And I think as an organisation we found it difficult to do everything at once.” (Focus group respondent)

“The only reason that we don’t do more is that we’re doing it in a voluntary capacity and can’t do more on top of work”(Focus group respondent)

Difficulties in accessing appropriate funding: The importance of accessing funding to aid the development of RCOs was highlighted in the questionnaire survey. Nearly 90% of the RCOs reported being in the process of seeking external funding. The focus groups discussed access to funding in more depth and revealed a number of issues that make it difficult for RCOs to find the funding they need. These included:
• The predominance of short-term project-based funding
• Lack of knowledge on how to develop funding proposals
• Difficultly in writing proposals, including lack of knowledge of ‘buzz words’ such as inclusion, community cohesion, partnership, and empowerment
• Complexity of accountability procedures
• Limited knowledge of and capacity to handle accountancy, legal, and HR procedures
• Limited feedback from funders

“We rely on funding— we get some funding now and we’re all excited, but in two years’ time we’re back to square one—and they ask you to come up with another new project.” (Focus group participant)

The research identified that short-term support, and the complexity of multiple funding streams made it more difficult for RCOs to plan into the future, develop funding strategies and develop their organisations. RCOs believed they would benefit significantly from funding that was long-term, able to support core activities, well publicised, accessible and flexible. This was held in contrast to the relatively short-term funding and support strategies provided by a number of agencies (such as education; health; and community safety) that did not provide a coherent and stable funding structure for RCOs.

“If you’ve got funding you can plan more knowing you have this amount of funding available. If you have a small amount of money and you don’t know if you’re going to get another small amount of funding next year (or the next funding cycle) then you are very limited to what you can actually offer your community. Having the funding in place and being sustainable [are important], so it’s not good having a lot of money this year and then in a few years time when the next cycle comes around you don’t get any at all. (Focus group participant)

Finding funding for young people’s projects was seen as a particular problem. Focus groups revealed that whilst it was relatively easy for young people to come up with ideas for cultural and integration projects, funding was not flexible enough to allow spending on some of these projects. In addition the outputs achieved via cultural events and integration projects centred on young people, did not always match the expected outputs of conventional funding streams. Funders were not perceived as being well disposed towards funding informal events; this was identified as a significant barrier. The view was that funders and other agencies did not always see the usefulness of organisations that are less formal and are driven by young people themselves.

Lack of premises/office spaces: The need for premises was an issue highlighted in the analysis of the questionnaire data (see section D). The importance of this issue was confirmed during focus group discussions, where the ability to secure premises was seen as central to RCO’s ability to fulfil the needs of their community, as well as their ability to develop organisationally. Premises were needed to facilitate many of the activities that RCOs undertook, including the running of advice and drop-in services, the holding of meetings, and also to act as office space for the RCOs themselves.
"We haven't got an office space. We have no space that people can drop into and exchange information. Information exchange is vital for people. If one person has gone through a process he understands the process and he will be at least able to share the information. Although not given in a formal way, it’s important that we meet all together and pass on information." (Focus group participant)

RCOs also needed support to acquire premise to develop into network and organisational centres that have provision for telephone and ICT facilities.

“We need the council or the government to offer a particular building, to say this is going to be a drop-in centre for RCOs and then this can be shared by different communities ... as long as its funded we know that when we go there on a Tuesday, we will be able to find people from this culture, from this country and you are bound to meet up with friends. And that place can be for meeting and socialising but you also need computers and internet access, maybe a telephone so that when ever anybody is in need you can make that phone call.” (Focus Group Participant)

Working without premises causes a variety of problems for RCO volunteers and members. For instance, cases were raised where organisational correspondence had to be addressed to individuals’ houses causing ‘credibility’ issues for the organisations involved.

A lack of premises also meant that RCOs were unable to provide suitable facilities and meeting spaces for women and young people (see section D). Many participants highlighted a lack of facilities where these groups could meet and in the case of young people hang-out with their friends. This placed limitations on the number and types of activities, events and support structures that RCOs could provide for women and young people.

**Conclusion E2:** It is crucial for RCOs to have a presence within their communities; this includes office space to allow for organisational development and spaces that provided a base for cultural and social activities and dissemination of information.

(See recommendation 24 with regard to the provision of meeting spaces).

**Recommendation 26:** Refugee support agencies should work with RCOs to identify appropriate office spaces, possibly ones they could share with other organisations and which could allow the pooling of resources.

**Inability to adequately support volunteers:** Discussions emphasised the point that many refugees and asylum seekers were well educated, and had previously held
intellectually challenging jobs in their home countries. The skills held by these individuals represented an invaluable resource with the potential to aid RCOs to deliver, sustain and develop their activities. However, these individuals needed to be supported to work in a voluntary capacity (or as paid staff).

Participants discussed the limitations created due to RCOs’ dependence on volunteer time and effort. RCOs based on volunteer support could not rely on this support all the time, and were also unwilling to rely too heavily on the goodwill of volunteers to provide transport and materials for the organisation. A clear outcome from discussions in focus groups was that it would be much easier for RCOs to continue working if some form of support could be provided to volunteers to allow them to give their time.

“As an organisation, we don’t have any paid staff- most of the time we try to do our best, but people need to survive and we can’t ask people to come and volunteer all of the time. And sometimes we don’t have volunteer expenses. So these are the important barriers we have as a community.” (Focus group participant)

**Conclusion E3:** The issue of volunteer support could be solved by a relatively low level of funding and support. In addition, volunteer time and capacity could be further strengthened though allocation of resources and training that could help to ease the burden of issues such as hiring premises, finance and other administrative duties.

**Recommendation 27:** Refugee support agencies should assist RCOs in identifying sources of support for volunteer activity, and lobby decision makers and funding organisations on the value of providing this sort of support for smaller organisations.

**Transport for volunteers:** The provision of transport for volunteers was a key issue. Volunteers often did not have access to their own transport but required access to transport in order to be able to deliver activities on behalf of RCOs.

