



# ACH Impact Report 2021

Building a better future for  
refugees and migrants in the UK.

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# Building a better future for refugees and migrants in the UK

ACH exists to ensure people from a refugee or migrant background arriving in the UK can access opportunities and support that enables them to enjoy fulfilling lives. We provide safe, supported housing for refugees and migrants in Birmingham, Bristol, Wolverhampton and Coventry, and the training, guidance and support they need to build better futures.

Despite the UK being the world's fifth-biggest economy, refugees can struggle to access housing, training, job vacancies and business advice that can leave them isolated and vulnerable. During 2020-21 political instability, global conflicts, the ongoing impact of COVID-19 and negative media portrayals of migrants have made the situation for refugees worse. Our services and support are more vital than ever before.

ACH's 80 staff combine lived experience, an exceptional set of skills and a passion for improving the lives of refugees. Over the past year, ACH has focused support on vital areas, including tackling digital inclusion during lockdown. The SCORE project used National Lottery funding to distribute over 200 tablets to adults, enabling them to access training and employment opportunities.

ACH's Critical Time Intervention (CTI) project, developed in partnership with Crisis, is testing whether structured, time-limited support for refugees in the post-asylum period will help them integrate more quickly with society, reducing the risk of them ending up on the streets. Our Migrant Business Support Project, funded by AMIF, is helping non-EU migrants to establish businesses, providing a personalised package of advice and guidance for emerging entrepreneurs.

In 2021 alone, we have helped over 1000 people to achieve their personal goals and lead fulfilling lives in their new country. You can read some of their stories and understand the impact we're having in this report.

As well as practical support, ACH is an outspoken voice for the rights of refugees. We advocate for positive policy change, including campaigns to have asylum classed as a human right and challenging the damaging National and Borders bill. We're working hard to target harmful stereotypes, with our #rethinkingrefugee campaign redefining and re-centring public and media perceptions of refugees.

We have received royal recognition for our achievements. In 2021, HRH Duke of Kent and the Lord Lieutenant of Bristol Peaches Golding presented us with the Queen's Award for Enterprise for our work transforming the futures of refugees.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequalities and highlighted the importance of our work. Today and in the future, our focus is on supporting refugees and migrants to build stronger communities and better futures.



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# CEO Message

Fuad Mahamed, Chief Executive Officer

Welcome to our Impact report. The last year has been incredibly challenging for many reasons. Still, I'm proud to say ACH and Himilo have continued to deliver life-changing service and support. In this report, you can read about some of our achievements. Everything in this report comes from the dedication, commitment and skills of our staff, residents and partners.

Our volunteers are critical to our success. Throughout 2020-1, we have grown our professional capability, embedding new competency frameworks. This is helping to raise standards and equip people with the professional skills required to realise our ambitions. As Head of Profession for Programme and Project Managers, I am fully committed to developing our capability to deliver excellent projects and programmes.

This report highlights some incredible work our staff are doing to help refugees and migrants in the UK build better futures in 2021.

## Housing

One of our core aims is to provide safe and supported housing for refugees and migrants who want to make a new life in the UK. Today, we have over 600 tenants in supported accommodation. We've seen growth in demand during the previous year in all areas we cover, including Bristol, Wolverhampton, and Birmingham.

To respond, we've opened a new office and operation in Coventry. Growth hasn't affected our standards, with successful inspections from Bristol City Council and



ongoing reviews in Birmingham progressing positively. We received the Queen's Award in recognition of our work over the past decade.

Many of our staff have lived migration experience and are always willing to offer extra support to those in need. For example, in 2021, ACH staff distributed 2 tonnes of food to residents during lockdowns, providing a vital lifeline in a time of great need.

The ACH team has focused on sustainability, implementing new systems, practices and processes to reduce our impact on the planet. People remain our priority, and providing a safe and secure home is the core of what we do at ACH. You can read some of our innovative projects and learn about the impact we're having on peoples' lives.

