



This 3 year project is a part of the Mobilising Community Assets to Tackle Health Inequalities programme, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).



Aims of today

1. About the project
2. Research progress so far
3. Next steps





About MigRefHealth

This research is a **collaboration** between 19 academic and community partners working together across 3 regions and 12 field sites



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Greenwich, Lewisham, Barnet, Islington, Colchester, Wethersfield, Ipswich, Lowestoft, Great Yarmouth, Norwich, Peterborough, Cambridge

Mixture of urban and rural / coastal communities , plus the 1 remaining mass migrant accommodation centre

Project Goal

To make sure that **community assets** used by **local communities** are collaboratively identified and better supported to help **improve the health outcomes** for refugee, asylum-seeking and migrant communities.





A “community asset” is a service, activity or space that is an integral part of community life. It can include advice and information services, community hubs, community groups, religious organisations, parks and open spaces, food banks, leisure centres etc.

Wide definition which allows participants to self define what they find useful



Project Objectives

The project aims to achieve its goal by:

- Investigating how the Social Determinants of Health impact on migrant, refugee and asylum seekers health outcomes
- Examining how community assets support their health and wellbeing
- Co-designing place-based models which show how integrated services can tackle health inequalities
- Sharing these models to other areas



9/3/20XX

SDOH - education, housing, environment, food, employment, social support etc

Research Strategy



Our project focuses on **3 key areas:**



Accommodation



Food/Nutrition



Support Services

With **4 migrant populations:**

- Hong Kongers
- Afghans
- Syrians
- Ukrainians



PLUS one EU and one non-EU population dependent on the field site



Approach

The project has a collaborative approach with co-production, community voice and stakeholder engagement embedded throughout:

- **Community partners** work in conjunction with the **academic team** throughout the project
- The project is divided into 4 work packages. Each has an academic lead, a community lead and an expert member with specialist experience
- Our community partner in Essex is Local Government East



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Plus field site team works with local stakeholders and community groups to recruit participants and run community forums, identify need and dissemination information e.g. In Colchester we work with RAMA, Colchester City Council, Essex Integration, Salvation Army etc



Methods

Work packages 2 & 3 are the project's fieldwork phase. They consist of:

- **Secondary research** to scope existing **literature** and create field site **demographic profiles**
- **Desk research** and **co-production** to create an initial digital asset map
- **Walking interviews** carried out by trained Community Co-Researchers (CCRs)
- 6 of the 12 **Community Forums** at each field site using a variety of qualitative and creative methods



Key Project Activities at end of July 2025



- 408 participants from 38 countries
- 33 were Hong Kongers
- 19 Community Co-researchers
- 83 Walking interviews - 4 were Hong Kongers
- 21 workshops and 15 interviews - 27/286 were Hong Kongers
- 12 storytelling creative sessions - 5/122 were Hong Kongers
- Stakeholder engagement sessions
- Over 1500 community assets identified



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Further creative sessions (CF6-8) covering the topics of food and access to services are planned between September – December 2025.

Harvest and Cook session planned Wednesday 17th September 10am-2pm at Together We Grow's site at Highwoods Country Park (see flyer for more details)

We also really want to hear from the Hong Konger community and are planning an event exclusively for you. If you would like more info then please see me during the break or after the event and I will take your details so we can get in touch...

You're welcome to share your ideas about what would encourage you to take part e.g. timing, venue, group or individual basis etc

The asset map

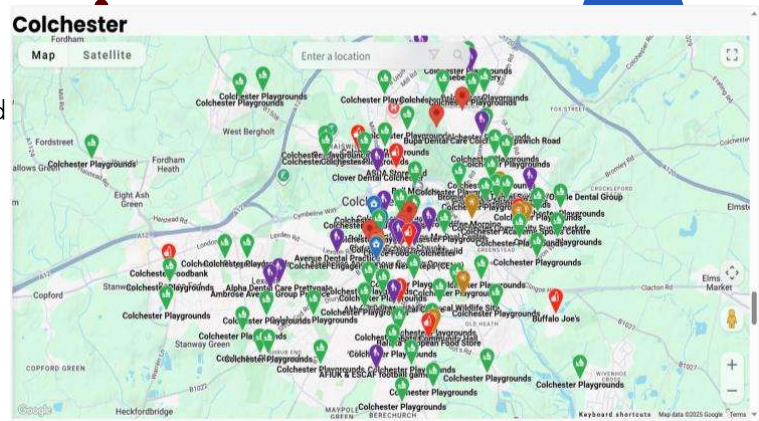


There will be 12 individual maps that are specific to each field site.

Over 450 assets have been identified so far in the 2 Essex field sites.

They include specialist food stores, health services, language support, community groups and activities, housing providers and parks and open spaces.

They will be publicly accessible on the <https://migrefhealth.co.uk/> website.



- 415 in Colchester
- 54 in Wethersfield
- 27 that cover all fieldsites

Currently Colchester, Cambridge and Ipswich maps are ready for viewing

Assets can be filtered into categories based on the core research areas, including:

- *Food & Nutrition*
- *Housing & Accommodation*
- *Access to Services*
- *Other*

Further categories can be added as necessary by the local field site.

Results so far

- a. Food
- b. Housing
- c. Services



a. Food



Cooking is an important part of people's cultures

"To be honest, for Hong Kongers, food is a big deal, and it definitely influences our mental health ... I'd say 8 or 9 out of 10. Hong Kongers really love food. We're all foodies."