“They say no- we give you £300 for the footballs, etc. but we can’t give you anything to support the volunteers. That’s a difficulty. How can you say to people, ‘come and try to help us’, and they say, ‘ok, we just need some transport’? Most of our members are refugees and asylum seekers. Their budget is really very, very restricted.” (Focus group Participant)

**Conclusion E4:** Finding solutions to the issue of funding transport and other forms of support for volunteers is central to ensuring that there is a sustainable volunteer base to support the activities offered by RCOs.

Focus groups discussion identified that, where possible, volunteers should be supported in onerous tasks by paid workers who would be able to commit more time and energy to delivering activities and other services for RCOs. Where possible,
volunteers should be supported to develop and train so that they could apply for paid worker positions.

**Recommendation 28:** Refugee sector support agencies should assist RCOs to identify and access appropriate training for their volunteers and community members in order to enable them to apply for paid positions within RCOs as these arise.

**Inability to employ paid staff:** Focus group data revealed that the ability to employ paid staff and community development workers would greatly enhance the activities and services that could be provided by RCOs.

However, some RCOs made it clear that they did not want the responsibility of employing paid staff directly as they recognised that they did not have the capacity to support this activity. The possibility of having people seconded into their organisation was mooted.

“What would be good would be to have a development worker here, but without us having to use our volunteer time to do all the technical employment stuff.... we’re a small, unincorporated organisation. And the responsibility...if we employ someone and they don’t like what we do, they can sue us. And we don’t want to bother with any of that.” (Focus group participant)

**Recommendation 29:** RCOs could investigate the possibility of having community development workers based in refugee sector support agencies that could help RCOs with processes of engagement, participation and the delivery of integration activities.

**Recommendation 30:** Where appropriate, RCOs should be supported to employ paid staff/development workers. Refugee sector support agencies should help to facilitate this process through the identification of suitable funding and, if required, through developing RCOs’ abilities and processes to enable them to employ staff. In addition suitable organisations structures should be identified to limit committee members’ liability when taking on ‘risky’ activities such as employing staff and accessing larger amounts of funding.

**Instability of communities:** Many RCOs have difficulties in creating stable communities and volunteer bases. Evidence from the focus groups suggests that people move on to different locations throughout the UK, depending on personal, housing and work circumstances. However, opinion in the focus groups suggested that if RCOs were able to develop more formal opportunities, volunteers would be more likely to stay and develop roots.
“We nominated people for the board ... Some were very qualified. But they decided to leave. They feel [area name] is a small town, and with limited opportunity for them. If we had this well set up, a formal community organisation, people would realise what [area name] has got.”
(Focus group participant)

Lack of meaningful participative consultative processes and input into policy design and decision making processes: The focus groups highlighted problems created where policies and rules are changed without refugees and asylum seekers being adequately consulted. The general opinion voiced was that it is important to have full consultation with all the stakeholders concerned to ensure that the needs and views of the refugee and asylum seeking communities were taken into account when policy was designed.

It was suggested that refugee and asylum seeking communities or their representatives should have links into discussions at strategic levels. It was acknowledged that though this would be difficult to achieve, there was a need to ensure that the ‘voices’ of refugee and asylum seeking communities fed into those spaces where strategy and policy are formulated. This would help to ensure that strategies were best designed to achieve their aims, and to guard against any possible negative implications of policy decisions on refugee and asylum seeking communities.

“When rules are changed or they want to change rules, it’s important that they involve all the people that are concerned. It’s important that we have some people to represent us- to talk on our behalf, or at least share our views so we won’t be neglected or excluded.” (Focus group participant)

The focus groups also indicate that there is a desire for 2-way consultation, with feedback from deliberations at the strategic level so that these can be commented on by RCOs. These feedback mechanisms will help to ensure that strategies and policies will have the greatest positive impact possible.

**Recommendation 31:** Where there is policy or programme changes that are likely to impact on refugee and asylum seeking communities, refugee sector support agencies should support RCOs to contribute to the discussions at a strategic level to ensure that policy design does not create further problems or barriers. Refugee sector support agencies should encourage statutory and voluntary agencies to actively involve representatives of refugee and asylum seeking communities in the strategic planning of services and activities.

Frustration was expressed that whilst a number of consultations had taken place in the past, little real progress was being seen in relation to the problems and issues
that refugees and asylum seekers faced. Participants felt that agencies should be careful to build on evidence previously collected and to ensure that they communicate the outcomes of consultations back to RCOs and refugee communities. Agencies needed to look at what gaps there were in the research around the issues faced by refugee communities and try to address these.

“It’s difficult to see consultations but there is no progression – we needed to look at what’s been left out – there needs to be an understanding of what’s outstanding – agencies need to take on board what other agencies have done.” (Focus group participant)

Lack of a coherent voice for RCOs and a central campaigning and lobbying group and/or networks: Focus group data suggested that RCOs and support groups would have a greater impact if they could present a coherent and united voice from refugee and asylum seeking communities in relation to the development of strategies and policies. Therefore, it is important that RCOs are involved in planning and campaigning, and are able to promote awareness of the issues faced by refugee and asylum seeking communities. Through the organisation of refugees and asylum seekers who are able to express points of view effectively, there is a greater possibility that campaigns for change in policy or practice may be successful.

“We’re not an official group- friends working together. But we have quite limited capacity to do campaigning etc.” (Focus group participant)

“If someone came to the group and said they would like to do a campaign, we’d be quite happy but don’t have the resources to support them.” (Focus group participant)

**Recommendation 32:** There is a role for refugee sector support agencies to help organise campaigns and to enable RCOs and refugees and asylum seekers to lobby effectively, and contribute to debates and decision-making processes at a strategic level.

“I don’t think we’re strategically at that level. Instead of just implementing those policies, we need to be involved in designing those policies.” (Focus group participant)

**Conclusion E5:** In order to address and effectively lobby on some of the broader issues facing their communities RCOs need to develop strong networks with meaningful links into local and national policy and decision makers.