## Himilo

Himilo Training is our innovative training subsidiary, providing careers advice, employment opportunities, training courses and personalised business support to ACH tenants and the wider community. As a learner who faced barriers to learning, I created Himilo to ensure that all learners receive the high-quality learning experience they deserve, with an emphasis on practical outcomes.

Himilo has proved incredibly successful, with 2021 a year of fantastic progress. We now work directly with employers to address skills shortages and ensure our unique training

programmes match their requirements. As a result, Himilo leads the way in providing and delivering life-changing opportunities, removing barriers that many learners and potential employers face.

Himilo is a model for inspiring refugees and empowering them to embrace opportunities and build better futures.

## A personal thank you

It's been an incredible privilege to work with ACH's dedicated staff, who have delivered the mission and values of ACH over the last 13 years. I've learned so much working alongside all of you. As we recognise our first decade as a community, I wanted to share my most salient lessons from our journey together. These lessons and your passion inspire and inform my optimism for the future of our work. I hope to continue to work with you and listen and learn from you for many years to come.

To our partners, thank you for the ten remarkable years of warmth, friendship, and support. We absolutely couldn't have done it without you, nor can we take the next steps without your help. I know you'll keep holding us to high standards, and I welcome your challenge, support and guidance.

What a fulfilling learning journey this has been, inspired and uplifted by the thousands of our learners and tenants we have impacted in ways we probably can't even imagine. And yet, we are still taking baby steps. As we continue with our life-changing work, we must dedicate ourselves to #rethinkingrefugees as people with talent, skills and aspirations who can and will contribute to our society if we let them.

This endeavour will provide us with renewed impetus to meet these new challenges to design, develop, and deliver IT systems and solutions that improve the customer experience. This has been a clear aim and ambition that's at the very heart of our plans for 2020-1.

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# Abdulbagi's story

'When I arrived in the UK, it was clear that things were different here than in Sudan. I quickly realised I didn't know many things about the UK. I had no idea about Universal Credit. I wanted to find work but had no clue how to search for jobs. I wanted to improve my English primarily to communicate with other people, but I didn't know where to start. I had no GP, and I wasn't registered to study at a college.

The most important thing I wanted was my own house to live in. At that point, I had been sharing a house with other people for a long time and wanted my independence.

I had recently left G4S property after receiving my Refugee Status Leave to Remain, and I had nowhere to go. I needed a place to live, and I needed help to learn to integrate into the UK and become independent in a new country, so I approached ACH after being recommended by a friend.

ACH helped me with everything. Firstly, they provided me with a room to live in. I was then taught how to use my Universal Credit account. I was helped to apply for a job with Amazon over Christmas time. I was registered for a house with Wolverhampton Homes, and months later, I was offered a place of my own.

ACH helped me with an application with Zakat, where I was offered £800 to buy furniture for my new house. I was also supported with registering utility bills and other things in

my new house by ACH. I could start to build a life and experience independence.

I attended English lessons at the ACH office, which helped me improve my confidence. Today, I'm studying Accounting and Finance at University. ACH helped me with a lot of things, small and big. They even helped me to register at a gym.

My confidence has improved massively. I feel like a member of society now. I have become independent and hardly need any support. I have my own house, and I am studying for a degree that I have always wanted. I am now waiting for my wife and children to join me in the UK from Sudan.

If ACH had never helped me, I would have had to rely on my friends in the same position. This would have been very difficult, if not impossible.

I personally want to thank the CEO of ACH for having good people to help me when I needed it.' - Abdulbagi, ACH client



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# Ignite Integration

Increasing involvement, changing lives

Coventry is home to the second-highest number of international migrants (ONS Local Migration Indicators (2013-2017)), with thousands of new arrivals seeking a better future. To help them, ACH partnered with Coventry City Council and Coventry Job Shop to create the Ignite Integration Programme, a holistic package of support that helps refugees become involved and engaged in local life. The project was funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Core to the project is the ACH Integrass Toolkit (now known as Tailored). Individuals are asked a series of questions to assess their level of integration. The responses enable us to create a tailored package of support, known as a Personal Integration Plan, that helps them overcome barriers to personal, social and economic integration.

