

Older Syrian Refugees in Oldham and Salford

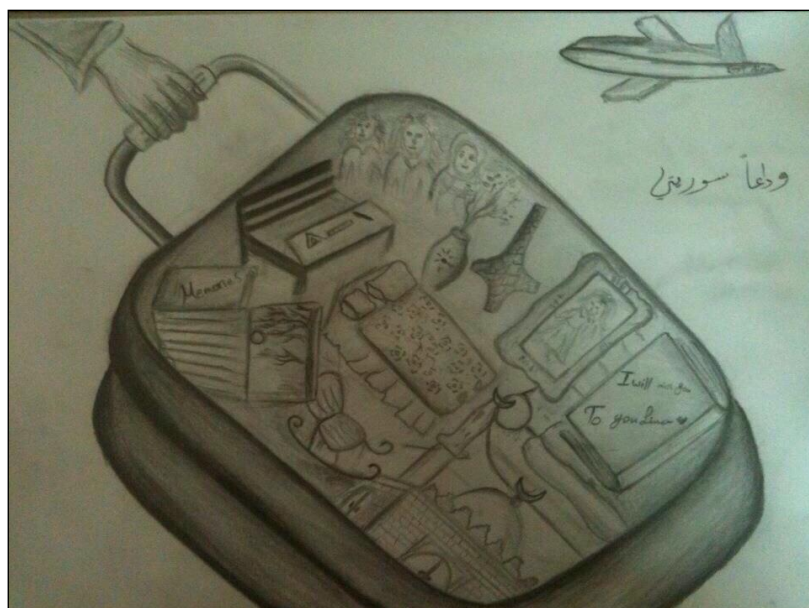
Ambition for Ageing “Ageing Equally?” Research Project

by Rethink Rebuild Society

Simpler summary report

This is an easier to read summary of the “Ageing Equally?” research report by Rethink Rebuild Society.

It contains some background to the research, the main findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The Equalities Board team have written it to help people understand the research more easily, and to make it easier to use the findings to make places better for older people.



Glossary

Ambition for Ageing (AfA) = a Greater Manchester programme that aims to make communities more age-friendly and improve older people's quality of life

Arab = someone who is from a country or ethnic group that speaks Arabic. These groups and countries are in the Middle East and North Africa.

Communities of identity or experience = a group of people who share a common identity or experience (e.g. Bangladeshi people, LGBT people, or people living with dementia)

Data = information

GMCVO = Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisations, the organisation that is responsible for managing the Ambition for Ageing programme

Hate crime = a crime committed against someone because of their identity, for example because they are disabled, LGBT+, BAME, etc

Identity = your sense of your self

Inhumane = cruel or unkind

Integration = when someone becomes a part of their community

Interviewee = someone who is interviewed for a research project

Kurdish = member of an ethnic group that comes from an area called Kurdistan, which crosses the borders of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria

Mainstream = catering for the majority, not specialised

Marginalised = the result of being pushed to the margins of society: excluded or ignored

Minority = a group of people who are different in some way from the majority of the population

Participant = someone who takes part in a project

Social media = Internet sites where people make friends, share personal interests and have conversations, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc

1. Introduction and background

Rethink Rebuild Society

Rethink Rebuild Society is a charity in Manchester that helps to improve the lives of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants who are mostly from Syria.

Context

The research project worked with older Syrians who live in Salford or Oldham. Most came to the UK after the start of the Syrian crisis in 2011. This is when a civil war started and people had to leave the country. The researchers thought that barriers of culture, age and language might combine to affect people's ability to integrate into life in their local UK communities.

Aims of the research

The research aimed to look at the lives of older Syrians in Salford and Oldham, in order to find out how to improve these places for them.

Summary of findings

For older people from Syria, the sense of belonging to their neighbourhood in Oldham or Salford was complicated by their past experiences as refugees and experiences of discrimination in the UK. Many felt more connected to Manchester where there is a larger Syrian community. English language, low income and difficulties understanding health and social care systems in the UK also caused barriers to integrating and making social connections. Like most older people, older Syrians want to live in safe, clean, welcoming environments with good public transport.

