



# MiFriendly Cities Interim Evaluation Report

A snapshot of our first 18 months experience of 31 actions aimed at supporting the development of Migration friendly cities in the West Midlands, specifically, Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton.



Research Centre  
Trust, Peace and  
Social Relations

Coventry University 



This project is co-financed by the  
European Regional Development  
Fund through the Urban Innovative  
Actions Initiative

# Foreword



Few subjects raise the conflicting and emotional responses than the rhetoric and reality around international migrants, whether refugees or asylum seekers, fleeing conflict or pursuing improved quality of life. More often than not it is the negatives that are heard most loudly, the problems, the difficulties and the costs of hosting; not often enough do we share and celebrate the positives, the enriching of our culture, the strengthening of local skill sets and the positive contributions that are made. Mi(grant)Friendly Cities, is a unique partnership project which is developing and implementing innovative and sustainable approaches to refugee and migrant integration that challenges often negative perceptions of asylum seekers refugees and migrants. The project starts from the assumption that migrants will migrate, will arrive and seek to belong and looks forward to enabling inclusion.

The project recognises that cities are the arrival areas for a multitude of different migrant groups, and are places where integration happens often despite national and international developments and pressures. As such cities can be positive or very challenging experiences – for residents and new arrivals alike. With over 100 languages spoken and a diverse population, the West Midlands is an appropriate region to develop innovation in this area.

A second assumption that we make through the Project is that migration can be a *positive force* (a symptom of success as much as a problem to be solved) that has the potential to move the public discourse on immigration from its current negative slant. But this requires work and staying power – a resilience about positive thinking. Cities are also ultimately places where common ground can be explored and can be built. It is in this spirit of positivity and solidarity upon which MiFRIENDLY CITIES has been introduced. Through the project we're seeking to redefine the way cities integrate newcomers by equipping migrants with the skills and knowledge they need to contribute to the economy and social wellbeing of the communities in which they live, and finding ways for the whole city to play a part in the process. This is a Project which redefines expectations, responsibilities and contributions – it is a project that we are fortunate to have in our neighbourhood!

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**Professor Mike Hardy**

Director of Coventry University

Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations

# Executive Summary

In October 2017 the EU's Urban Innovative Actions fund awarded more than £4m to Coventry, Birmingham and Wolverhampton for the MiFriendly Cities project, a 3-year initiative that will develop innovative, community-led and sustainable approaches to enhancing the contribution of refugees and migrants across the West Midlands region with a focus on Coventry, Birmingham and Wolverhampton. The project delivers an exciting programme of 31 actions specifically designed to help the region's communities get the maximum benefit from migration and improve migrants' and refugees' sense of belonging by offering services including language classes, employment support, the chance to learn new skills, set up a business or deliver an innovative community project. Together these actions push the boundaries of what has previously been attempted in the EU.

The actions are driven by the participants as much as possible and are implemented within the projects own Urban lab (made up of the Mifriendly Cities partners, their networks and facilities). This approach enables us to bring different actors together from the complex ecosystems that exist in cities and actions such as the citizen social scientists and social innovation projects help us emphasise the critical human and social aspects. This is backed up by evidence of citizens as the driving force for urban innovation (Eskelinen et al 2015), as Steiner et al. (2015: 160-161) explain: *"Combinations of both top-down interventions and citizen-driven innovations will likely lead to more sustainable crises resolution than either approach alone"*



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## 31 actions, 11 partners, 3 cities, 1 initiative

MiFriendly Cities is delivered by an innovative partnership of public, private and voluntary sector organisations in the West Midlands. Together they provide a unique network of skills and knowledge to improve our understanding of how we can all benefit from integrated communities by recognising and promoting the valuable contribution that refugees and migrants make to our communities.

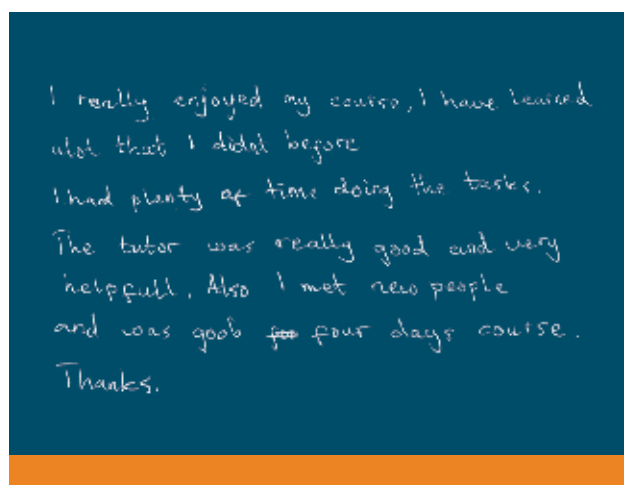


MiFriendly Cities has been running for 18 months as of September 2019. At this interim juncture, it is time to reflect on what has been achieved so far, the challenges and opportunities identified and the “emerging crown jewels” that are likely to become the legacy of our project, existing long after the project has ended. Most importantly however, we reflect on the real experiences of the individuals that have been supported by the project and that have helped us to steer how we develop and grow new and existing actions.

MiFriendly Cities includes over 40 extremely passionate employees of 11 very different organisations but whom all have a drive to see wider recognition of the value that asylum seekers, refugees and migrants represent within our communities. Thanks to the unique skills of the projects partners and participants this report represents a snapshot of progress to date as well as work yet to be done in the projects key theme areas of;

- Jobs
- Skills
- Citizenship and Voices
- Social Innovation and start-ups

All of which are underpinned by evidenced based resources developed using new and existing research and co-creation with participants and partners.