We helped hundreds of individuals to achieve their goals, including getting a job, a house or settled asylum status. To date, Ignite partners have worked with 169 refugees and migrants, listening to them, learning from them and working together. In total, we completed 206 Integrass Assessments (including benchmarking assessments) and provided 1,302 individual interventions. The programme has helped 30 individuals get a job, providing access to employment 6-12 months earlier than expected without our intervention. The work has clear economic benefits for Coventry and increased social cohesion and inclusion in city-centre communities.

Statistics only tell half the story. Feedback from those who have experienced the programme has been incredible. "You are so amazing. I've never had help like this in all my life. God bless you, Employment Support. The Job Shop and the Ignite Integration Programme. You guys are making a huge difference in my life." An Ignite Integration Learner, Coventry.

The programme has changed lives and has demonstrated the power and potential of collaboration for communities in Coventry. It's a model for the MyCoventry project, providing skills-based support to improve the language skills and literacy of new migrants.

# Measuring our impact

Our impact in the year 2020 - 2021

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Founded in **2008**

**2,500** individuals supported each year

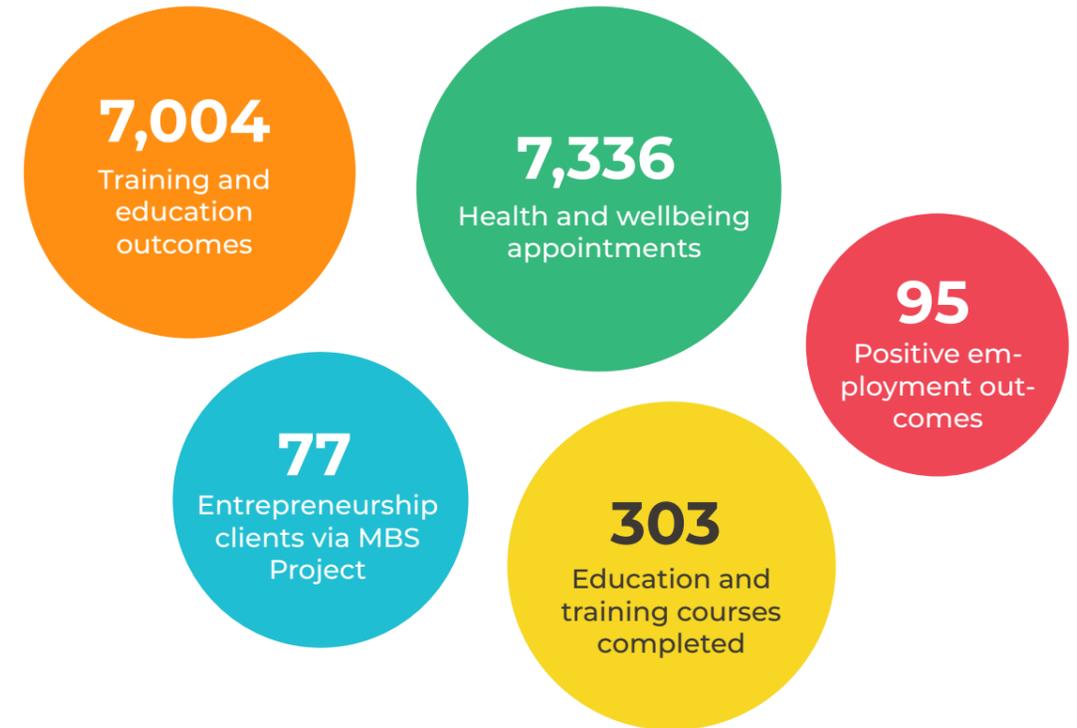
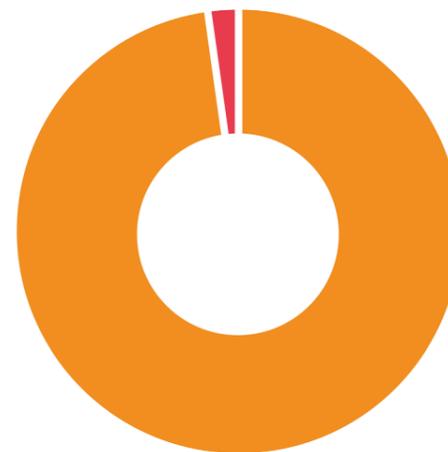
**28,000** hours of engagement