**Recommendation 33:** Refugee sector support agencies have a role in developing RCOs’ networks and enabling them to link in with strategic bodies and policy makers.
iv: Wider structural issues and barriers

Many focus group participants talked about the wider structural issues that impact on refugees and asylum seekers and which mean that there are limits to the opportunities offered to refugees and asylum seekers. A number of subjects were raised within the focus groups that were too wide-ranging for this study to deal with adequately. Many of these relate to policy strategy and programmes at a national and UK level and beyond. Where appropriate the impact of these issues is acknowledged as they create the context in which RCOs and support agencies are currently operating. A summary of the discussion centres on some of following issues:

Lack of status for asylum seekers: Lack of status for asylum seekers was seen as a major barrier both to the development of RCOs and also to the ability of individuals to make a contribution to their community. This problem negatively impacts upon the possibility for integration and the realisation of the wider societal benefits that refugees and asylum seekers can bring to the UK. It is a problem that extends beyond the remit of RCOs and the partnership of support agencies involved in this report; however, as discussed previously, RCOs do a significant amount of work to minimise problems caused by status issues.

"The important barrier is the status of people. That’s the first thing. Because if people who could achieve things can’t do that because they don’t have the status... they try to volunteer, but to volunteer means that they don’t give 100% of what they could give for the community." (Focus Group Participant)

**Conclusion E6:** The lack of status for asylum seekers limits the ability of these individuals to contribute to both the development of RCOs and support groups and to use their skills and knowledge to benefit the community as a whole. This acts to further deplete RCOs’ available resources and thereby has a negative impact on their potential to act as a resource for their communities and for external UK agencies.

The need to widen access to work opportunities: Although beyond the scope of this study, a clear outcome from the focus groups is an understanding that asylum seekers would benefit from the automatic right to work. Providing the option for asylum seekers to work and to receive training/language skills would make it much easier for RCOs to achieve their targets. The focus groups discussed many instances where asylum seekers were unable to work and as a result could not contribute positively to either RCOs or to the receiving community. This has a
negative impact on the individual, and has led to many seeking work illegally leaving them vulnerable to exploitation by employers.

Although this is a concern for wider UK policy, it is important to note the role of RCOs and other support agencies in helping to minimise the negative impact of not being able to work for asylum seekers. RCOs also have a role in supporting refugees and asylum seekers who are being exploited in the workplace who are unable to expose unfair employment practices.

Refugees, although having the right to work, report finding it difficult to find work and have many barriers they need to overcome before they can find work. These barriers can be specific to refugee communities such as language acquisition and of racism, but are also generic such as not getting feedback from applications.

**Conclusion E7:** Support for the provision of volunteering and training opportunities could help to create pathways for refugees and asylum seekers to get valuable work experience and facilitate their move into paid employment.

“We are qualified people, the fact that someone becomes a refugee or an asylum seeker we are normally people who function, oppose whatever the government is that we are running away from. They are people who function within the communities from where they come from and then when they come here - they have qualifications but they still can’t penetrate into the labour markets to do whatever and they don’t lead fulfilled lives so we find ourselves discriminated against solely because we are a minority.” (Focus group participant)

“I am a Business and Information graduate but I am filling out the form for lots of applications, Dominos, Tesco’s, etc. but not getting a reply. Feedback from applications is crucial. I am desperate to get a job. (Focus group participant)

**Non-recognition of qualifications:** An issue raised within the focus groups is that there is less recognition of qualifications gained abroad, and these issues can limit the capacity of individuals to work in the UK and to contribute effectively to UK society. Those affected by this issue would benefit from conversion courses or opportunities to gain further qualifications that would allow them to build on their educational background.

“Some refugees are quite educated, so they have some qualifications. But unfortunately it is not the same as here. So for them to study is quite
difficult. There is a barrier, and it makes it more difficult to move on to higher education.” (Focus Group Participant)

**Recommendation 34:** Policy changes could make significant differences to the quality of life of refugees and asylum seekers. Although these are beyond the direct remit of this study, the research suggests that the following are key policy issues that should be followed up with advocacy and lobbying:
- Tackling the issue of lack of status for asylum seekers
- Allowing asylum seekers to work
- Lobbying to ensure equal opportunities for refugees in finding work by raising awareness of the barriers they face
- Working to get more equal acceptance of qualifications gained abroad

**F: Organisational Support needs**

This section of the report discusses the support needs identified by RCOs which would enable them to meet them to both meet their organisational objectives and the needs of their communities more effectively.

**i. Support needed to achieve objectives**

Respondents to the questionnaire were asked to identify the support they would need to achieve their objectives. Most organisations gave more than one response to this question so the research team allowed for 3 responses per organisation and combined the results; responses were categorised by the research team. 13 categories were identified and the results for each category are shown in Table 15.

**Table 15: Organisational Support needs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supported needed</th>
<th># respondents giving this response</th>
<th>% of overall responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Funding / resources</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premises</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networks / Moral support</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid staff / seconded staff</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnerships / other organisations</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes to policy / WAG</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal support</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Chair</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative help</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Consultants  |  1  |  2  |
Office Equipment  |  1  |  2  |

Results clearly identify that enabling access to funding is the most important support that can be given to RCOs. However there are also other important support needs such as getting premises, staff, and office equipment. There are also indications that the formation of ‘non-monetary’ support structures is required, particularly the provision of training frameworks, the building of networks, and the giving of advice and legal support.

**Conclusion F1:** Although funding is the major issue facing RCOs, RCOs also identify a wide variety of support needs, some of which will not require massive amounts of financial support.

**Recommendation 35:** Refugee sector support organisations need to work together to assess where there are gaps in the provision of identified support needs and work to fill these.