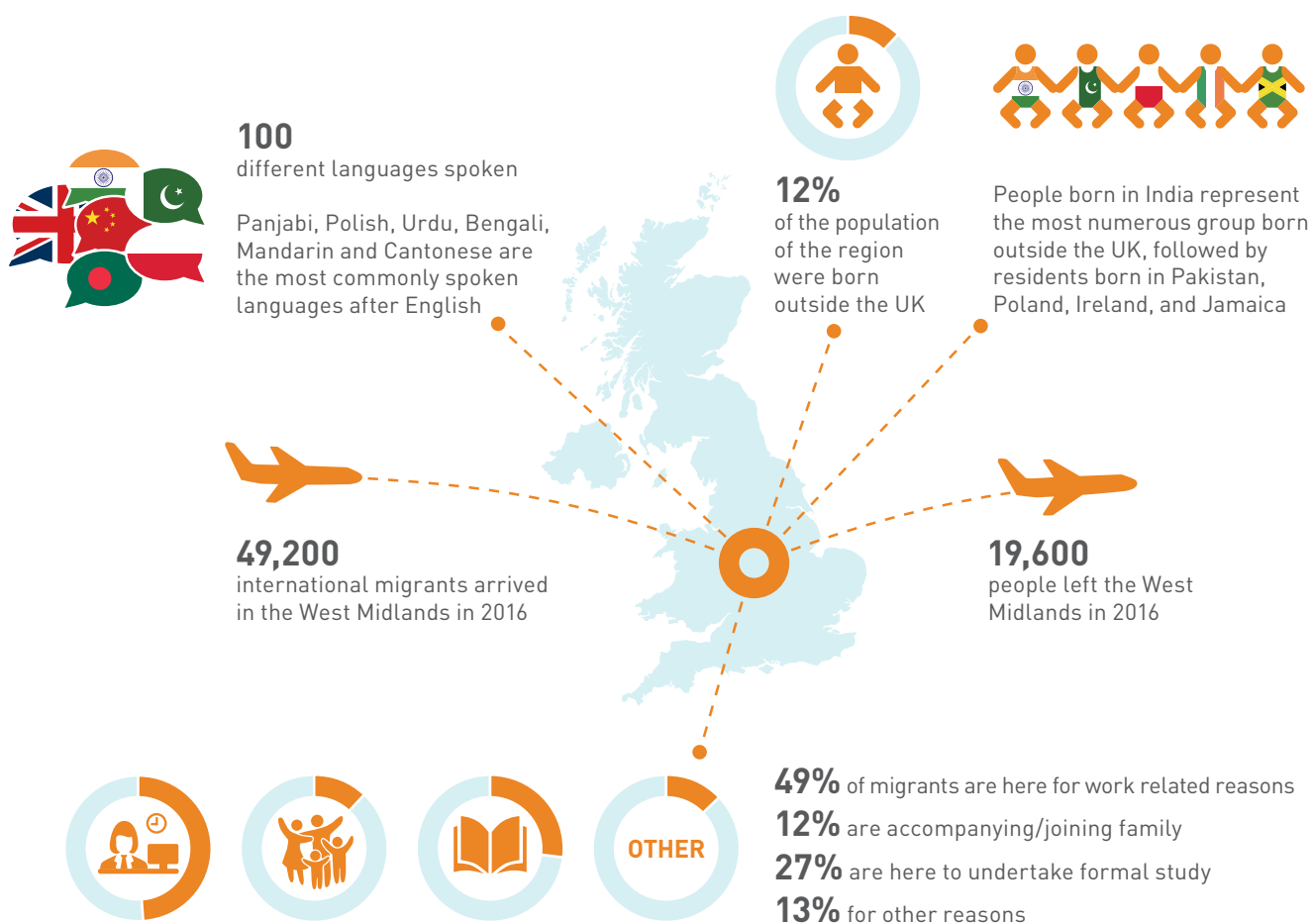


# Introduction

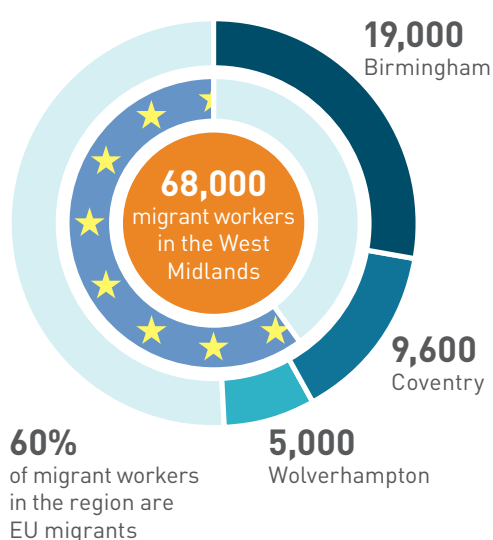
## How MiFriendly is the West Midlands?

Our project started by looking at the context of migration within the West Midlands, specifically Coventry, Birmingham and Wolverhampton. This initial baseline informed the development of a series of focused actions that could directly address the challenges and opportunities identified, the assessment also helped to identify areas in need of further research and evidence for example, to gain insights from the employers' and residents' perspective.

## MIGRATION IN THE WEST MIDLANDS



## EMPLOYMENT



**65%** of male refugees and up to **80%** of female refugees face unemployment in Birmingham



**5%** of employers in Coventry employ refugees



**52%** of employers in Coventry employ EU migrants

## SOCIAL COHESION



**55%** of people in the West Midlands are most likely to meet someone from a migrant background in their neighbourhood



**62%** of people in the West Midlands agree that migrants enrich the region's cultural life



**57%** of people in the West Midlands agree that public services in the UK could not survive without migrant workers



**70%** of people in the West Midlands would not challenge someone else's prejudice towards migrants, refugees and asylum seekers



**36%** of people in the West Midlands believe that migrants and refugees are discriminated against in the UK



**61%** of people in the West Midlands who have been discriminated against say it was because of race

## ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP



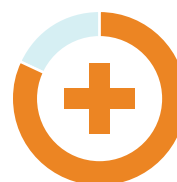
**70%** of people in the West Midlands agree that EU migrants should be allowed to remain in the UK after Brexit



**92%** of people in the West Midlands agree that asylum seekers should be allowed to work











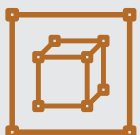







**37%** of people in the West Midlands believe that non-UK born people should not have the same rights as UK born people



**82%** of people in the West Midlands expect to be treated more positively than refugees and asylum seekers

# MiFriendly Cities, the 31 Actions helping us to succeed

<b>JOB</b> ▶	<b>1</b> Employers guide (converting work placements into apprenticeships)  1	<b>2</b> 100 further employment, apprenticeships training and job opportunities created  56	<b>3</b> Digital guide for employers  1
	<b>4</b> 6 employers round tables  2	<b>5</b> 3 employment brokers reaching 2000 employers and meeting 100 companies  684	<b>6</b> Drop-in employment sessions  49
<b>SKILLS</b> ▶			
<b>7</b> 250 participants gaining accreditation  92	<b>8</b> 500 ESOL classes  314	<b>9</b> Additional ESOL classes  203	<b>10</b> 100 people trained in D.I.Y, Carpentry and Painting and Decorating  41
<b>11</b> Mobile fab lab  1	<b>CITIZENSHIP AND VOICES</b> ▶		<b>12</b> 60 Community Health Champions  43
		<b>13</b> Share my language sessions  100	
<b>14</b> 200 rights health checks completed  66	<b>15</b> 115 rights awareness sessions delivered to support young people  113	<b>16</b> 100 community and home makeovers delivered for vulnerable people  34	<b>17</b> Community repair cafés  3

<b>18</b> 3 MiFriendly exhibitions  2	<b>19</b> 30 Citizen Social Scientists trained  5	<b>20</b> 100 citizen journalists trained through media labs  129	<b>21</b> 30 volunteers supporting the project  7
<b>START-UPS AND INNOVATION</b> 	<b>22</b> 16 social enterprise start-ups  16	<b>23</b> 15 social innovation projects  11	<b>24</b> 4 themed briefings produced  5
<b>25</b> Pop-up furniture factory  2	<b>RESOURCES</b> 	<b>26</b> MiFriendly Cities baseline document  1	<b>27</b> MiFriendly Cities scorecard  1
<b>28</b> Opportunities map for influencing policy  1	<b>29</b> Hope House  0	<b>30</b> Employers survey  1	<b>31</b> Residents survey  1

**1** = completed action

**56** = number currently completed

# MiFriendly Cities Actions in Detail: JOBS

**OPPORTUNITY:** In a recent UNHCR report<sup>1</sup>, for most refugees, integration is most dependent on having a job. As well as bringing in new talent, hiring refugees introduces new ideas and perspectives that can enrich any workplace<sup>2</sup>.