Home country food provides emotional comfort

Some migrants were taken aback by the UK's culture of convenience and fast foods

"We Hong Kongers don't solely cook pure Chinese cuisine but also 'Western' stuff, sort of like mixing."

Shop at general & specialist supermarkets

Issues with distance, cost and quality

"There are some cooking ingredients, like Shaoxing Rice Wine. You have to go to the Sainsbury's in Stanway for that, the supermarket is big enough, and they've got a lot of Asian food."

Food bank items inappropriate

Inedible food served in hotel accommodation

"For example, steak, poultry, and pork—the price and quality here are way better than in Hong Kong."

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Participants said that cooking and eating were an important part of their cultures
Food from their home country gave them emotional comfort and invoked memories of childhood, family and home (quote 1)

Migrants were taken aback at the UK's culture of convenience and fast foods, not so Hong Kongers who have a mixed diet (quote 2)

People living in the community shopped at both general UK and specialist supermarkets.
Most foods from their cultures were available in the UK but there were issues with distance, cost and quality.

Some Chinese foods were available in UK supermarkets but there are a number of Chinese supermarkets and restaurants in all the project field sites
Hong Kongers said cheaper and better quality (quote 3)

Foodbanks were generally viewed as inappropriate for either their culture, religion and dietary needs, as well as poor quality e.g. tinned not fresh (Don't need it)

For those living in hotels there were issues with poor quality, culturally & dietary inappropriate and inedible food (not an issue for HK)



b. Housing

Finding accommodation in the UK varied by route of entry and the level of support provided

"If you're a Hong Konger moving here, just finding a place to live is already a huge challenge."

Issues finding social housing

"They [landlords] do reference checks very seriously—and harshly. ... The reference check proves that you can afford the rent. If you can't prove that, some landlords ask you to pay the rent in advance. ... If you can't ... you have to find a guarantor ... has to be a local. As a new migrant here, if you can't find a guarantor, how can you rent a house? The only way is to get a job. ... it's incredibly hard."

Issues with hotels

Barriers to private rented accommodation

Housing quality concerns

"I've been living in town. It didn't feel very secure. So later on, when I was choosing a place to live, I decided to stay outside the town centre."

Safety and security

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Hong Kongers, unlike other Visa Holders, are expected to find their own accommodation

Reported issues with finding social housing included lack of knowledge of the process, long waiting times and feeling unable to refuse accommodation offered (N/A)

People living in hotels talked about the lack of privacy and choice of roommate (N/A)

Difficulties renting or buying accommodation were mainly related to the complex and lengthy UK admin processes

Barriers to private rented accommodation included unemployment, lack of UK references and guarantor or the ability to provide a large upfront deposit

People living in the community reported concerns about housing quality including overcrowding, not disability friendly, ineffective utilities, mould and damp, and poor maintenance, coupled with high and rising rents and benefit delays leading to debt. Few HK reported quality issues, although 1 Hong Konger contacted Citizens Advice's for housing support, but they did not respond, and as a remote service was difficult to follow up.



c. Access to Services

Language is **the** major barrier

Service eligibility criteria

Affordability

Lack of knowledge

Qualification recognition

Job Centre approach

Digital ability

Transport

Faith & community groups

"NHS support should be improved ... Take my parents, ... their English isn't good, ... they can't book on line, they struggle on the phone, and they often don't have an interpreter. ... If interpreters were readily available... then, people could properly explain their medical conditions and get the right treatment."

"For someone who needs Cantonese-language mental health support, there's almost nothing available ... Even the NHS wasn't much help, because everything was in English."

"Even though I often say that the UK system is familiar to us, things like job-hunting and workplace culture are completely different ... Another big issue is job mismatching. Many Hong Kongers struggle to find jobs that match their qualifications."

At the moment, it's (Chinese Association) mainly just a place to eat ... They also have a small library with Chinese-language books ... and they also have some English books related to Cantonese culture."

"Before I moved here, I got connected to the local church through Welcome Churches of the UKHK. And prior to my arrival, the pastor contacted me, asking if I needed help with anything."

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Language was the major barrier to accessing all services in the UK – eg in health lack of NHS interpreters, translated materials or counselling in Country of origin languages compounding existing NHS structural barriers. Schools praised for welcoming & inclusive approach

Service eligibility criteria such as legal status and length of time in the UK esp for ESOL

Affordability of services when NRPF, lack of legal aid, and high cost of leisure facilities and transport etc. HK have to pay NHS IH surcharge to access free at point of use

Lack of knowledge of how UK services work coupled with **complex and lengthy application processes**, e.g. to access health & education

No UK **recognition of qualifications** and **Job Centre approach**. Not helpful for those with professional occupations and exacerbated by language ability and fewer opps in rural areas. HK mixed experiences re qualification recognition but issues finding work e.g. EON

Digital ability is increasingly required to find and access UK services. Something a number of participants struggled with, esp in combination with English ability. Older HK

provide services such as language and employment support, information and advice (including immigration advice) and social opportunities

**What are we missing?
Help us map your local assets by
filling and circulating our online
form:**

<https://tinyurl.com/2wkxd4t9>



Next Steps

- ✓ Harvest and Cook Session - **Wednesday 17 September 10am-2pm**, Highwoods Country Park
- ✓ Share local mapping data once available
- ✓ Deep dive into what and how you **use** community assets, what you would **like to use** and what would make them **suitable** for you?



Talking about food – if interested in signing up then please take a flyer

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You're welcome to share your ideas about what would encourage you to take part e.g. timing, venue, activities, or food etc



Thank you

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