This section of the report looks at the wider discussion that took place around these identified support needs. The following areas are covered:
- Funding
- Lack of premises
- Training
- Development of networks
- Issues relating to the delivery of support

**ii. Funding:**
In a general sense funding emerges as the major issue for all RCOs, although organisational need varies depending on factors such as the size and scope of the organisation. The funding issues raised ranged from the need to generate small levels of funding for resources and equipment for smaller organisations, through to the challenge of bidding for and administering large sums of money in the case of RCOs that are more formalised and which have paid staff. Lack of funds prevented RCOs from accessing other forms of support, such as training on committee development and other issues.

“One of the things we need is help with committee development...we would need funding for that.”(Focus group participant)

Support in developing funding bids emerged as a clear need for many RCOs. The questionnaire demonstrated that whilst most RCOs wished to develop the scope and frequency of their activities, they would require external support and funding to do
Focus group data helped to identify the main problems experienced by RCOs when trying to compile successful funding bids. These included:

- the complexity of funding applications;
- the need to use appropriate wording;
- the need to demonstrate good governance; and
- the need to demonstrate effective systems for administration of funding.

**Conclusion F2:** There is clear need for RCOs to be supported in accessing training on developing funding strategies and fundraising opportunities. This supports earlier conclusions that point to the need for organisations to develop governance processes in order to be able to have the best chance of obtaining funding as and when the opportunity arises.

**Conclusion F3:** A key area of support need for RCOs and support agencies is how to develop successful funding applications.

"With a lot of RCOs, the passion is there, the people are very dedicated. And sometimes these funders, their interest is in whether you come out with something presentable- applications and so on. So if you don’t have that skill, it is difficult." (Focus group participant)

**Recommendation 36:** The data identifies a number of actions that refugee sector support agencies could undertake to enable RCOs to develop successful funding bids. These include:
- Helping RCOs develop strategic planning processes.
- Helping RCOs to identify appropriate funding sources.
- Indicating to RCOs when different rounds of funding become available.
- Providing support to RCOs on how to develop funding strategies, as part of their strategic planning processes.
- Providing support for RCOs on writing successful funding bids. This could involve either ad-hoc support from support organisations on a ‘help-desk’ basis, through a mentoring programme or through the ongoing provision of training.
- Supporting RCOs’ funding applications by acting as referees.
- Providing training and direct support to ensure that RCOs are able to fulfil the requirements required by many funders in relation to financial management and administration and governance structures.

**iii. Finding Premises:**

Access to premises is a central issue in terms of enabling RCOs to develop and sustain a wide range of their current and future activities. This finding is underlined by a need to ensure that organisations can develop their patterns of service provision via training of volunteers, ability to employ paid staff and independently accessing funding.

(See conclusions E2 and recommendations 24 and 26)
iv. Training:

Training and Support Preferences

Organisations were asked to identify the activities they would like to receive training for. Table 16 demonstrates the responses received. The findings demonstrate the key importance of the ability to raise and access funding for RCOs and the recognition that they need training and support to develop this ability. Improving governance and management procedures and widening participation are other areas where the majority of RCOs recognise that they could do with further support and training.

Table 16: Activities respondents would like to receive training for

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities respondents would like to receive training for</th>
<th>Number of organisations</th>
<th>% organisations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Raising funds</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving management board</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding applications</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating with members</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing money</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involving young people</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widening / increasing membership</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registering as a charity</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women into management board</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EST management board</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing a constitution</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Level of training: Focus groups revealed that current provision of training courses was generally viewed positively, but that courses needed to be delivered at the correct level for RCOs. Training delivered by the support organisations was generally viewed as having been of benefit to RCOs. Opinion on training courses was that:

- Training should be viewed as part of a wider set of support mechanisms.
- Support agencies needed to develop formalised programmes of training, but there should also be tasters and courses that are appropriate for other audiences that were more informal and flexible.
- Practical training was important, for example courses that help develop successful bids for funding.

Duplication of training: Findings from the focus groups indicated that there was not a significant level of duplication of training opportunities. This is a positive finding as it indicates that there are no significant challenges to rationalising current training provision. However, issues were raised in terms of how RCOs and refugee and asylum seeking communities accessed information about the training activities that were available.
Gaps in training: Some clear training gaps were highlighted in discussions. These included:

- Training in delivering ESOL (see section D, recommendation 19).
- Business training and business support.
- IT training: Ideally this should be community-led, providing training for people in their own language.
- There is also a need to develop profession-specific training (such as motor mechanics; fork-lift training; childcare) that is delivered in the refugees and asylum seekers' own language. This may involve a flexible approach to the delivery of courses, but could significantly improve the ability of refugees and asylum seekers to engage positively with the labour market and to make a positive contribution to their communities.
- Training on areas such as women's rights and on issues such as domestic violence was requested by some participants.
- Other training in needs identified by RCOs in focus groups and in the questionnaires included training on governance and constitutional issues; note and minute taking; finance and how to manage it; fundraising; communication; Diversity and Equality; and Child protection training. Focus groups highlighted the need for committee training, and to develop skills and knowledge to work in sub-groups that deliver activities within RCOs.
- Communication training and help with reaching refugee and asylum seeking communities was identified by RCOs as an issue and a gap that would be helped by further support and training.

Audit of training available:

**Recommendation 37:** Refugee sector support agencies should collaborate on an ongoing audit of training opportunities. Support agencies should identify in more detail where gaps exist and work together to provide suitable training/support schemes. These training opportunities should be offered by the consortium of support agencies in order to effectively support RCOs and their communities. Where duplication of opportunities is identified, services should be rationalised as best possible.

Training portfolio:

**Recommendation 38:** Support agencies should look to develop a portfolio of training resources and training providers that are able to deliver training on specialist issues such as legal status for community organisations. These should include assessing the availability and appropriateness of 'off the shelf' training provided by organisations such as Communities First, the WCVA and CVCs.