## RESOURCE: Employers' survey

**RESEARCH:** Primary research was conducted by Coventry University to ascertain employers' current level and type of vacancies, as well as why they find it difficult to recruit. Survey findings formed part of the baseline evaluation of MiFriendly Cities and have contributed to the development of MiFRIENDLY activities to better connect employers in the region with currently under and unemployed refugees and migrants. The online survey received 200 responses from employers in the private, public and voluntary sectors.

## CHALLENGE / OPPORTUNITY

- Over 80% of employers in Coventry who responded to this survey told us they are currently experiencing vacancies that are hard to fill.
- Less than 5% of respondents currently employs refugees / former refugees.
- However, 34% reported not seeing any barriers to them employing refugees in the future.
- That said, almost a third of respondents (27%) had not considered employing refugees.
- Almost all (96.1%) of respondents reported that they lacked confidence in employing migrants (including refugees) from outside the EU as they had not received training on the validity of documents which tell them who has the right to work.
- Over half (52.2%) of respondents reported that they would like more information about who has the legal right to work.

SMEs employ 60% of the working UK population<sup>1</sup>. However, smaller companies are less likely to have time and resources (or a HR department) to keep abreast of developments in regulation and rights to work. This is mirrored in our employer's survey where employers state a lack of confidence in employing those from outside the EU, due to limited knowledge of employment rights in this area.

## MiFRIENDLY ACTIONS

- Employers guide
- 100 further employment, apprenticeships training and job opportunities created
- 6 employers round tables
- Digital guide for employers
- 3 employment brokers reaching 2000 employers and meeting 100 companies
- Drop in employment sessions

### ACTION ZOOM IN: 6 employer's round tables



#### A MiFriendly cities example action addressing employers' challenges and opportunities.

The purpose of the employers round tables are threefold: 1) to raise awareness amongst employers about how to fill vacancies and skills gaps from refugee and migrant communities, 2) to build the capacity of employers to employ people from outside the EU and 3) to identify employer ambassadors to take a lead on this activity going forward.

1. [www.unhcr.org/5adde9904](http://www.unhcr.org/5adde9904)

2. [https://i.forbesimg.com/forbesinsights/StudyPDFs/Innovation\\_Through\\_Diversity.pdf](https://i.forbesimg.com/forbesinsights/StudyPDFs/Innovation_Through_Diversity.pdf)

Interserve (a private company employing 60,500 people worldwide) are leading a series of employers' round table events. They ran their first event on the 16th May in collaboration with Birmingham City Council and the second is due to take place in Coventry on the 21st November 2019, as part of the Coventry and Warwickshire Business Festival.

The events are titled: **Refugees and Migrants - Untapped Talent.**

*Over 80% of employers in Coventry who responded to this survey told us they are currently experiencing vacancies that are hard to fill.*

Sales and customer service roles were the most difficult to recruit for, with almost one-third of respondents finding this challenging. Unemployment in the UK is **currently at an all-time low**, which emphasises these hard-to-fill vacancies. If someone has refugee status they are legally entitled to work in the UK.

- Employers often overlook the possibility of recruiting skilled refugees and migrants due to misconceptions around their 'Right to Work' status.
- This untapped talent pipeline may offer solutions for employers looking to fill long-term skills gaps and this informative workshop will offer information and guidance around this, including current legislation.
- This event is focusing on the support options available for employers to enable them to fill vacancies and skills gaps from refugee and migrant communities.
- Attendees will gain latest information on 'Right to Work' legislation and a demo of the 'RightCheck' App, also how the MiFriendly Cities programme can become a free recruitment channel.



## ACTION ZOOM IN: Drop-in employment sessions and employment brokers

### A MiFriendly Cities example action addressing refugees' and migrants' challenges and opportunities in accessing employment

MiFriendly Cities Employment brokers are based within RMC (Refugee and Migrant Centre, Black Country and the Midlands), Birmingham City Council and CRMC (Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre). Their job is to better connect employers with un- and under-employed refugees and migrants, and to educate employers about the availability of skills and qualifications within these communities. They also work closely with individuals to match their needs to other activities.

### Example of a participant's experience from Wolverhampton:

Fred was introduced to the MiFriendly Cities project (RMC) by one of his friends. Fred, a Nigerian national arrived in the UK in January 2019. Fred worked in numerous industries in Nigeria. However, after arriving in the UK, Fred found it very difficult to gain employment. He alluded this to his lack of UK working experience and lack of self-confidence. He also recognized that he needed to improve his English skills. The MiFriendly Cities project has developed a personal holistic support, comprising of ESOL support, Employability Skills Support and Confidence Building, which was implemented over a 6-week period, after which Fred secured 2 interviews and was successful in one. He is presently working as a warehouse operative in the Walsall area. The MiFriendly Cities Project continues to provide in-work support to Fred.

Fred states that *"I am ever grateful for the support that I received and am still receiving from the MiFriendly Cities project. I believe this project is very helpful in supporting migrants like me to fully integrate into the UK".*

### Example of a participant and employment broker's journey from Coventry:

Danny contacted the MiFriendly Cities website after seeing a poster at Bell Green Library, Coventry where he had gone to try and write his CV. He initially contacted the project to get support with his CV and help looking for work. With previous experience as a senior support worker supporting vulnerable client groups in the area of drug and alcohol/housing support roles he has built up a wealth of knowledge and experience.

Despite facing financial and personal barriers regarding former drinking problems and rehabilitation, general introversion, and responsibility for children, Danny developed his CV and started his job search and within three months' he secured an interview in a Housing trust, applied for two other support worker positions, and eventually attended a recruitment day with another interview following. These experiences and the discussions with his employment broker on interview techniques helped him gradually gain confidence and he was offered a position working with adults with learning difficulties.

The employment broker supported Danny with tracking DBS to commence employment. Then, within a month, he was interviewed for a role as a Substance Misuse Officer with a local company. Finally, Danny was appointed to a role as a mobile carer supporting the elderly with dementia with daily activities in their own homes. Danny started the role in October and has been supported with travel costs initially to be able to work his full time shifts. He had his first probation review on the 03/10/19, which went well. By that time he was shadowing other staff members in 5 different locations around Coventry.