**11** family reunions

**22** projects

**80** staff

**4** offices



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# Key Projects

ACH provides tailored integration services to empower individuals, and advocacy and awareness raising activities to disrupt the systems that entrench inequalities in our society. We're working to provide refugees with a better future in the UK. Here are some key projects that have made an impact in 2020-21.

## **SCORE Project**

**Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme**

**Bob-UK**

**Change Makers Project**

**Critical Time Intervention (CTI) Programme**

**Queen's Award for Enterprise**

**#RethinkingRefugee**





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# Window of opportunity

Project: Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme

The scale of the Syrian refugee crisis is vast, with almost 14 million refugees searching for a new home. Since 2019, ACH's Syrian Vulnerable Person's Resettlement Scheme has been helping migrants to develop skills for employment, access opportunities and build a better life in the UK.

"Our training team in Birmingham have been working with 109 people to assess their needs and develop the right employment and integration plan for an individual," says ACH Employment Advisor Lina.

Like many ACH employees, Lina has first-hand lived experience that she uses every day in her work. Since arriving in the UK from Syria as a refugee, Lina has completed a BTEC qualification, English language courses and secured employment at ACH. Today, she's at the heart of the programme and is passionate about improving the lives of newly arrived Syrian refugees, encouraging them to achieve their potential. "Determination and hard work is the key to finding a window of opportunity and hope when life closes a door," she says.

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# Digital lifeline

Project: SCORE Project

COVID-19 has increased the digital divide, with many refugees unable to access or afford the technology they need to access online opportunities for employment, education and access to services. ACH's SCORE project used funding from the National Lottery Community Fund to provide 200 refugees with a tablet and training on how to use it.

Learners in Bristol, Birmingham and Wolverhampton attended digital training sessions to develop skills in staying safe online, protecting personal data and understanding British values. The project provides a digital lifeline for learners and an entry point to employment for those involved.

'The tablet helps me with searching on websites and completing courses: I completed my ICT course through it.'

'It has been useful to use, especially when applying for jobs online.'





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# Build in aspiration

Project: Bob-UK

ACH is pioneering the use of Bob-UK, an open-source, AI-powered assistant created by Bayes Impact that can match an individual's skills to local employment opportunities. Bob identifies barriers to employment and proposes a phased, progressive strategy to help jobseekers gain employment. It also acts as an unbiased and well-informed job counsellor, available 24/7 to support jobseekers.

The technology uses insights from cognitive psychology, artificial intelligence, and learning algorithms to provide accurate and informed guidance.

The potential of Bob-UK was recognised by Nesta, who awarded us first prize in their CareerTech Challenge. Bob-UK's potential is incredible, says ACH's Chief Innovation Officer Richard Thickpeny. "(Bob-UK) goes beyond traditional skills matching by exploiting AI designed by our staff teams to transform individuals' career plans and build in aspiration. For front-line support staff and careers coaches, it is an essential tool ensuring their advice and guidance is linked to the immediate and future needs of their cities."

