



Northern Ireland Refugees and Asylum Seekers Women Association (Bomoko NI)

ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

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1. Introduction

The Northern Ireland Refugees and Asylum Seekers Women Association (Bomoko NI) is a unique organisation created by and for refugee and asylum seekers and women living in Northern Ireland.

Bomoko NI has emerged in response to the needs of refugees' asylum seekers women living in Northern Ireland.

This document contains the impact of the work the organisation has delivered in year 23-24 as well as since its establishment.

There has been a focus on ensuring we are set up to effectively deliver Bomoko's NI program as written in our strategic plan document.

Since its establishment, we have also built strong relationships with funders and various community organisations.

We look forward to continuing to work with all the partners and stakeholders in the coming year and beyond.

2. Our Mission

Bomoko NI connects and empowers refugee and asylum seekers women in Northern Ireland to claim our rights and improve our lives through self-determination and public participation.

3. Our Vision

Our vision is a society where every refugee and asylum-seeking women can fully participate and unlock her potential and where her needs and rights are respected.

4. Our Core Values

We are led by refugee and asylum seekers women and seek to harness our energy, skills and enthusiasm to support our community.

In all we do, we empower refugee and asylum seekers women to address their own challenges and meet their own needs.

We seek to collaborate with those who want to support our community, including statutory agencies, voluntary sector and members of wider society.

We are equal and have the rights to dignity, to be heard and to meet our basic needs.

We welcome all refugee and asylum seekers women and be inclusive of all, irrespective of religion, country of origin, status, age, family or racial background.

5. Our Objectives

The organisation's objects ('the objects') are to support and emerging in response to the needs of refugee and asylum seekers women living in Northern Ireland by:

- To prevent and relieve the poverty of refugees and asylum seekers women by the provision of advice and advocacy services to help the beneficiaries who cannot afford necessary items such as furniture, bedding, clothing, or fuel; to make grants of money for the relief of the poor.
- To advance the education of the beneficiaries by the provision of facilities, courses, training, programs, grants for education, and resources to enable, assist and encourage the education of persons in the English language, skills training, and learning programs through colleges and universities.
- To promote cultural diversity and racial harmony by the promotion of
- cultural activities to foster understanding between people from diverse backgrounds and the indigenous people in Northern Ireland and to cultivate a sentiment in favour of social integration and good relation;
- To provide relief to refugees' women through access to specialist advice, education, and workshops of the welfare benefits system and understanding of the social housing process.
- The advancement of the health of the beneficiaries through the provision of mental health well-being trauma workshops and the referral to health professional and counselling services for treatment.
- The advancement of the human rights of refugees and asylum seekers women living in Northern Ireland through the promotion of good relations and social engagement events between refugees and asylum seekers women and indigenous women, to foster understanding

between them. And the promotion of equality and diversity through the elimination of any type or form of discrimination.

6. Advocacy and Advice Support Services

The advocacy and advice support services have been running since we set up Bomoko NI in April 2019, supporting refugee and asylum-seeking women in Northern Ireland. The services operate five days a week on an appointment and drop-in-based system. Members are allowed to discuss issues for which they require support, and several options are explored together to decide upon the best course of action for the individual involved.

On average, 10 to 15 members a week attended the Advocacy and Advice Service, including emergency support with Tesco and Lidl gift card vouchers, food parcels, clothes, babies' wipes and nappies, and toiletries.

Each year, we have an increase in our membership. Families and single women joined the organisation every week and we noticed an increased demand for advocacy and advice services compared to the previous years.

Through our advice and advocacy support services, we assisted 1200 members on the following issues:

- **Housing**

320 service users were assisted on the housing issues.

We have specifically worked with families, single parents, and single women on housing issues moving from hostels to Nass accommodations. We also assisted

those who were newly granted refugee status during the transition from the Nass accommodations to Housing Executive temporary accommodations.

We also contacted Migrant Help on behalf of the service users for the following issues: home electricity/gas, boilers, and dampness.

We contacted MPs and MLAs' constituency offices to act on behalf of families and single women regarding a long stay in the hostels as well as for families with children with special needs who were sent outside Belfast after being granted refugee status as children were missing school and hospital appointments.

We also raised the issues of the living conditions of children and families in the hotels, the delays in the weekly payment support, and other issues that affected the living conditions of families in the hotels.

We worked in partnership with NICCY for families with children who have been sent outside Belfast during the school period after being granted refugee status.

We also worked and supported other refugee, members of Bomoko NI to access the appropriate accommodations and address the ongoing issues.

- **Education and Training**

In year 23-24, a total of 192 of service users were supported in accessing education through various means including grant applications, referrals and the opportunity to attend the English classes and accredited training programs.

These were facilitated in collaboration with the following institutions and community centres following:

-Belfast Metropolitan College, Conway Education Centre, East Belfast Mission, and Gems Belfast.

Additionally, the service users participated in training, workshops, and information sessions gatherings organised by our organisation.

- **Welfare rights**

We assisted 320 service users with issues related to benefits throughout the year.

Our team engaged with job benefits to address delays in payments and child benefits. We guided newly granted refugee status members of Bomoko NI in registering with job centre and provided referrals to the relevant agencies Law Centre and Advice NI.

We also offered advice on how to apply for various types of benefits and supported service users through the application process.

- **Referral and signpost**

Throughout the year, we referred and signposted 368 of service users to organisations and services for the issues outside our area of expertise. This included:

- **Immigration and Legal services:** Referrals were made Solicitor offices, Law Centre, and the constituency offices of MPs and MLAs, as well as Advice NI.
- **Physical and Mental Health:** Service users were directed to mental health specialists' organisations and GPs for appropriate services.