## LEGACY OPPORTUNITY

- SMEs employ 60% of the working UK population<sup>ii</sup>. However, smaller companies are less likely to have time and resources (or a HR department) to keep up to speed with developments in regulation and rights to work. Therefore, they may shy away from employing those from outside the EU for fear of incurring fines. We will therefore focus some employers round tables specifically for SME's.
- To continue this link with SME's beyond the project organisations like the Growth Hub, Chamber of Commerce, Local Enterprise Partnerships or Regional Development agencies (EU) could take on the role of hosting and supporting employers forums.
- We need to continue to support people once in employment with for example travel cards, confidence building etc.

# MiFriendly Cities Actions in Detail: SKILLS

**OPPORTUNITY:** Experience in countries such as Finland, the Netherlands, and the UK shows that when migrants' and refugees' qualifications are recognised and/or if they have the opportunity to update their skills and knowledge by undertaking additional training or education, they are more likely to find suitable and long-term employment – matching their skills and qualifications<sup>iii</sup>.

## RESOURCE

The MiFriendly Cities pop-up furniture factories (Coventry and Wolverhampton) and FabLabs provide UK-recognised qualifications through their West Midlands Open College Network training centre accreditation status.

## CHALLENGE / OPPORTUNITY

- Refugees who come to the UK hold professional qualifications or have years of experience of working in a particular profession.
- Refugees who arrive in the UK with skills in demand in the UK economy such as teachers, doctors and nurses, often do not practice professions in the UK<sup>iv</sup>.
- This is likely to be due to them facing a number of barriers, such as, the erosion of skills for those who have waited a long time before a decision on their asylum claim, lack of confidence in skills and gaps in CVs, insufficient English language skills or a failure in recognising previous skills and education and unfamiliarity with the UK market<sup>v</sup>.
- English language skills are an important part of integration. However, the funding for providers of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes across England has shrunk dramatically over the past decade, from £212.3m in 2008 to £105m in 2018<sup>3</sup>
- Currently 770,000 people in England aged 16 and over say they cannot speak English well or at all; and women are disproportionately affected.<sup>4</sup>

## MIFRIENDLY ACTIONS

- 250 participants gaining accreditation
- ESOL classes
- 100 people trained in D.I.Y, Carpentry and Painting and Decorating

### ACTION ZOOM IN: 250 participants gaining accreditation



#### A MiFriendly Cities example action addressing refugees' and migrants' challenges related to skills

The MiFriendly Cities industry relevant 4-day intensive Digital Fabrication courses. Digital fabrication begins with digital design and ends with an output from a fabrication machine, such as a vinyl cutter, laser cutter or 3D printer. On the Level 1 and 2 courses, students learn a variety of skills including spatial reasoning, math concepts, 2D and 3D design and its associated modelling software. These skills are highly relevant within West Midlands industry. Gaining a recognised qualification also supports access to further training and employment.

3. <https://www.refugee-action.org.uk/new-research-shows-refugees-suffering-from-lack-of-english-classes-despite-strong-public-support-for-action-by-government/>

4. Office for National Statistics, (2011). Census Data on English Language Proficiency. Analysis of data from table CT0558 - Ethnic group by proficiency in English by sex by age.



**FabLab Coventry** is a joint venture between the city council and the university, awarded training centre status by Open College Network West Midlands to provide over 48 different UK-accredited courses and qualifications. It is a community maker space offering access to state-of-the-art computer-controlled tools like 3D printers and laser cutters as well as more traditional metal and wood working tools.

The FabLab - short for fabrication laboratory - is open to anyone from budding entrepreneurs to school pupils, sculptors and scientists, it is also a space for people who are simply looking to gain new skills - or share theirs.


### Participant example

Originally from Syria, Mohammad had previous experience of vector graphic software, such as auto CAD and solidworks; although this experience was causing some issues with getting to grips with the new software and finding out the best way to create the design he wanted to begin with. Mohammad persevered and quickly began to understand the correct tools and functions he needed to create the designs he wanted. Not only did Mohammad have to overcome the software specific skills and functions, but he also had to work through language difficulties to understand all of the tasks being set out. With the help of other peers translating when necessary, he was able to persist and complete everything that was required to develop his design prototype and achieve the qualification. Since undertaking the Digital Fabrication course, Mohammad has gone on to continue his studies, developing his English language skills in ESOL classes.

### Feedback from participants

- *"It's been one of the most rewarding experiences I've had since I arrived in the UK"*
- *"It was a very good course, I couldn't sleep at night as I was excited about coming!"*
- *"It has helped to teach me language. I want to do more things like this again. I would like to get a job in this area."*


**RESEARCH:** Following analysis of feedback from participants, we conducted a series of in-depth participant interviews in which we asked the participants about their experience of being on the courses as well as their motivations for joining the courses. The results clearly identify that whilst most joined the courses to gain accreditation and improve their English, the major driver for joining the course was to meet people, make friends and address feelings of isolation and loneliness.



## **ACTION ZOOM IN:** ESOL classes and Share my Language (under the same sections as they collaborate)

From our own primary research, refugee action, the Office of National Statistics and the 2019 Green paper (Integrated communities action plan), it is strikingly clear that the ability to speak English is imperative to integration but the recent and substantial cuts in this area is holding people back.

MiFriendly Cities actions addressing this challenge include scaled up ESOL classes across the three cities as well as an informal creative approach called share my language.



## **ACTION ZOOM IN:** English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL) Classes

To address the lack of provision in this area, the project is trialling two very different approaches to supporting people to learn English, formal ESOL and informal Share My Language.

The formal ESOL classes delivered across the three cities also engage volunteers and the resources represented by the large number of students in each city to scale up provision beyond what is achievable by the projects ESOL tutors alone. As a result, there have been 314 ESOL classes run to date and a successful collaboration with another programme in the area (Building Bridges) which has enabled an additional 203 classes to be run. The outcome of identifying areas of opportunity for synergy in provision of ESOL within cities enables us to deliver a significantly larger number of classes without the need to secure additional resources.



MiFriendly Cities **'Share My Language'** looks slightly different in each city but all sessions use a range of social and creative techniques to encourage people to enjoy and share each other's language and culture. Activities such as poetry/spoken word, dance, and art is used in sessions that are designed to be centred on sharing with others. Some examples of activity to date include SML Poetry and open mic nights. With the resulting poetry and stories showcased at Refugee Week in June 2019.

Share My Language has so far delivered over 100 sessions, reached over 250 people, shared over 15 languages and continues to grow across the three cities. There are now 5 Share My Language champions, from social enterprises, NGO's, and council backed programmes, who deliver the ethos of MiFriendly Cities and Share My Language across Coventry. This will only grow across the West Midlands spreading and sharing culture and language.

Birmingham City Council Share My Language have so far awarded 8 of 20 small grants for community organisations and groups to run informal, fun, accessible, purposeful sessions (20 per organisation) in a way that is relevant to their local community, and where improving confidence in spoken English is a feasible benefit.

Wolverhampton City Council is also in the process of launching a smaller grant scheme for community

organisations to take on the Share My Language activities and events. All Share My Language sessions have some crossover, shared principles and lots of learning, peer support and network creating.

