

# Sawt Suriah

September 2021

No.1



**BOSNIA &  
HERZEGOVINA**  
UK NETWORK



**Birmingham**  
City Council

# BOSNIA HOUSE WELCOMED SYRIAN COMMUNITY

BH UK Network, in cooperation with Birmingham City Council has organised two introductory application sessions for Syrian coordinators to help organise the Syrian community.

The premises of the Bosnian House were visited by Birmingham City Council workers and potential candidates for workers of the Syrian organisation. The aim is to help Syrian refugees in Birmingham form their organisation, learning from the BH UK Network's experience, both success and failure.

The main intention of this grant is to train and recruit two temporary workers from the Syrian community. Integrating into UK culture will not be easy for Syrian refugees.

BH UK Network, in cooperation with the Birmingham City Council, decided to hire *Aisha Aldalati and Mohammad Seiffedin*. The two will gain a



My name is Mohammad Seiffedin, I am from Syria and have been in the UK about three years ago. I used to work as a vit, I have a long experience more than fifteen years and I was owe a small clinic in the village where I was live. I left Syria to Lebanon after the war had started. I spend seven years in Lebanon watching, sadly, my country bombed, burned, and destroyed. My children growths up in front of my eyes without have any ability to do anything for them, so I decide to leave Lebanon in the first chance.

When we arrive to the UK, it was horrible time, everything was different, people, weather, buildings..... we worked hard to adapted ourselves to the new life, started to learn English, discover the aria around the home, meet new people, and look for a job.

Now I am very happy to start my first job with Bosnia and Herzegovina community and wish to get some benefits for me and my community.

Thank you  
Mohammad



Hello

I am Aicha Aldalati , I Came from Syria, I have been living in Birmingham for 5years .

Recently I started working for Bosnia and Herzegovina UK Network on a Syrian project. The aim of the project is to prived support to my commynity in Birmingham.

In my country I used to work as a hairdresser in my own. When the war was start, I went to Lebanon with my family to get a safer life.

We lived there for 7 years. One day my husbend was killed by a bomb

I was very sad and decided to leave Lebanon and go to another country where there is no war so that so that it is safe for my children.

I arrived to the United Kingdom about five years ago and attended ESOL classes at a college to improve my English. It has helped me to better integrate into new society. There is till a long way to go but at least I can speak to and understand with me new friends and neighbours and am now in possition to help other members of my community. I hope everything will be okay inshallah.

Thank you.



comprehensive understanding of how Birmingham departments and organisations work and plan together.

On a practical level, they will observe the work of the Network, helplines, cultural activities, and activities for the elderly, supplementary school, newsletter production and community events. At a strategic level, he will attend

meetings with the BHUK manager on community safety, health, human rights, education, wider partnership, funding, and reporting

BH UK Network's main objectives are to support the early stages of the formation of the Syrian Organisation, which will be able to provide long-term support to the Syrian community in Bir-

mingham, empowering the Syrian refugee community in Birmingham by training two Syrian workers, as well as Syrian volunteers and activists in community development areas.

*The beginning is always the hardest!*

*Aisha and Mohammed, good luck!*

## SYRIAN SUPPLEMENTARY SCHOOL

BH UK Network decided with the new staff, Aicha and Mohammad to set up the Syrian supplementary school. There are already about 20 volunteers helping the activities of the Syrian school. Classes are held by qualified teaching staff in Bosnia House. Due to the great interest and a large number of students, classes take place two days, on Saturdays and Sundays in the premises of Bosnia House.













Interview with:

## **NATASHA BHANDAL - BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL**



### **Can you tell us a bit about yourself?**

I am of Indian origin (from Gujarat on the west coast of India) and was born in this country. My parents came to this country from East Africa in the 60s with my grandparents and resettled here.

I was born in the UK and have grown up here - I feel very privileged to have been educated in this country and to build a life here which wouldn't have been possible if my grandparents hadn't uprooted their lives and moved to England.

### **What is your role/job in Birmingham city council? And how long have you been working in the refugee and migration sector?**

I've worked at Birmingham City Council for 16

years starting in a role as Communications Officer working for Birmingham Community Safety Partnership which was part of the council. I delivered community safety campaigns, developed press releases and looked after the team's communication needs. My role also involved developing websites, marketing and engagement with community groups. Before coming to Birmingham, I worked in Wolverhampton and Walsall in roles that involved working



with community groups and creating partnerships.