2. Method: How Rethink Rebuild Society did their research

Fifteen participants aged over 50 took part - nine from Salford and six from Oldham. Eight were men and seven women. Ten identified as Arab and five as Kurdish. Nine were married and six widowed or divorced. Only one person identified as disabled, although others had long term health conditions.

The research used two main methods: walking interviews and Photovoice, in which people use pictures to record their daily lives. Each participant was given a smartphone to photograph important events and places. They were then interviewed about the photographs they had taken. Researchers used walking interviews to find out how people related to their neighbourhoods. Participants chose the walking route and the conversations were recorded.

3. Findings: What Rethink Rebuild Society found out

Older Syrians face some specific issues because they are refugees, as well as more general issues because they are older.

a) Belonging and integration

Older Syrians have complicated feelings about feeling at home in Salford and Oldham. Some feel comfortable, safe and respected. Others want very much to go back to Syria, but know they cannot. Some who did not feel part of their local community thought this might be because of inhumane treatment they experienced when seeking asylum in the UK, or because they feared local people would not welcome them. For some people, leaving Syria unexpectedly made it difficult to feel secure in a new place, in case this happens again.

Safety was very important. Some people had experienced hate crime including their home being attacked. Some had seen negative social media comments about refugees. At first some believed they would face discrimination but this changed when they met kind local people. Many felt their neighbourhood would feel more like home if there were more Syrian elders living there. Some people liked going to Manchester where there is a larger Syrian community, Syrian shops and the Rethink Rebuild Society community centre.

English language is a barrier for many older Syrians. Many, especially those with jobs, show resilience and determination in learning English, while others felt they were too old to learn it well. Many also did not understand health and social care systems, or do not have digital skills to access them.

b) Work, income and free time

Most participants lived on Universal Credit or Pension Credits. Men in the study felt work was very important and were prepared to take lower status jobs than the ones they had in Syria. However, their age and English language abilities made getting a job difficult. Some were concerned that the time it takes to retrain might not give them enough time to earn money before retiring.

Living on a low income made it difficult for people to use public transport and leisure facilities. People in central Salford felt the area has a good choice of cinemas, fitness clubs and Old Trafford Stadium. Those who could not afford these enjoyed free facilities such as public libraries and walking along Salford Quays. People in Oldham and outer areas of Salford had fewer local facilities and were more likely to go to Manchester to socialise if they could afford it.

c) Physical surroundings

Participants wanted to live in a clean environment and many, especially in Salford, were concerned about litter and rubbish creating a negative image of their neighbourhood. Access to public transport and shelter was important for travelling to shops and to socialise, especially in winter.

Rethink Rebuild Society's recommendations

The report has a range of recommendations aimed at helping refugee communities including:

- Offer English classes and courses in Arabic for older adults on how to access health and social care.
- Make connections between host communities and new arrivals to break down barriers.
- Support new informal community centres and shops for Syrian communities in Salford and Oldham.
- Make local leisure activities and centres more affordable for people seeking asylum.
- Develop ongoing relationships with older Syrians to help them access services, plan for getting work, and get emotional support to help live with past experiences.

4. What can we learn from this research about what makes a good place to grow older for people in minority communities?

- Migrants need specific support in communities as their experiences of migration and loss are important in shaping their relationship with where they live now.
- As well as learning English, newly arrived migrants need to learn digital skills and how health and social care systems work to be able to access services..
- Positive welcoming contact with local people can help create a sense of belonging for marginalised people even though they may fear or experience discrimination.
- Affordable leisure facilities and transport are important for people from marginalised communities who may be more likely to live on low incomes.

About the “Ageing Equally?” Research Programme

Depending on their backgrounds, culture and life circumstances, different people need different things to feel socially connected and supported in their daily lives. Ambition for Ageing funded the ‘Ageing Equally?’ research programme to find out more about this by asking: “What makes a good place to grow older for people who belong to minority communities?”

More information

This is a simpler summary of the full report, which contains a lot more information about the background of the research, and details of Rethink Rebuild Society’s findings. You can read and download this summary, the full report, and all the ‘Ageing Equally?’ project reports and summaries from the Ambition for Ageing website here:

<https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/ageing-equally>

Cover image: Drawing by Sanaa Sadaki