## LEGACY OPPORTUNITY

- Both of these activities have engaged other existing resources within the locality in order to boost and scale up provision (through citizen champions, the local student population, as well as forming partnerships with other organisations and respective programmes of activity). As a result, this activity is on track to exceed its target and through the volunteers recruited is sustainable beyond the life of the project.
- Each city should align Share my Language with the structures existing in that locality, to ensure potential for life after the UIA funding has finished.
- Through analysis of participant interviews, we now know that addressing isolation and loneliness is as important as addressing skills gaps and opportunities. This will affect the development of future skills programmes in the three cities so that their design encourages interaction, connection with people from different backgrounds, age etc. and opportunities to continue to engage after the provision e.g. through encouraging students to set up their own WhatsApp group.

# MiFriendly Cities Actions in Detail: CITIZENSHIP AND VOICES

**Opportunity:** Having awareness of civic, political and legal rights is a cornerstone for active citizenship, so in keeping with the MiFriendly approach, we want refugees and migrants to feel confident in accessing these rights, representing themselves and to feel that they are fully-fledged citizens.

## RESOURCE

To understand where to focus actions related to citizenship and voices, MiFriendly Cities conducted an initial baseline assessment of the MiFriendliness of the West Midlands, specifically Coventry, Birmingham and Wolverhampton. The projects baseline report identified a number of opportunities and challenges related to; migration generally, health, employment, active citizenship and social cohesion, including the associated effect of negative stereotypes in press coverage of asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants.

## RESEARCH

To gain an even deeper understanding of the region, Coventry University worked with Suration to undertake additional primary research using a survey of residents in the three cities. The extensive survey focused on interactions with other people and highlighted the nature and extent of contact with people from migrant, refugee or asylum backgrounds. We surveyed over 2,000 residents and received 1555 responses, 74% of respondents were UK born, and 26% were born outside the UK. The full analysis of the survey will be made available online at:

<https://mifriendlycities.co.uk/resources/>

## CHALLENGE / OPPORTUNITY

- 92% of people in the UK agree that asylum seekers should be able to work.
- 70% of people in the West Midlands would not challenge someone else's prejudice towards migrants, refugee and asylum seekers.

- 62% of people in the West Midlands agree that migrants enrich the region's cultural life.
- 57% of people agree that public services in the UK could not survive without migrant workers
- Migrants, who are mostly young, use the NHS less than the ageing native population. Furthermore, migrants are healthier, on average, than the UK born. In 2018, 26% of the foreign-born population said that they had a long-lasting health problem; compared to 41% of UK born<sup>5</sup>. This contravenes perceptions, particularly those portrayed in the media, about migrants being a drain on public resources.
- Of people born in the UK within the residents survey, 41% say that less than half of their friends or people they chat with are from migrant, refugee or asylum seeker backgrounds

## MIFRIENDLY ACTIONS

- 60 Community Health Champions
- Share my language established in 3 cities
- 200 Rights health checks completed
- 115 Rights awareness sessions delivered to support young people
- 100 Community and home makeovers delivered for vulnerable people
- Community repair cafes
- 3 MiFriendly exhibitions
- 30 Citizen Social Scientists trained

5. <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/the-health-of-migrants-in-the-uk/>

## ACTION ZOOM IN: 60 Community Health Champions



That BAME communities face particular and culturally sensitive barriers to accessing health services is well documented (e.g. the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence).

MiFriendly Cities action to address this challenge is a Community Health Champion programme. Community Health Champions from BAME communities are people whom with training and support; voluntarily bring their ability to relate to people and their own life experience to improve health and wellbeing in their communities by signposting to local services. In this way, health champions from Asylum seeker, refugee and migrant backgrounds very much represent an asset to their community and health service.

In Coventry, Birmingham and Wolverhampton the project recruited 43 enthusiastic, resourceful individuals with the ability to raise awareness, champion health messages and to transform health and wellbeing in their communities.

The three cities specifically sought individuals with the following characteristics:

- Refugees, migrants and asylum seekers in Coventry, Birmingham or Wolverhampton
- A friendly and approachable personality
- Good level of spoken and written English
- Speakers of additional languages

Once recruited the participants attended Public Health training for 1 day a week for 4 hours, for 5 weeks and then took on the task of organising and supporting at least two health related events. In return the Community Health Champions receive:

- An Open College Network accredited Level 1 qualification in Health Awareness
- Continuous support and supervision, business cards and local public health literature
- References, provided on successful completion of placement



### ▲ *The September 2019 Community Health Champions graduate from Coventry*

The Coventry cohort of Community Health Champions is typical of all the Health Champions trained so far. They include 70% asylum seekers, 70% of them are qualified to degree level or higher, including a qualified nurse, a biomedical scientists a mechanical engineer and an Olympic Judo champion.

To date the Community Health Champions in the three cities have been active, helping people in their communities register with GP services and they are providing signposting to health services at community events such as, the care leavers conference in Coventry, Black history month celebrations in Birmingham and the opening of two new cricket lanes in Wolverhampton. They continue to receive support from project staff in CRMC and RMC as well as Public Health consultants from Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton city councils.

### Testimony from one of the qualified Community Health Champions in Coventry

*"I am very excited to tell you about this one. Today I managed to convince a friend of mine named Ahmed who is an international student from Azerbaijan to come with me to the walk-in centre at priory gate practice to ask about TB testing because he has been coughing for over two months now.*

*At first he was very reluctant and insisted that he knew how to self-medicate, until I presented him with my health champion card and a leaflet from the NHS on "The truth about TB". As soon as he examined the HC card and went through the leaflet he finally agreed to go with me to the centre tomorrow after 11 am. I am very happy I was able to play my role as a health champion and help a friend in the meantime."*

The **European Commission's** Digital Science Unit and the SOCIENTIZE Project published a Green Paper on CS for Europe in 2013; this includes the following definition of CS:

"the general public engagement in scientific research activities when citizens actively contribute to science either with their intellectual effort or surrounding knowledge or with their tools and resources. Participants provide experimental data and facilities for researchers, raise new questions and co-create a new scientific culture. While adding value, volunteers acquire new learning and skills, and deeper understanding of the scientific work in an appealing way. As a result of this open, networked and trans-disciplinary scenario, science-society-policy interactions are improved leading to more democratic research, based on evidence-informed decision making."

### ACTION ZOOM IN: 30 Citizen Social Scientists trained



Women and minorities are under represented in science and BAME communities can be difficult to reach without support. Therefore, if we want to get closer to understanding how people live their lives we need to engage them in the research process.

MiFriendly Cities action to address this challenge is to train 30 Citizen Social Scientists from asylum seeker, refugee and migrant backgrounds. This action supports citizens to take ownership of the research, it builds their capacity to affect change and supports the project to get closer to communities experience by gaining a more in depth understanding of the daily lives of asylum seekers refugees and migrants.

