

# Regional Refugee Integration Forum co-chairs

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The co-chairs of the Regional Refugee Integration Forum are Zahra Niazi and Akoi Bazzie.

**Zahra Niazi**

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Zahra is the strategic equalities, diversity and inclusion (EDI) lead for the Wellbeing Board to coordinate EDI across the strategic partnerships within the district. Previously programme lead for Bradford Council working on the Integration Strategy communities programme, which continues to run under Bradford For Everyone. Bradford For Everyone is a £4.6m programme with 80+ interventions and activities supported through its funding; around four pillars of Getting on, Getting Involved, Getting Involved and Feeling Safe. Zahra is the co-chair of the Regional Refugee Integration Network.

Born in Pakistan in Chakwal, and raised in Bradford, Zahra is deeply committed to the city and its people; and expresses this through championing diversity and equality. Zahra graduated from the University of Bradford in 2001 in Interdisciplinary Human Studies and completed a Postgraduate Certificate in Business Administration in 2008.

Zahra is also the Director of Impact Hub and has been previously been a public governor for the Care Trust. She has a background in project and programme management with experience of supporting programmes of up to £49m. Zahra was Leader of the Year for Bradford Council in 2020, a finalist for Emerging Leader for the Northern Asian Powerlist in 2020, the top most influential South Asians in Bradford as highlighted by Asian Standard and Young Leader Award by the Young Professionals Society in 2021.

**Akoi Bazzie**

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Akoi works as the Community Development officer and coordinates the Yorkshire and Humber Refugee Advisory Group at the British Refugee Council and is the co-chair of the regional Refugee Integration Forum. Akoi is a Liberian Refugee resettled in Sheffield through the UK/UHNCR resettlement programme. He was fourteen when civil war erupted in his home country, Liberia, and fled to Guinea, living in a refugee camp for 12 years. Since resettling in the UK, he has volunteered and worked in various roles such as Community Development and Volunteer Coordinator, Charity Trustee and School governor.

Akoi had a childhood desire to work with people from diverse backgrounds. In the refugee camp he dedicated himself to working with the UNHCR and liaising between refugees and the host communities. When he was resettled in Sheffield, Akoi was determined to help others like him, and was able to gain valuable work experience through volunteering. He has gone from strength to strength and is now giving something back to refugees and to the society that welcomed him.

Akoi has travelled extensively across the UK speaking on refugee participation, engagement, involvement, and integration. He has travelled to Geneva, Paris, Amsterdam, Belgium, and the USA where he had opportunities to speak about his lived experience. He was presented a City of Sanctuary award, for his contribution to the city of Sheffield and was finalist Refugee of the Year,

Yorkshire, and Humber.

Yorkshire and Humber Refugee Integration Forum logo

## **Contact us**

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