Information in training availability:

**Recommendation 39:** Support agencies should develop an information dissemination strategy regarding availability of training, perhaps in the form of a monthly bulletin that could be emailed out. This should be a combined bulletin from all support agencies, to avoid duplication. This will require joint working and co-ordination between current support agencies.
Support to enable access to training courses:

**Recommendation 40:** Refugee sector organisations should support RCOs to find the resources necessary to support their members and volunteers to take full advantage of available training opportunities.

v. Development of Networks

The creation of networks for RCOs and support groups would help to develop a more knowledge and information based sector. There is a clear role for refugee sector support agencies to help facilitate this, and to create opportunities for discussion and joint working between RCOs.

**Recommendation 41:** Refugee sector support agencies should pool resources to create vibrant networking opportunities for RCOs which would facilitate knowledge and information sharing and joint working between RCOs and support groups.

vi. Other support needs highlighted included:

- Support and funding to create networks of community champions, advocates, and translators.
- Support for volunteers— for example in providing transport, refreshments etc. This support will help to create and sustain volunteer roles.
- Providing office space for drop-in and information sessions, facilitating the exchange of information that can be vital for people.
- The provision of dictionaries, books and other teaching materials would help some RCOs to provide informal and formal English classes and tuition.
- Funding for cultural trips— involving support for activities such as renting coaches with members contributing.

vi. Issues relating to how support is provided to RCOs:

Evidence from the focus groups indicates that support is often provided on an ad-hoc basis, prompted by the RCO emailing or calling support organisations such as DPIA, WRC etc. Refugee sector support agencies were therefore operating in ‘responsive’ mode. Many RCOs favoured this approach, as it allowed questions and queries to be answered as and when they arose. However the success of this approach requires a fairly high degree of flexibility from support agencies in being able to deliver as and when required, and is dependent on the RCOs knowing individuals with suitable capabilities within the support agencies.

Most RCO respondents were satisfied with the support given by existing refugee sector support agencies. Respondents felt that these organisations provided well-tailored support, appropriate to the needs of RCOs. Key to this seems to be the development of positive, trusting inter-personal relationships with key individuals within support agencies. As a result support can be accessed with relative ease. However, this raises an issue concerning the need to maintain these inter-personal
relationships and the ability to continue in the absence or departure of key people. Significant effort may need to be put into ensuring that these gateways can stay open in these situations, and that a suitable succession strategy is in place.

Support accessed via mainstream agencies was generally regarded as useful, and expertise they provided could help RCOs move their organisations forward. However, the focus groups indicated that there needs to be a flexibility that can adapt to the needs of RCOs and can acknowledge the specific needs of refugee and asylum seeking communities.

**Signposting support:**

**Recommendation 42:** Refugee sector support agencies should act as central sources of information on, and signpost RCOs and support groups to, appropriate support available from mainstream support agencies. There is also a role for refugee sector support agencies to act as intermediaries and to ensure that other support agencies are aware of the needs of RCOs when signposting takes place.

**Directory of support:**

**Recommendation 43:** Discussion should be held between refugee sector support agencies as to who is best placed to support particular types of specialist expertise for RCOs. Where it is not feasible for sector support agencies to provide these services directly, a directory of organisations that are willing to provide specialist support services should be created in order to help support RCOs.

**Joint working with community regeneration agencies:**

**Recommendation 44:** Support agencies and RCOs should attempt to work more closely with community regeneration programmes such as Communities First, in order to develop joint training, networks and support systems for RCOs and support groups.

Section G: Future directions and areas of development

i. Areas of work organisations want to develop

Respondents gave more than one response to this question so the research team allowed for 2 responses per organisation and combined the results; responses were categorised by the research team, 17 categories were identified and results for these categories are shown in Table 17.

**Table 17: Areas of work organisations want to develop**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of work identified</th>
<th>N respondents giving this response</th>
<th>% of overall responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establish a centre/ premises</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
95.7% (N=22) of organisations responded that they would need external help to enable them to develop in the longer term future.

**ii. Longer term challenges facing RCOs**

There was significant variation in the 5-year aims of the RCOs that took part in the research. Many wished to become larger, and incorporate a greater variety of activities into their work. There was also a desire to become more formal and to incorporate better governance mechanisms. These included assessing the options for becoming a charity, a company limited by guarantee, and other legal forms. It is important that training and legal advice for these activities is available to allow RCOs to develop and achieve sustainability in the forthcoming years.

However, it is important to understand that RCOs required training on a range of issues, not just governance issues and that not all of them were interested in becoming larger or more formalised. It is important that RCOs are allowed to develop at their own pace to prevent them over stretching, and that support is provided to prevent volunteer burnout. It is also vital that they are allowed to develop in line with the needs of their communities.

Some RCOs expressed the view that it would be preferable for larger, more established refuges sector support agencies to act as umbrella bodies for some
RCOs. Issues raised include the provision of support for activities that involve finance, HR, legal and other key technical functions that most RCOs are unable to deal with internally.

In order to be able to facilitate the future support of RCOs refugee sector support agencies will need to ensure that they develop both their capacities and sustainability and seek the funding necessary to do this.

In some of the focus groups RCOs expressed an eventual desire to become independent of the support of refugee sector agencies. They saw this as a necessary outcome of the empowerment process.

“For a lot of organisations because we are refugees we will always remain that vulnerable group – but there has to be a point when agencies say we have helped that community and now they have got to be able to stand on their own two feet and I think that has got to happen. You can’t go on for 7 - 10 years about how to form an effective RCO, how to manage an effective RCO, there should be some progression because you want to empower us but why can we not break that barrier to where at the end of the day we are equal partners and competitors and there needs to be that progression.” (Focus group participant)

Section 4: Conclusions

A: Organisational details:

Conclusion A1: The current spread of RCOs concurs with patterns of refugee populations across Wales.

Conclusion A2: RCO’s organisational activity covers areas where there is a concentration of refugee and asylum seeker populations.

Conclusion A3: Whilst in terms of nationality, a wide spread of refugee populations seem to be supported by RCOs and support groups, further research is needed to identify those populations not currently provided for.