### ACTION ZOOM IN: MiFriendly Cities Citizen Social Scientist



The project is recruiting individuals from asylum seeker, refugee and migrant backgrounds to work alongside experienced researchers from Coventry University to;

- Learn how to design and deliver a research project
- Help the partners to evaluate and improve the MiFriendly Cities project
- Gain an accredited OCN L2 qualification
- Graduate with Coventry University

Thereafter the Citizen Social Scientists bring a new skill to their community and can implement what they have learned in their work, community organisation or other activity.

# Experience of a Citizen Social Scientist



Last joined the course in August 2019. She brought with her a wealth of experience in mental health challenges specific to BAME communities. As part of the course Last worked with one of the Centre for Trust Peace and Social Relation's visiting researchers who specialised in the participatory practice of story telling. Taken with this methodology Last decided to use this approach in her own research project, which is summarised here by Last.

**Title:** Homelessness and Mental Health in Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Migrants of African origin living in Coventry

**Research Question:** How homelessness affects the ability to access Mental Health Services in BAME Communities

## Methodology - Story Telling

- Why this methodology?
  - Good for bringing out emotions
  - Good for people with English as a second language
  - Promotes a willingness to communicate thoughts and feelings
  - Listening to others' stories can be encouraging and reassuring
  - Emotions evoked could be too much which can affect other members of the group
  - The discussion can bring out various themes which can make it difficult for the researcher to come back and focus on their question, but is also good in the sense that the researcher will have a feel of other issues that come into play when people experiencing Mental Health problems and are homeless

## How the research was conducted

- Recruited seven participants; six male and 1 female working with a local organisation
- All participants were members of a support group that already meets at the research venue every Tuesday
- Invited a Counselling Therapist to be present in case someone had a breakdown.
  - 1 participant had a breakdown
- Researcher introduced the River of Life and asked participants to draw their own Rivers of Life
- Participants asked to add a layer of homelessness by adding a symbol which indicated a time when they were homeless in their life
- Participants were asked to add a layer of emotions by adding a symbol that depicted times they felt happy or sad in their river
- Participants asked to present their rivers
- Open Discussion – Mental Health and Homelessness

## Findings/Conclusion

- Most people do not seek help when experiencing Mental Health problems
  - Do not understand the definition of 'Mental Health'
  - Different ways in how Mental Health present
  - Not sure what is available and how to access it
  - Homelessness is a big issue in Asylum Seekers
  - Besides homelessness, there are other intersectional issues that create barriers to seeking help
- Gender differences came up with men showing they are confused by the way women behave when they get to the UK
- Gender roles reversal an issue
- 50% of participants have been detained under The Mental Health Act 2007
- Bad experience in hospital
- Drugs too strong leaving them drowsy and in a 'zombie' state
- Same problem makes them disengage when they are released, especially if homeless

## Conclusion

- It was a very interesting topic to both the researcher and participants. A session that was scheduled to last for about 90 minutes went on for almost four hours. I had to stop the discussion because the room hire time had expired
- This has brought the group closer together and they have become more open to me
- People opened up more with this methodology, as a result I gained a more in depth understanding of the challenges faced by this group



## ACTION ZOOM IN: MiFRIENDLY CITIES Community and home makeovers, Exhibitions and Media Labs

### MiFRIENDLY CITIES MEDIA LAB

The project will train 100 citizen journalists from asylum seeker, refugee and migrant backgrounds throughout the lifetime of the project with the aim of getting more positive stories and experiences into the public domain and mainstream media. This is delivered through regular Media lab training sessions, each with a different focus, print, video, film, social media etc.

## Example: Media Lab Wolverhampton

Migrant Voice organised a special Media Lab training workshop for migrants and refugees in Wolverhampton.

They invited International photojournalist and creative photographer Denise Maxwell of Lensi Photography to lead the session, which aimed at helping migrant voices to be represented in the media. During the workshop participants learned how to tell their personal migrant stories using photography. They were then supported to capture their own photographs and to create a visual medium for documenting their stories and experiences. Thereafter they were provided ongoing support from Migrant Voice.

### Testimony from a Media Lab participant:

*"I used to ask myself who are all these non-migrants talking on behalf of us, migrants, asylum seekers or refugees? I had a voice, I've always had a voice but I didn't simply know how to make it heard. Thanks to Migrant Voice and the Media Lab training, now I feel empowered to tell my story and show the truth face of our treatment to the whole world."*

## Example: MiFRIENDLY CITIES community and home makeovers

Project participants who have undertaken the DIY, Carpentry or Painting and Decorating course have been asked to help out with improving the home of a vulnerable local person e.g. a young person leaving care and getting their own accommodation for the first time or a community project or venue that needs help to get off the ground. The first two community projects engaged 7 volunteers and delivered a community arts van and the Chapel of Many.



Local Architect Sebastian Hicks designed the **Chapel of Many** and having heard about the MiFRIENDLY CITIES project approached the Coventry pop up furniture factory to bring his design to life. Sebastian wanted to create a third Chapel, joining The Chapel of Unity and the Chapel of Industry from Coventry Cathedral as they hold a similar circular design. Built of 90 removable chairs, the more people gather the more transparent, open and light the Chapel of Many becomes, welcoming everyone. This immense structure, built for Refugee Week in June 2019 had to be sturdy and weather proof to be based outside in the ruins of Coventry Cathedral for a week of activities, gatherings, performances and conversations.

Coventry University Faculty of Arts and Humanities approached the MiFRIENDLY CITIES project to support their students to refurbish a **community arts van**.



Stephen attended the DIY course and showed a great aptitude for woodwork. He had already built himself a desk using recycled shipping pallets, and when he heard about the community arts van project, he was keen to get involved and help create the space. Stephen assisted Tony (a retired carpenter and joiner) who volunteers for MiFriendly cities and together they turned a box van into an arts and teaching space that can be used in the community to deliver community courses and performances.



Debra James from the Disruptive Media Learning Lab approached MiFriendly Cities to help bring her project to life and engage communities in circular fashion. **The Community Couture project** supported participants to experiment with 1) Technology – Digital Couture (Interactive and sensory), 2) Biology – Bio Couture (Grow your own materials) and 3) Sustainability (Remix, Repair and Restore). Based in **FabLab** Coventry, Community couture took place every Monday for three months in 2019. Students and community members came together every week to co-create and learn from one another whilst building essential employability skills such as cultural awareness, communication, emotional intelligence and mentoring. After three months the participants showcased their upcycled garments at the Remix Replay symposium at Coventry University. This new partnership will now become a permanent feature of MiFRIENDLY CITIES and thereafter FabLab Coventry.