My role now is Senior Commissioning Officer at Birmingham City Council. I'm part of the Refugee & Migration Team which is part of the Adult Social Care Directorate. Within this team, we manage a number of funded projects which all aim to improve the support provided for all new arrivals and migrants in the city. I've only been working in this sector for 4 years but it's been the most interesting, fulfilling role that I have ever held in my career to date. I love working in Birmingham – the refugee and migration sector here is so big, vibrant and full of people with a high level of expertise as well as genuinely caring about refugees and asylum seekers.

I currently coordinate the Syrian scheme, the UK Resettlement Scheme, the Afghan Scheme (mentioned below) and a project for asylum seekers who have received a positive decision.

### **How does Birmingham city council work to support the Syrian community?**

As a City of Sanctuary people seeking asylum, refugees and migrants are welcome in Birmingham and Birmingham City Council works to ensure that their



health, welfare and wellbeing needs are met, and that resources are in place to do this.

For the Syrian scheme, we provide commissioned services to help with resettling and integration into the city. Commissioned providers help with all aspects of life including school places, access to GPs, benefits, housing, access to ESOL and getting to know the city. This is for the first 12 months.

We also provide support with welfare & tenancy, employability, mental health awareness and connecting to your local area via commissioned providers. We also have a range of grant funded projects – the attached document provides a list of all the services we are currently providing.

Bham city council have always wanted to provide the opportunity for you all to meet with each other and to speak to service providers – we were holding Community Days before the pandemic for this reason and I'm really pleased that we are now able to hold our first face to face Community Day with Bosnia UK Network on 22 Sept.

### **To what extent do you think project in Bosnia House is having an impact on the Syrian community ?**

The Community Development Workers are having an amazing, positive impact on the Syrian community. They have been able to share information, gain feedback, arrange activities & trips, run Arabic classes and more – I've seen the numbers of chil-



dren interested and attending the Arabic classes!

We have always hoped to create a community base

for Syrian refugees and to find a few representatives of the community that would work with us to help build the community, empower the community and create a base for the future of the Syrian community

### **Approximately, how many Syrian families live in Birmingham?**

We have about 127 households that we have welcomed on the Syrian scheme in Birmingham.

### **Any comment/experience working with Bosnia & Herzegovina UK Network?**

Anes and his team have shown how their passion helped the Bosnian community to resettle when they first came to the UK. When Anes first approached Bham City Council, he was keen to use his experience to help engage and empower the Syrian community to build a community centre that will provide support for the Syrian community for now, and in the future.

He has been and still is keen to establish so much through the Community Development Workers and his aspirations for the Syrian community keep growing. We can only admire the support that he has been providing.

### **Are there any plans for Birmingham city council to accept refugees from Afghanistan?**

Birmingham City Council made an urgent pledge to accept 80 individuals under the ARAP Scheme in the Summer. The ARAP scheme (Afghanistan Relocation and Assistance Policy) is open for interpreters and staff and their families who worked alongside British Armed Forces.

The government has announced a new Afghan Citizenship Resettlement Scheme which will be similar to the Syrian scheme and we're just waiting for the details to be finalised on this.

**Natasha Bhandal**  
*Senior Commissioning Officer*

*Refugee & Migration Team  
Commissioning  
Adult Social Care Directorate  
Birmingham City Council*



# A RISING SYRIAN

It is so amazing to see Syrians challenging their circumstances, overcoming obstacles and achieving what they dream of in this new society.

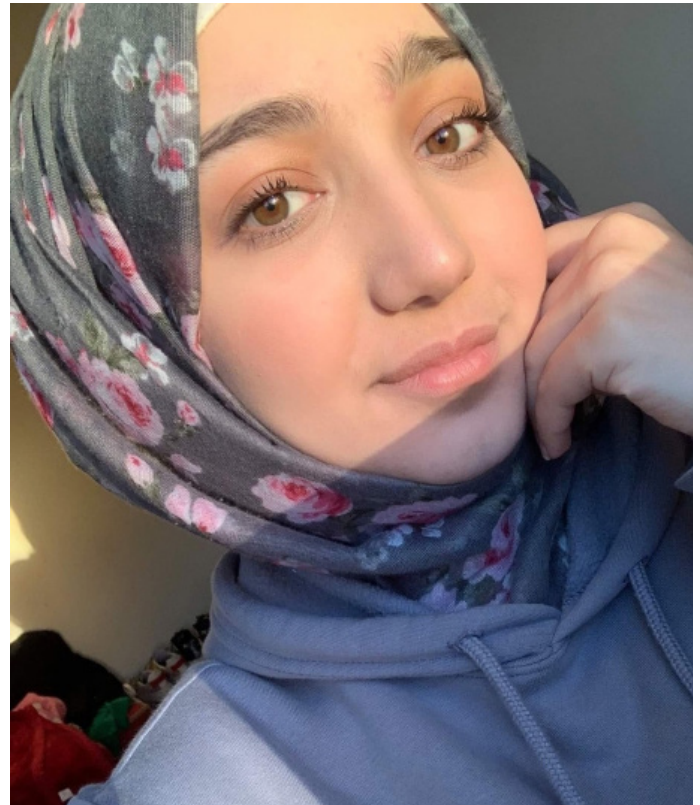
**Asmaa** came to the UK in March 2016 and was one of the first 50 families who arrived through the VPRS. Like many other Syrian refugees, English language was an obstacle to Asmaa, however she thinks it was not big as it is for her parents. “thanks to the interaction I had in college and spending long hours with my English friends at college” she says as English now became “part” of her.