Conclusion A4: Although word of mouth is the primary method of keeping in touch with their clientele a high level of use of electronic media and ICT is also reported.
B: Organisational Legal structures, income profiles and governance practices.

**Conclusion B1:** Results indicate that only a small number of RCOs and support groups currently benefit from the advantages that relate to having charitable status or from being incorporated.

**Conclusion B2:** Results indicate that external funding has been critical in the past for RCOs’ development with over half a million pounds in funding being reported as having been received.

**Conclusion B3:** Significantly fewer organisations report being currently in receipt of funding than those who reported having received funding in the past.

**Conclusion B4:** Although not all respondents gave data on receipt of funding, information based on those that did indicates that external funding has and continues to be critical to the development of RCOs. Despite its importance less than 30% of RCOs reported being currently in receipt of external funding, although almost 90% of respondents reported that they were currently seeking external funding.

**Conclusion B5:** Only 2 RCOs reported earning income from their activities. In the context of reductions in the number of funding streams available to Third Sector organisations, earning income is a way that RCOs can potentially develop and sustain their organisations. As part of a process of organisational review RCOs should be encouraged to investigate their potential to develop sustainable income streams.

**Conclusion B6:** Although 100% of RCOs report having written governing documents, only half report having written policies in place to support their activities. This demonstrates that there is a need for some RCOs to develop more formalised policies.

**Conclusion B7:** The majority of committee members are elected; this represents good governance practice in the majority of RCOs and support groups who responded to the survey. The processes of appointing committee members were not explored so some further investigation may be necessary help to determine how transparent governance processes are in some RCOs.

**Conclusion B8:** RCOs should be encouraged and supported to review membership of their boards to ensure gender parity is achieved and maintained.

**Conclusion B9:** There is a need for the majority of RCOs to review their financial management practices to see if they meet the needs of their organisation.
Conclusion B10: Although RCOs are good at keeping records of the people who are actively involved in running their organisations, they are less adept at monitoring the use of their organisation by community members.

C: Organisational functions and the services they provide to their communities

Conclusion C1: The provision of support services and the provision of offering of social and cultural activities are central to the role of RCOs and support groups. Although significantly fewer groups describe themselves as faith groups, this is still an important function for a significant proportion of those organisations who responded.

Conclusion C2: RCOs currently provide a wide range of support services for their communities, many of which are central to the needs of their communities.

Conclusion C3: RCOs have a role in accessing further support for their communities via interaction with community regeneration programmes such as Communities First.

Conclusion C4: The provision of personal and emotional support is a central function of RCOs and although the impact of this function is difficult to evaluate, statutory agencies need to recognise the value of this function.

Conclusion C5: The holding of cultural events has a dual purpose in that they provide opportunities for members of refugee and asylum seeking communities to meet and maintain links with the cultures of their home countries. In this way they can help ease the transition from home countries into receiving communities. They also provide opportunities for integration with receiving communities, opportunities for cultural exchange and developing greater mutual understanding.

Conclusion C6: RCOs are well placed to provide information and advice services for refugees and asylum seekers as they are a ‘visible’ presence in the community, as well as being a community level point of contact. Services are provided through a variety of activities including signposting to other agencies and information dissemination. An important part of this is that they are able to provide support in the member’s home language.

Conclusion C7: A key role of RCOs is referral /signposting community members to other agencies. They provide an advice and gateway service for communities that may have limited access to some of these resources.

Conclusion C8: RCOs should be supported to work with statutory agencies in order to help with translation and provide flexible support for language and cultural barriers when they emerge. This work should be remunerated accordingly.

Conclusion C9: RCOs can draw upon the first hand experience of their members, and this underpins the key role RCOs have in delivering many of the activities and services highlighted by the focus groups.
D: Areas of unmet needs within refugee and asylum seeking communities and areas those communities need developing

Conclusion D1: Financial support/ access to funding, access to office space and premises for meetings, access to learning materials and training opportunities and lack of IT equipment were the main forms of unmet community need reported. These are practical needs which relate equally to organisational development.

Conclusion D2: Given support RCOs should continue their current range of activities such as offering direct formal and informal advice, acting as a point of referral to other agencies, provision of interpretation services, providing counselling support and informal support.

Conclusion D3: RCOs should look for ways that they can develop their services to support the unmet needs of their communities. Refugee sector support agencies should support them in this process.

Conclusion D4: Lack of access to educational opportunities impacted negatively on the ability of individuals from refugee and asylum seeking communities to fulfil their potential and contribute to their community.

Conclusion D5: Findings from this research indicate that current ESOL provision is not currently meeting the needs of refugee and asylum seeking communities in terms of either availability of classes or appropriateness of delivery.

Conclusion D6: Lack of childcare is a major barrier to the full participation of women within their communities and within RCOs.

Conclusion D7: RCOs have a role in helping to meet the needs of young people within refugee and asylum seeking communities. Young people should be supported to formulate their own programmes of activities. In addition young people should be allowed representation on the committees of RCOs and allowed to participate in their development.

Conclusion D8: RCOs have a general role to play in providing information and advice in order to assist community members to access services. Helping community members find suitable housing is part of this role and is one of the ways that RCOs can work to alleviate the impacts of homelessness and poverty that can be associated with refugees and asylum seekers, particularly for those who are not a priority need or are destitute (see recommendation 16).
E: Barriers to meeting organisational objectives, aspirations, and community need

**Conclusion E1:** RCOs feel unable to overcome barriers to their development and achieve their objectives without external support. This is an indication of the high degree of negative impact that the barriers discussed in this section have on RCOs’ ability to meet the needs of their communities.

**Conclusion E2:** It is crucial for RCOs to have a presence within their communities; this includes office space to allow for organisational development and spaces that provided a base for cultural and social activities and dissemination of information.

**Conclusion E3:** The issue of volunteer support could be solved by a relatively low level of funding and support. In addition, volunteer time and capacity could be further strengthened through allocation of resources and training that could help to ease the burden of issues such as hiring premises, finance and other administrative duties.