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# Leading the Change Makers

Project: Change Makers Project

The UK is home to almost 150,000 refugees, many of whom face significant barriers to integration, employment and access opportunities. Funded by a £600,000 grant from Comic Relief, the Change Makers Project aims to ensure that all refugees can maximise their social and economic potential through person-centric policies.

Developed in partnership with the Refugee, Asylum and Migration Policy (RAMP), we're creating a robust evidence base to better inform the development of city and regional policies and initiatives to integrate people from refugee backgrounds.

To understand the impact of local and regional policies on refugees, we're producing regular State of the City reports. In addition, we're actively engaged in stimulating discussion on issues affecting refugees, helping to shift perceptions of refugees and identifying employment opportunities with the private sector.

"I support ACH and RAMP's new initiative that will bring to light potentially unidentified barriers to integration in Bristol and bridge the gap between organisations delivering integration services and policymakers." Marvin Rees, Bristol Mayor.





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## Time to change

Project: Critical Time Intervention (CTI) Programme

Refugees are at an increased risk of experiencing hardship, leading to homelessness and life on the streets. ACH's Critical Time Intervention (CTI) Programme targets high-risk refugees, providing refugees access to housing and advice, guidance and support to integrate into the local community.

Working in partnership with homelessness charity Crisis, ACH has developed a three-month programme based on evidence and best-practice to assist refugees to live independently. The three-phase programme gradually scales back support as participants create community links and build support networks.

“Ending homelessness is not just about providing bricks and mortar, but also about providing the support needed for someone to keep that home,” says Sarah Walters, Head of Best Practice, Crisis. The CTI programme establishes a framework that provides refugees with safe housing and the support they need to build a better future.