## LEGACY OPPORTUNITY

- The capacity built up through the citizen social scientists and their respective research is an approach that can get closer to the challenges and opportunities for integrated communities that can in turn help to produce better policy, regulation where appropriate and better allocation of resources. An idea developed by the university is to explore delivering this course to both students and citizens so that they get to know each other and each other's community better whilst developing their own research skills.
- The community and home makeovers will continue to be enjoyed beyond the project but here is an opportunity grow this provision further whereby the furniture factory and courses could support start up micro enterprises to make products to sell on websites such as Etsy. This facility could also support the design and making of sets and artefacts for Coventry City of Culture 2021.
- CRMC have developed a business plan to set up a food and handy person social enterprise under which project participants will be able to gain employment or set up their own businesses.

# MiFriendly Cities Actions in Detail: START-UPS AND INNOVATION

Unlocking the skills and ideas from within all of the West Midlands' communities can benefit everyone, and open the region up becoming a hub for innovative thinking.

In line with the entrepreneurial nature of MiFriendly Cities and in respect of the grass roots social mobilisation ethos of the project these activities under this theme include a financial scheme to support up to 30 social innovation pilot projects and start up enterprises led by project beneficiaries.

The region also faces many social challenges – in areas such as housing and healthcare – but these could be met by nurturing and funding creative grassroots projects, which are aimed at improving the quality of life for everyone.

## CHALLENGE / OPPORTUNITY

- Promoting entrepreneurship can provide an important mechanism to advance integration and can accelerate migrants' and refugees' contributions as actors of development in the process.
- Entrepreneurship is increasingly viewed as an effective approach to overcoming some of the challenges of integration by providing a venue for income and employment for individuals with constrained access to the labour market.<sup>6</sup>
- Social enterprises contribute £24 billion to the UK economy and employ 800,000 people. However, the sector has limited involvement from migrant, refugee and ethnic minorities. Lack of access to credit and funding alongside religious, gender and language barriers all contribute to the issue. As a result, opportunities for potentially high impact and community-focused enterprises and entrepreneurs are lost.<sup>7</sup>
- Coventry City has achieved Social Enterprise Place status in recognition of its thriving social enterprise activity and is therefore, well placed to reach out to and involve local councils, businesses, charities, consumers and budding social entrepreneurs, bringing them together to grow their social enterprise communities.

- Grassroots innovations create empowering 'sociotechnical configurations' that would otherwise be suppressed by existing innovation systems. Through resourcing grassroots innovations we can help nurture general levels of social diversity that are important for democracy. However, current innovation ecosystems do not provide financial support in sufficient quantities at the grassroots level.<sup>8</sup>

## MIFRIENDLY ACTIONS

- 16 social enterprise start-ups
- 15 social innovation projects
- 4 themed briefings produced
- Pop-up furniture factory

The actions under this theme encourage all projects to work with their wider local community. This has been supported by the partners, providing access to their own mixed stakeholder ecosystems in each city, making the most of the wealth of resources in staff and infrastructure in city council's, Universities, local businesses community organisations and others.

## ACTION ZOOM IN: Social enterprise start-ups



A social enterprise is a trading business set up to meet specific social challenges; all profits are retained and not distributed to shareholders.

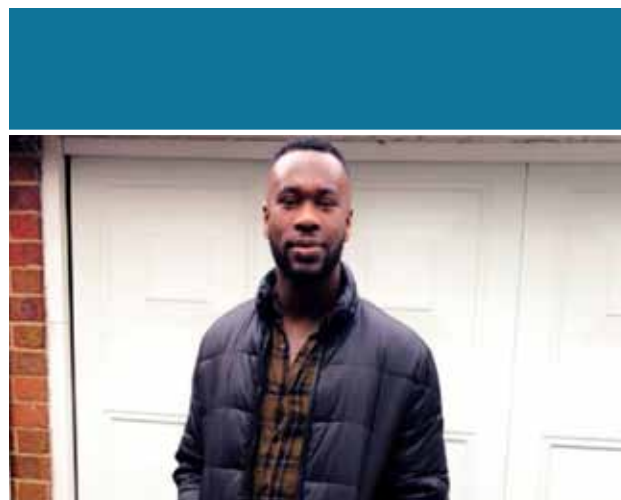
Coventry University Social Enterprises (CUSE) developed a specific package of support aimed at addressing the lack of refugees and migrants starting up social enterprises.

The EVOLVE Social programme includes:

- Introductory workshops that help you explore social challenges and how to face them.
- A Toolkit to approach developing viable solutions to these challenges including how to set up a social enterprise, marketing and business management.
- Participants will also have access to the social enterprise city network of entrepreneurs who meet regularly to exchange best practice, provide peer support and mentoring with external invited speakers and training sessions.

At the conclusion of the programme they will have a completed business plan and the ability to pitch for up to EUR 5,000 funding to help start up and cover up to 12 hours of business coaching support.

CUSE have delivered 4 workshops in 4 cities, trained 43 participants (29 women and 14 men), of whom 28 pitched for seed funding. €80,000 was invested into 16 social enterprise start-ups and 6 of these have gone on to register as businesses.



### Meet social entrepreneur Uyiosa Osawe: Game Changer

**Uyiosa** joined the Evolve Social Enterprise course with CU Social Enterprise in November 2018, and has been awarded €5000 from MiFriendly Cities to get his business idea off the ground. As a result he has started a clothing brand with a social mission: **Game Changer**.

6. [https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/diae2018d2\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/diae2018d2_en.pdf)

7. <https://youngfoundation.org/projects/growing-migrant-social-entrepreneurship/>

8. <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/66067/1/Smith%20Stirling%202016%20-%20Grassroots%20innovation%20and%20democracy.pdf>

## ACTION ZOOM IN: Social innovation projects



Many of the typical funding sources for innovation and community projects exclude the hyper local grassroots opportunities due to structural barriers such as only awarding funding to legal entities, awarding funding but taking months to pay organisations the funding etc. However, it is people and organisations working in communities that are best placed to address their barriers and opportunities.

Migration Work ran a series of sessions in the three cities entitled Make a Difference: Start your own Project

They asked for people to attend that have an interest in developing a project that benefits refugees, migrants and the wider community?

They specifically asked people to consider projects that provide a way of helping people get jobs, health care, better housing, or to be more connected with the community? They also asked participants to consider projects that bring people together and build solidarity between communities. There was also an option for people to attend who did not have their idea yet. The programme included:

- Introductory workshops to hear about inspirational projects from across Europe that are making a difference to people in the areas of work, health care, housing or active citizenship.
- Workshops and support from expert consultants to develop and refine ideas.
- A pitch day for funds and the support of a consultant to kick-start the awarded projects.

## ACTION ZOOM IN: Social Innovation project pitch day



The main social innovation Pitch Day event was held on the 30th March 2019. At the pitch 11 projects were successful in attracting funding these projects have now started.