- **Family Reunion:** Guidance was provided for service users needing assistance with family reunion processes through the British Redcross
- **Women trafficking and domestic abuse:** Support was offered to service users through organisations such as: Flourish and Women's aid
- **Food Bank: Members:** service users were referred to various foodbank including Bradbury Hub, North Belfast food bank, and South Belfast foodbank
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7. Employment and Volunteer opportunity

During the year, we collaborated with 15 dedicated volunteers' members of Bomoko NI as well as internship students from Queen's university.

Our organisation assisted in submission of employment and volunteer placement applications and provided references.

Furthermore, we referred and advised members on volunteering opportunities with partner organisations that align with their qualifications and areas of expertise.

8. Funding and Donations

Funding Overview

Bomoko NI has worked diligently to secure a diverse range of funding sources to sustain its programs over the past 18 months. The funds have been utilised to support various initiatives, including:

- Program Activities: Training and workshops such as English classes, online cookery workshops, health-oriented weekly walking groups, multicultural events, International Women's Day celebration, and

activities for Community Engagement and Integration (including visits to historical sites to learn about the NI's history), and refugee week.

- Operational Costs: Essential budget covered office insurance, office rent, telephone and internet, and staff salaries.
- Direct Families support: Assistance provided to families in the form of home gas and electric top-ups, food parcels, Tesco, Dunnes Store and Lidl gift cards vouchers, as well as household items, baby necessities such as nappies and toiletries.

Bomoko NI has successfully secured funding from several funders:

- The Executive Office (Minority Ethnic Development Funds)
- National Lottery (Award for All)
- Cash for Kids

Donations Received

In addition to funding, Bomoko NI has received Material donations from various organisations, which include:

Materials donations and Cheque:

- Cash for Kids (children's Christmas appeal toys)
- Salvation Army (children's Christmas appeal toys)
- Toiletries, baby nappies and wipes from various donors
- Another World Belfast
- Homeless Period
- Trademark Training
- St Anne Cathedral (Black Santa, cheque)

9. Social opportunities and integration

Services users have actively participated in meetings and events, seminars, conferences, training, and workshops organised by the Bomoko NI and partnered organisations including:

- International Women's Day in partnership in collaboration with Corrymeela Community
- Family residential with the Corrymeela Community
- Refugee week celebration
- Women's Resources Development Agency
- Belfast Mela
- Volunteer Now
- Queen University
- National Women Council
- Housing Executive
- Good Relations Week
- QUB Sanctuary
- Feminist Communities for Climate Justice
- Community Foundation Ireland
- Migrant Forum
- Refugee and Asylum Forum
- PSNI

10. Networking and Partnerships

Bomoko NI actively engaged with multiple organisations through face-to-face and online meetings and events. Key partners include:

- Migrant Forum (Belfast City Council)
- Reclaim the Agenda
- Belfast Trust
- Law Centre NI
- Women Resource Development Agency
- Housing Executive
- Community Foundation NI
- National Lottery
- PSNI
- National Women's Council of Ireland
- Lorag (Inner South Neighbourhood Issue sub-group)
- MSCNI
- Corrymeela
- British Institute of Human Rights (BIHR)
- Community Foundation Ireland
- CO3
- National Women's Council of Ireland
- Common Knowledge (Ireland)

11. Activities

Bomoko NI conducts its work through several key activity areas, which are systematically classified in our financial accounts:

Online English Languages Support

We provide English classes twice a week catering to different levels: beginners, intermediate, and level 1.

The classes are facilitated by qualified English tutors through both online and in person sessions, with an average attendance of 10-12 each week.

The classes are designed to provide Bomoko NI service users with accessible informal ESOL learning opportunities tailored to their needs, including one-to-one lessons when required.

Training and workshops

A range of training and workshops has been delivered within the organisation including:

- Mental Health and Resilience
- Employment training (covering CV writing, Job search strategies, and interview skills)
- Volunteer training
- Money management
- Food hygienic
- Leadership training
- Cooperative and its rules
- Online cookery workshops
- Information session on the free various accredited training courses (Belfast Works Connects).
- Sewing classes
- Health-focused Walking Programs

Community Engagement and Integration/Civic Education

Members and their families have participated in community engagement and integration trips to significant sites such as:

- Newcastle beach
- Portrush beach
- Belfast Zoo
- Giant's Causeway
- Giant's Causeway Carrick a rede rope bridge.
- Family residential in partnership with Corrymeela

Walking Group Activity

Since January 2020, Bomoko NI has hosted a weekly walking group, attracting an average of 10- 15 women per month.

Support for Food Parcels, gift card vouchers, and home electricity and gas top-ups

Throughout the year, we assisted 250 service users 6 to 8 times with food parcels, grocery (for Teso, Lidl and Dunnestores) , and home energy support, which included electricity and gas top-ups, toiletries, baby products and children (family) Christmas toys. The support was based to family living condition.

Online Cookery Demonstration Workshops

We developed an online cookery program where women members of Bomoko NI shocase and prepare meals from their home countries.

This project aims is to reduce isolation among refugee and asylum-seeking women, providing a platform for enjoyment and a means to cope with the stresses associated with their journeys.

12. THANKS, AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our board members, service users, funders, our Project Coordinator, our finance worker, our partners and all our dedicated volunteers, and all those who have supported our mission.