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# Royal recognition

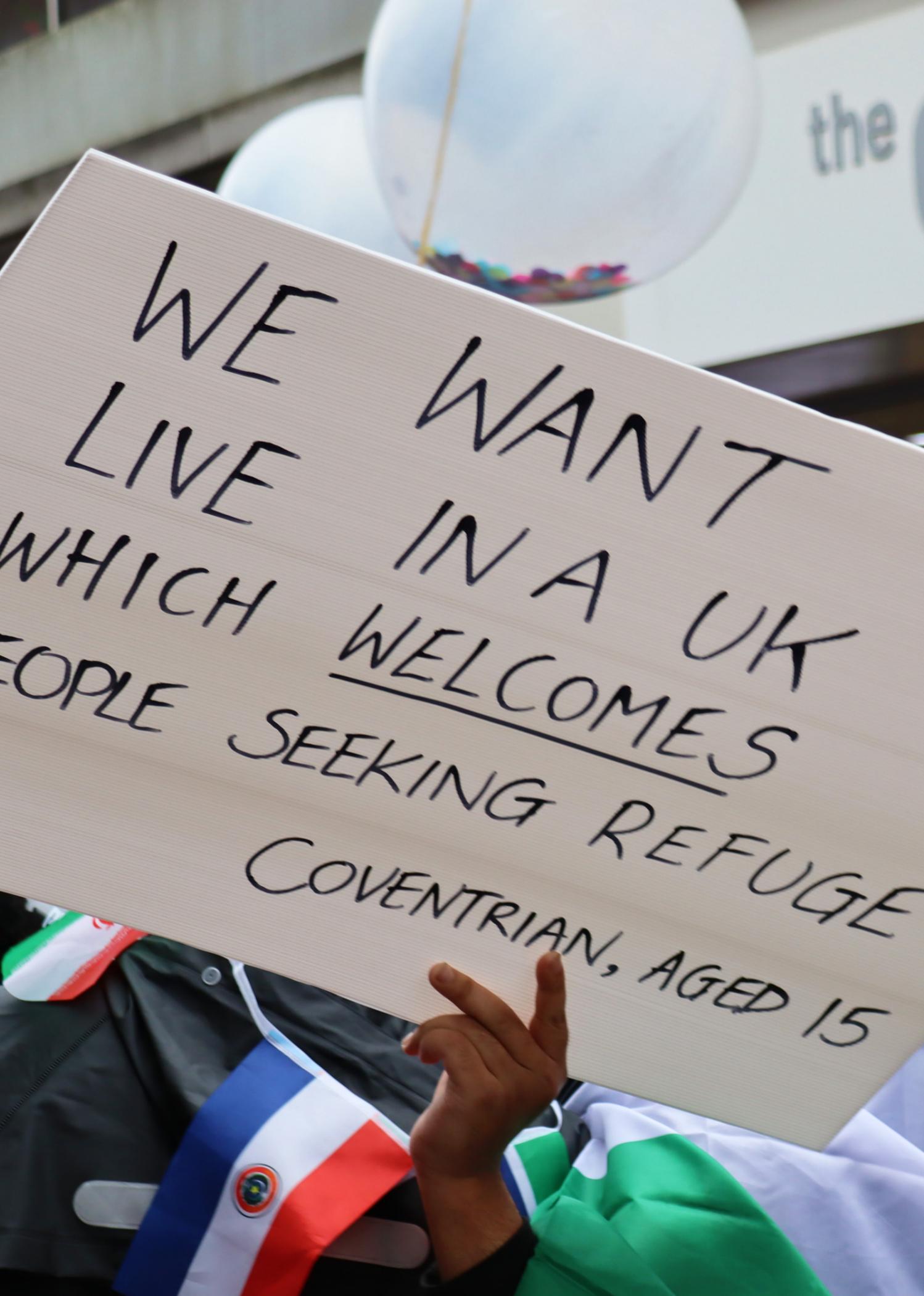
Project: Queen's Award for Enterprise

In 2021, ACH received the Queen's Award for Enterprise, an annual business award bestowed on companies in the UK, by Her Majesty the Queen. The award was in recognition of our work in promoting opportunity (through social mobility).

We work hard to create and promote opportunities for refugees and newly arrived people to forge meaningful, sustainable and happy lives in the UK. The award reflects the impact we've had and the positive outcomes we've had for the thousands of people who have used our services.

The award was presented to ACH by HRH Duke of Kent and Lord-Lieutenant of Bristol, Peaches Golding. "Winning the Queen's Award is a huge achievement for ACH. We pride ourselves on our accommodation, the support services and training we offer to our customers," said ACH CEO Fuad Mahamed. "Last year has been a difficult year going through the pandemic, the response of our staff has been exemplary, and this is a worthy recognition for all our relentless and untiring response."





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## #RethinkingRefugee

It's impossible for one organisation to change the systems around refugee resettlement and integration by themselves, so we're creating a community for change called #RethinkingRefugee.

At the heart of our #RethinkingRefugee has always been our aim to promote change through others by sharing best practices, working together in partnership and providing others with the opportunity to meet and discuss how we can develop the right solutions to the right problems.

Our project launches have been well attended, and supported by key stakeholders helping us to share the message widely. Our academic series with MMB has seen us work closely with academia to bring new insights to existing research, opening new areas of research and feeding directly into the student experience through guest lecturing and other opportunities.

#RethinkingRefugee is an ongoing campaign to support refugees and migrants to build a better, brighter future, and we're continuing to develop new projects, partnerships and collaborations that will change lives.

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## Future forward

The previous year has been incredibly challenging for us all in ACH, but also immensely successful.

We should be enormously proud of what we achieved. I've no doubt this year will be equally demanding but that, building on our firm foundations, we can be equally successful.

To do this we must continue to work well together across our own individual ACH Divisions, but also to get better still at working with our partners, stakeholders and supporters.

We have demonstrated we can deliver - we stand ready to meet the challenges of 2022-23 with renewed vigour. A core part of this will be enabling the ACH's Change Programme detailed in the new Business Plan.

While we will undoubtedly face challenges, I know that by working together, we can face them and overcome them for the benefit of the people who rely upon us to help them create a better future.



**ACH**