Asmaa’s main goal was to resettle the way she wanted in terms of education, job, and feel more at home. Having the idea of achieving the image she built in her head was what motivates her and inspired her to keep going and work hard on her dreams.

In terms of education, Asmaa’s high qualification was not enough to let her in to the degree she wanted so she had to do A-levels again to be able to achieve her dream. One of the hardest things that she faced was the fact that she was the oldest in her class at college and the same goes for university.

The biggest support that Asmaa received was from her parents who were always there for her, standing next to her in the hardest moments and supporting her dreams. She also received a lot of support from refugee action in terms of informing her about life in the UK and how the system of the country works.

Asmaa worked at Starbucks (her favourite coffee she says) and thanks refugee action and especially Julie for providing the opportunity at the “right



time”.

At the same time, she was volunteering at refugee action with the navigator project for over a year and was doing office-based work.

***Now, Asmaa became employed the navigator project rather than being a volunteer and now she is working as a navigator project assistant helping people to integrate with the community and be able to make them feel more at home.***

Asmaa believes that she is still halfway through achieving her goals. One of them is being a pharmacist as she is now a pharmacy student at the university of Wolverhampton, she is determined to work hard and graduate to become an official pharmacist who can help people in different sectors.

***Asmaa’s message to her community is: “you are doing absolutely great and I know how good we are to adopt and live in a country that we know nothing about. And for all the young ones: pick a dream you are willing to achieve and work on it, trust me it will pay off in the future and it will be amazing”***





# DETERMINED SYRIANS

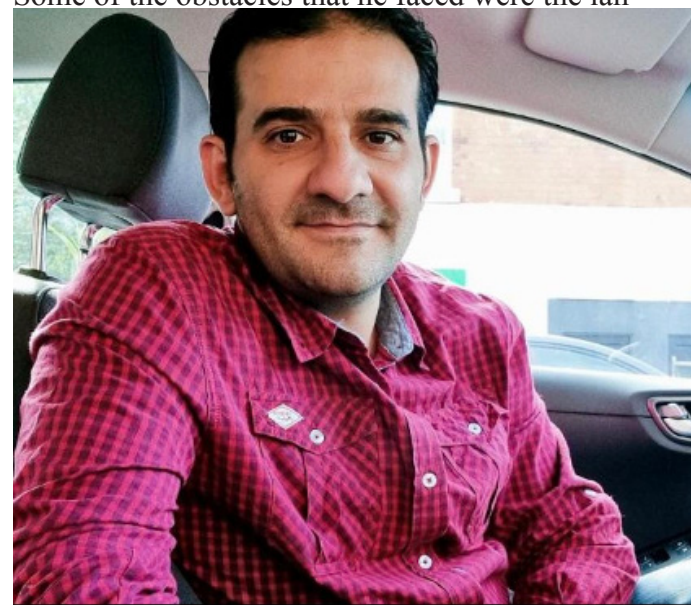


We are very glad to see determined Syrian people trying to prove themselves in this new society, for example: ***Yusuf Almoutalak who opened his own food business “Grab to Eat” in Birmingham during his second year in the country.***

During his journey, Yusuf faced a lot of obstacles however, he refused to give up and continued until he reached his goal which he would like to improve further and further...

Yusuf was motivated to start this business because he wanted to prove himself in the new society, and to present the Syrian food to the new culture in Birmingham.

Some of the obstacles that he faced were the lan-



***Yusuf Almoutalak***

guage barrier and finding a good place to start the business.

***He could overcome these obstacles with the help of some experienced friends, Julie Barton from Refugee Action and Birmingham City Council.***

Yusuf believes that his work is improving every day as he is developing his skills and experience whilst dealing with customers from different cultures and backgrounds.