**Conclusion E4:** Finding solutions to the issue of funding transport and other forms of support for volunteers was central to ensuring that there is a sustainable volunteer base to support the activities offered by RCOs.

**Conclusion E5:** In order to address and effectively lobby on some of the broader issues facing their communities RCOs need to develop strong networks with meaningful links into local and national policy and decision makers.

**Conclusion E6:** The lack of status for asylum seekers limits the ability of these individuals to contribute to both the development of RCOs and support groups and to use their skills and knowledge to benefit the community as a whole. This acts to further deplete RCOs’ available resources and thereby has a negative impact on their potential to act as a resource for their communities and for external UK agencies.

**Conclusion E7:** Support for the provision of volunteering and training opportunities could help to create pathways for refugees and asylum seekers to get valuable work experience and facilitate their move into paid employment.

F: Organisational Support needs

**Conclusion F1:** Although funding is the major issue facing RCOs, RCOs also identify a wide variety of support needs, some of which will require relatively low levels of financial support.

**Conclusion F2:** There is clear need for RCOs to be supported in accessing training on developing funding strategies and fundraising opportunities. This supports earlier conclusions that point to the need for organisations to develop governance process in order to be able to have the best chance of obtaining funding as and when the opportunity arises.
**Conclusion F3:** A key area of support need for RCOs and support agencies is how to develop successful funding applications.

## Section 5: Recommendations

**Research caveat:** A number of subjects were raised within the focus groups that were too wide-ranging for this study to deal adequately with. Many of these relate to policy strategy and programmes at a national and UK level and beyond and other issues such as institutional racism and wider discrimination. Where appropriate, the impact of these issues is acknowledged as they create the context in which RCOs and support agencies are currently operating. However in terms of the recommendations contained within this report the research team have concentrated on areas where refugee sector support agencies can have a practical impact.

**Recommendation 1:** Further research is needed to investigate whether RCOs and support groups adequately cater for the needs of all nationalities of refugee and asylum seeking communities.

**Recommendation 2:** RCOs should be encouraged to identify gaps in their provision and supported to develop their work with children, young people and older populations.

**Recommendation 3:** The importance of the use of electronic and ICT technology for keeping in touch with their communities in combination with information on the lack of ICT equipment experienced by many RCOs indicates that support is needed in this area.

**Recommendation 4:** Where applicable refugee sector support agencies should support RCOs to undertake organisational reviews in order to determine whether their legal status or structure suits their organisational developmental needs.

**Recommendation 5:** Refugee sector support organisations need to develop ways of supporting and enabling RCOs to access funding.

**Recommendation 6:** Refugee sector support agencies can help RCOs to identify ways in which they can earn income and also develop opportunities for RCOs to earn income from their activities. Refugee sector support agencies also have a role in signposting RCOs to external agencies involved in the development of social enterprise activities.

**Recommendation 7:** Although 100% of RCOs reported having written governing documents, there is a clear role for refugee sector support agencies to facilitate the
development of written policies to underpin the operations of RCOs and support groups.

**Recommendation 8**: Although the majority of organisations demonstrated that they had good governance processes in place, refugee support sector agencies should develop ways of supporting RCOs to review their governance procedures to ensure transparency in the way in which committee member are elected and to ensure greater gender parity on their management boards.

**Recommendation 9**: There is a role for refugee sector support agencies to support RCOs and support groups to facilitate the development of more formal financial management procedures, should they identify that these would help them achieve greater organisational sustainability.

**Recommendation 10**: Refugee sector support agencies should support RCOs and support groups to develop ways of monitoring the use of their organisations and of demonstrating their impact to potential funders.

**Recommendation 11**: Refugee sector support agencies need to enable RCOs and support groups to sustain their provision of support services and the holding of cultural and social events within their communities as these constitute their main reported function. Support should also be provided to allow those organisations that act as faith groups to continue doing so.

**Recommendation 12**: Refugee sector support agencies should aid RCOs to find funding to help them maintain their current range of essential activities and services as well as enabling them to develop their activities and earn income directly from via routes such as developing service level agreements with statutory agencies.

**Recommendation 13**: Refugee sector support agencies should support RCOs and support groups to develop ways of evaluating their impact in the areas of provision of advice and support, easing integration into receiving communities and the provision of a ‘safety-net’ for members of their communities.

**Recommendation 14**: Although information packs are available for new arrival to the UK, it is important that RCOs are given the chance to contribute to the design of these packs, and that the packs are localised and targeted to needs of different communities.

**Recommendation 15**: RCOs should be supported to maintain and develop their activities that:
- Provide support for new arrivals to the UK
- Provide information and translation facilities for refugees and asylum seekers
- Develop cultural events and integration strategies

**Recommendation 16**: RCOs should be supported to develop a network of community champions, consisting of individuals and groups that can work as intermediaries between statutory agencies such as the police, local authorities and benefits agencies. Cultural differences may be helped by working as interpreters and
liaising between police, other agencies and refugee and asylum seeking communities. Through working as cultural intermediaries, community champions may enable more effective delivery of services

**Recommendation 17:** Refugee sector support agencies should work to raise awareness and recognition within statutory agencies of the added value that RCOs’ first-hand experience gives to their ability to deliver assessable and appropriate services to members of refugee and asylum seeking communities.

**Recommendation 18:** Refugee sector support agencies groups need to design initiatives to support RCOs to find solutions to the many practical issues they face which would enable them in turn to provide more effective support for their communities.

**Recommendation 19:** There is a need to develop a range of opportunities to access ESOL courses and to provide the courses in ways that are most accessible and appropriate for refugees and asylum seekers. RCOs have a role in helping design provision of ESOL courses.

**Recommendation 20:** Refugee sector support agencies should work with RCOs to identify, support and find training for individuals willing and capable of learning to deliver language support to refugee and asylum seeking communities.

**Recommendation 21:** Refugee sector support agencies should work to support RCOs to find the resources they need to provide childcare at their meetings and events allowing women the time to participate more fully in their activities.