### QUOTES from panel member, projects and audience on the day

- “Many different ideas of people’s dreams that the government is not seeing”
- “Music was great. Loved seeing the passion of the individual presenters and their desire to make a difference”
- “Extremely positive day. It is amazing to see a working grass roots approach. It was interesting to see the ideas are parallel to what current charity organisations are doing which implies therein a need for more links with relevant organisations and other parts of the MiFriendly City project”
- “As a refugee, it made me feel empowered”
- “I enjoyed the way you organise it and also that I explore my idea and create useful project in reality”
- “I loved meeting all the other groups and listening to their project ideas. I have always felt that all migrants have a valuable contribution to make in all areas if they are only given a chance to do so”
- A large appetite for the client groups to contribute positively to their communities. You can see this in the wide variety of social innovations

## LEGACY OPPORTUNITY

- By supporting local refugee and migrant entrepreneurs to start new business, MiFriendly Cities can expand job opportunities and strengthen the wider economy.
- Big organisations do not have the infrastructure to support very small activities in a community setting. The challenge of getting Innovation funds to individuals in this project illustrates this perfectly. NB funds were distributed by Coventry University that as a large organisation have a complex process involving long lead times to pay suppliers, which is difficult for a micro project to manage.
- The CRMC have developed 3 business plans which could sustain employment for migrants but they require access to investment to start them off properly. These models create light structures, which do not require big infrastructure as they enable migrants to use the skills they have in very flexible ways.

# Our People!

The project has interacted with over 4,000 people to date. Of those 572 project participants have been supported by one or more of our more in depth 31 actions. Thanks to their participation, ideas and engagement we are one-step closer to developing our MiFRIENDLY CITIES.

Ethnicity		
Asian – Bangladeshi	2	0.35%
Asian – Chinese	2	0.35%
Asian – Indian	19	3.32%
Asian – Other – Malaysian	1	0.17%
Asian – Other – Middle East	1	0.17%
Asian – Other – Sri Lankan	3	0.52%
Asian – Other, not specified	11	1.92%
Asian – Pakistani	10	1.75%
Asian, not specified	30	5.24%
Black – African	219	38.29%
Black – Caribbean	16	2.80%
Black – Other, not specified	8	1.40%
Mixed – Other	3	0.52%
Mixed – White and Asian	1	0.17%
Mixed – White and Black African	5	0.87%
No data	36	6.29%
Not clearly stated	33	5.77%
Other – Afghan	7	1.22%
Other – Arab	57	9.97%
Other – Chechen	1	0.17%
Other – Iranian	13	2.27%
Other – Iraqi	8	1.40%
Other – Kurdish	10	1.75%
Other – not specified	1	0.17%
Other – Roma	7	1.22%
Other – Sudanese	2	0.35%
White – British/English	15	2.62%
White – Other – American	1	0.17%
White – Other – European	36	6.29%
White – Other, not specified	14	2.45%
	<b>572</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Gender		
Female	312	54.55%
Male	247	43.18%
No data	11	1.92%
Not clear	2	0.35%
	<b>572</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Age group in 2019		
16-24	66	11.54%
25-30	77	13.46%
31-35	73	12.76%
36-40	92	16.08%
41-45	80	13.99%
46-50	46	8.04%
50+, not specified	2	0.35%
51-55	24	4.20%
56+	38	6.64%
No data	73	12.76%
Not clear	1	0.17%
	<b>572</b>	<b>99.83%</b>

Nationality (Country)		
Afghanistan	7	1.22%
Albania	5	0.87%
Algeria	2	0.35%
Argentina	1	0.17%
Azerbaijan	2	0.35%
Bangladesh	5	0.87%
Belarus	1	0.17%
Belgium	2	0.35%
Botswana	1	0.17%
Bulgaria	2	0.35%
Burundi	1	0.17%
Cameroon	14	2.45%
China	2	0.35%
Congo	9	1.57%
Croatia	1	0.17%
Czech Republic	2	0.35%
Egypt	3	0.52%
El Salvador	1	0.17%
Eritrea	18	3.15%
Ethiopia	3	0.52%
France	5	0.87%
Gambia	2	0.35%
Germany	3	0.52%
Ghana	10	1.75%
Greece	1	0.17%
Guinea	1	0.17%
Hungary	2	0.35%
India	15	2.62%
Indonesia	1	0.17%
Iran	20	3.50%
Iraq	13	2.27%
Italy	14	2.45%
Ivory Coast	2	0.35%
Jamaica	7	1.22%
Kazakhstan	1	0.17%
Kenya	7	1.22%
Liberia	1	0.17%

Libya	1	0.17%
Lithuania	2	0.35%
Malawi	1	0.17%
Malaysia	1	0.17%
Morocco	3	0.52%
Namibia	2	0.35%
Netherlands	11	1.92%
Nigeria	42	7.34%
No data	58	10.14%
Norway	3	0.52%
Not clear or double	20	3.50%
Pakistan	16	2.80%
Philippines	1	0.17%
Poland	15	2.62%
Portugal	1	0.17%
Romania	19	3.32%
Rwanda	1	0.17%
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	1	0.17%
Santa Lucia	1	0.17%
Senegal	1	0.17%
Slovakia	3	0.52%
Slovenia	1	0.17%
Somali	1	0.17%
South African	1	0.17%
Spain	6	1.05%
Sri Lanka	5	0.87%
Sudan	26	4.55%
Swaziland	1	0.17%
Syria	40	6.99%
Tanzania	2	0.35%
Togo	1	0.17%
Turkey	1	0.17%
Uganda	5	0.87%
UK	67	11.71%
USA	5	0.87%
Yemen	2	0.35%
Zimbabwe	18	3.15%
	<b>572</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Location (From Postcode)		
Birmingham area	85	14.86%
Coventry area	270	47.20%
Dudley area	1	0.17%
Hemel Hemstead area	1	0.17%
Leicestershire area	1	0.17%
No data	63	11.01%
No fixed abode	7	1.22%
Walsall area	54	9.44%
Wolverhampton area	90	15.73%
	<b>572</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Status Category		
British citizen / naturalisation	77	13.46%
British temporary residence	61	10.66%
British permanent residence	34	5.94%
Refugee	93	16.26%
Asylum seeker	87	15.21%
Unclear	20	3.50%
Pending	15	2.62%
British residence, unclear	25	4.37%
No data / None	59	10.31%
EU national	101	17.66%
	<b>572</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

If you would like to learn more about the project or find out how you can get involved, you can visit our website at [www.MiFriendlyCities.co.uk](http://www.MiFriendlyCities.co.uk) or email [MiFriendlyCities@coventry.gov.uk](mailto:MiFriendlyCities@coventry.gov.uk)

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 MiFriendly Cities

Report compiled by Sinead Ouilon, Coventry University with contributions from all of the project partners.

With special thanks to Last Mafuba, MiFriendly Cities Citizen Social Scientist for her invaluable contribution.

## ENDNOTES

- i <https://www.merchantsavvy.co.uk/uk-sme-data-stats-charts/>
- ii <https://www.merchantsavvy.co.uk/uk-sme-data-stats-charts/>
- iii <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/>
- iv [https://www.ippr.org/files/ecomms/files/making\\_it\\_work.pdf](https://www.ippr.org/files/ecomms/files/making_it_work.pdf)
- v Refugee Council 2016