Yusuf is very determined to improve everything that he does. He is willing to open a restaurant chain which serves delicious Syrian food and make it well-known in Birmingham and other cities across the

west-midlands.

The menu of Grab to eat mostly includes traditional Syrian dishes such as Falafel and Shawarma and these are very liked by majority of customers from different backgrounds.

The menu also includes basic dishes that are liked by everyone including different types of pasta and burgers. Different diets are taken into considerations, so the menu includes some vegetarian options.

***Grab2eat@gmail.com***  
***07403006161***

# TRAINING AND WORK PLACEMENT OPPORTUNITY



The Refugee Council and IKEA are working in partnership to support the employment of refugees.

***This is an opportunity for refugees to access paid work placements at IKEA stores in Sheffield, Leeds, Peterborough, Birmingham and Doncaster.***

## **September 2021 course:**

- Monday 20/09
- Wednesday 22/09
- Monday 27/09
- Wednesday 29/09

All sessions are from 12pm until 2pm

## **Eligibility Criteria**

- Refugee status with permission to work.
- Living in the listed cities.
- English entry 3 or above.
- Over 18 years old.

## **Store tour and interviews dates:**

- Peterborough 30/10
- Doncaster and Leeds 01/10
- Birmingham 01/10
- Sheffield 04/10

## **The online training will include:**

- Information on UK labour market.
- How to write a CV.
- What to expect at interview.
- Introduction to IKEA
- Interview practice.

**AFTER COMPLETING A 4-DAY ONLINE COURSE, PARTICIPANTS WILL VISIT AN IKEA STORE, HAVE A GUIDED TOUR AND A SHORT INTERVIEW.**

***For more information or to register your interest please email [tina.ponting@refugeecouncil.org.uk](mailto:tina.ponting@refugeecouncil.org.uk)***

## **Ikea Placements:**

- Participants will receive an interview for an 8-week paid employment.
- Placements are in the market hall, self-serve or parcel team.
- Pay rate is £9.50 per hour.
- Participants that are not selected for placement will continue to receive support from their advisors.



## SPRING HOUSING - SUPPORT FOR REFUGEES



In December 2016 Spring Housing Association became the housing provider for the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme across the Midlands.

We have provided accommodation in Birmingham, Staffordshire, Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Shropshire and Wolverhampton; and have housed over 200 adults and 142 children.

Spring has recruited local people and set up local offices in Birmingham, 861 Vulnerable Syrians have been housed in the West Midlands since the programme began – Spring have housed 57% of these new arrivals across 113 homes.

We have housed 100% of new arrivals in Birmingham, Worcester, Staffordshire, Shropshire, Wolverhampton and Hereford

Spring works in partnership with Refugee Action, in delivering support to the families that arrive. They have responsibility for sourcing the accommodation.

Their main aim is: “To promote independence and settlement into the UK through housing related targeted support, guidance and empowerment”.

### *Spring Housing supports refugees to:*

- Understand their tenancy agreement,
- Report any repairs to the property

they have provided

- Become used to the UK system especially in relation to housing benefit, utility accounts and tenant responsibilities

### *Spring housing also provides support in the following:*

- Managing housing benefits.
- Filling in important forms.
- Managing bills and finding the best deals for peoples' circumstances.
- Managing council tax
- Set up TV licence.
- Applying for water discount programmes to reduce the cost of bills.

£



Eid packages that were distributed earlier this year.

### *Contact information:*

0121 663 1443

[info@springhousing.org.uk](mailto:info@springhousing.org.uk)

**Head Office: Hestia House, 22 Old Walsall Road, Birmingham, B42 1DT**

# BEAS



BEAS is part of Birmingham city council and is one of the largest adult learning providers.

## It provides the following:

- Free ESOL courses to help people learn the English language.
- Free maths and IT courses to provide students with some essential skills that are required in work life.
- Vocational courses such as business, creative crafts and health and social care.
- A trained staff is available to provide guidance to help students make decisions regardless their career path.

**Contact information:**  
**0121 303 4318**

# ASIRT



***"Are you the primary carer of a British citizen child?"***

If so, you may be eligible to apply for 'Settled Status' under the EU Settlement Scheme.

This could potentially grant you indefinite leave to remain in the UK, without having to pay substantial repeated Home Office application fees.

If you would like further information about this, please contact Dave Stamp at ASIRT

[davestamp@asirt.org.uk].

ASIRT is a registered charity: all our services are free of charge. You will not need to pay for any advice or help we are able to give you".



# IN HER SHOES



We work with women and girls in Birmingham to promote their voices through song creation and performance. We also provide a safe space for women to be themselves, support each other and make friends.