**Recommendation 22:** Refugee sector support agencies should ensure that childcare is provided for all of their training events, and that they lobby other agencies to provide crèche facilities at training events also.

**Recommendation 23:** That refugee sector support agencies work with RCOs to identify, support and find training for individuals willing and capable of training to deliver childcare services within their communities.

**Recommendation 24:** Refugee sector support agencies should work with RCOs to help them identify potential meeting spaces within their communities and find the resources to secure their use. The need for provision of appropriately resourced women only meeting spaces should be recognised and made a priority to enable women participate more fully in the lives of their communities and avoid isolation.

**Recommendation 25:** Refugee sector support agencies have a role in supporting RCOs to audit and assess community need and identify gaps in their provision of services. Where necessary they should then be assisted to plan the development of appropriate services and develop funding strategies to support the delivery of these services.
Recommendation 26: Refugee support agencies should work with RCOs to identify appropriate office spaces, possibly ones they could share with other organisations and which could allow the pooling of resources.

Recommendation 27: Refugee support agencies should assist RCOs in identifying sources of support for volunteer activity, and lobby decision makers and funding organisations on the value of providing this sort of support for smaller organisations.

Recommendation 28: Refugee sector support agencies should assist RCOs to identify and access appropriate training for their volunteers and community members in order to enable them to apply for paid positions within RCOs as these arise.

Recommendation 29: RCOs could investigate the possibility of having community development workers based in refugee sector support agencies that could help RCOs with processes of engagement, participation and the delivery of integration activities.

Recommendation 30: Where appropriate, RCOs should be supported to employ paid staff/development workers. Refugee sector support agencies should help to facilitate this process through the identification of suitable funding and, if required, through developing RCOs’ abilities and processes to enable them to employ staff. In addition suitable organisations structures should be identified to limit committee member’s liability when taking on ‘risky’ activities such as employing staff and accessing larger amounts of funding.

Recommendation 31: Where there is policy or programme changes that are likely to impact on refugee and asylum seeking communities, refugee sector support agencies should support RCOs to contribute to the discussions at a strategic level to ensure that policy design does not create further problems or barriers. Refugee sector support agencies should encourage statutory and voluntary agencies to actively involve representatives of refugee and asylum seeking communities in the strategic planning of services and activities.

Recommendation 32: There is a role for refugee sector support agencies to help organise campaigns and to enable RCOs and refugees and asylum seekers to lobby effectively, and contribute to debates and decision making processes at a strategic level.

Recommendation 33: Refugee sector support agencies have a role in developing RCOs’ networks and enabling them to link in with strategic bodies and policy makers.

Recommendation 34: Policy changes could make significant differences to the quality of life of refugees and asylum seekers. Although these are beyond the direct remit of this study, the research suggests that the following are key policy issues that should be followed up with advocacy and lobbying:
- Tackling the issue of lack of status for asylum seekers.
- Allowing asylum seekers to work.
• Lobbying to ensure equal opportunities for refugees in finding work by raising awareness of the barriers they face.
• Working to get more equal acceptance of qualifications gained abroad.

Recommendation 35: Refugee sector support organisations need to work together to assess where there are gaps in the provision of identified support needs and work to fill these.

Recommendation 36: The data identifies a number of actions that refugee sector support agencies could undertake to enable RCOs to develop successful funding bids. These include:
• Helping RCOs to identify their priorities.
• Helping RCOs develop strategic planning processes.
• Helping RCOs to identify appropriate funding sources, and indicating to RCOs when different rounds of funding become available.
• Providing support to RCOs on how to develop funding strategies, as part of their strategic planning processes.
• Providing support for RCOs on writing successful funding bids. This could involve either ad-hoc support from support organisations on a ‘help-desk’ basis, through a mentoring programme or through the ongoing provision of training.
• Supporting RCOs’ funding applications by acting as referees.
• Providing training and direct support to ensure that RCOs are able to fulfil the requirements required by many funders in relation to financial management and administration and governance structures.

Recommendation 37: Refugee sector support agencies should collaborate on an ongoing audit of training opportunities. Support agencies should identify in more detail where gaps exist and work together to provide suitable training/support schemes. These training opportunities should be offered by the consortium of support agencies in order to effectively support RCOs and their communities. Where duplication of opportunities is identified, services should be rationalised as best possible.

Recommendation 38: Support agencies should look to develop a portfolio of training resources and training providers that are able to deliver training on specialist issues such as legal status for community organisations. These should include assessing the availability and appropriateness of ‘off the shelf’ training provided by organisations such as Communities First, the WCVA and CVCs.

Recommendation 39: Support agencies should develop an information dissemination strategy regarding availability of training, perhaps in the form of a monthly bulletin that could be emailed out. This should be a combined bulletin from all support agencies, to avoid duplication. This will require joint working and co-ordination between current support agencies.

Recommendation 40: Refugee sector organisations should support RCOs to find the resources necessary to support their members and volunteers to take full advantage of available training opportunities.
**Recommendation 41:** Refugee sector support agencies should pool resources to create vibrant networking opportunities for RCOs which would facilitate knowledge and information sharing and joint working between RCOs and support groups.

**Recommendation 42:** Refugee sector support agencies should act as central sources of information on, and signpost RCOs and support groups to, appropriate support available from mainstream support agencies. There is also a role for refugee sector support agencies to act as intermediaries and to ensure that other support agencies are aware of the needs of RCOs when signposting takes place.

**Recommendation 43:** Discussion should be held between refugee sector support agencies as to who is best placed to support particular types of specialist expertise for RCOs. Where it is not feasible for sector support agencies to provide these services directly, a directory of organisations that are willing to provide specialist support services should be created in order to help support RCOs.

**Recommendation 44:** Support agencies and RCOs should attempt to work more closely with community regeneration programmes such as Communities First, in order to develop joint training, networks and support systems for RCOs and support groups.
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