*In our recent projects 'What Community Means to Me', 'Hidden Voices' and the "Syrian Conversation Café" women and girls have worked together to create songs, based on the experience of their lives in Birmingham.*

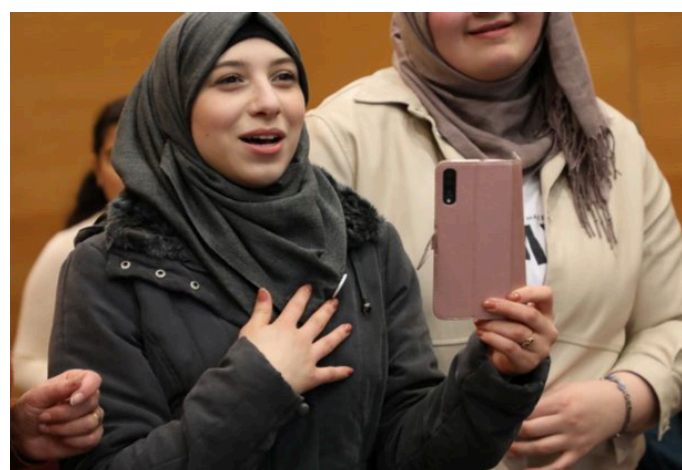
Many of the women who have joined us in the projects are asylum seekers or newly arrived to Birmingham, with women from Syria, Yemen, Nigeria, Sudan, India, Bolivia and Ethiopia taking part in the workshops.

We have met in schools with mothers of young children, joined a youth drama group and over the

last year we have met on line with women asylum seekers. In the lyrics created you will hear the joy and sadness of women's lives.

*We now want to create new projects and groups. Please get in touch with us if you are interested in working with us.*

*info@inher shoes.org.uk*  
*Facebook: InHerShoes Birmingham*  
*Twitter: @inher shoes5*



# ACH - SYRIAN VULNERABLE PERSONS RESETTLEMENT SCHEME (SVPRS)



## “Supporting the Syrian Community into Employment”

As a consequence of the conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Eritrea the Government confirmed its support and the Home Office in turn requested support from local authorities. Birmingham City Council has successfully responded to the need to support the migration of individuals into the city for many years and commissioned the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS).

The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme is a five-year scheme which provides vulnerable Syrian refugees access to resettlement support service, including accommodation, education, orientation, access to benefits, GP registration, ESOL and access to health services.

### What does the scheme do?

In July 2019 ACH was awarded with an Employability Services contract to meet the varying employment support needs of refugees (settled in the UK for 2 – 5 years) to assist developing the skills required to find employment and to gain employment including:

- Work with BCC Employment Team to identify employment and work experience opportunities to help meet the skills gap using information provided to the main contracted provider in the Personal Integration Plan (PIP) conducted during first few weeks of arrival.
- Develop individual career plans following on from

information provided during Personal Integration Plan meetings.

- Support with the job application process including CV writing, application form completion and digital skills.
- Support with IELTS access and funding for the programme.
- Support with and planning, identifying and accessing career pathways to help progress long term career goals including self-employment.
- Support women into employment addressing cultural issues.
- Support access to employment opportunities working alongside DWP job centre work coaches.
- Work with the ESOL Partnership to establish pathways to trades (carpentry, building work) with supported vocational courses.
- Develop relationships with key regional employers (Starbucks, National Express, Ikea) obtaining their commitment to offer opportunities to relaunched in October 2019, the SVPRS team at ACH, Nevinder Ram, Humza Chaudry and Lina Akkad so far has engaged with 125 individuals. Using the INTEGRASS Toolkit (developed through the ARIVE Project) to assess the level of a person's integration, they have been able to provide Information, Advice and Guidance on Employment and Training continuing to support much more at outreach venues in Birmingham.

### The future

We're thrilled to be able to continue working with learners on the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, working to make a real difference to people's lives. ***Lina, Humza and the rest of our staff at ACH Birmingham are excited to carry on supporting people in the Syrian community in Birmingham into employment that is meaningful and helps individuals to reach their aspirations***

***For more info:***

***Nevinder Ram - [nevinder.ram@ach.org.uk](mailto:nevinder.ram@ach.org.uk)***



# REFUGEE ACTION



Refugee action started in 1981, where it helped to support refugees from Vietnam to settle in the UK. They provide services in many different cities across the UK such as London, Manchester, Barford, Liverpool and Birmingham.

***Since 2015, Refugee Action has been funded by Birmingham City Council to support Syrian refugees as part of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. So far, this organisation has helped over 500 Syrians to settle in Birmingham by providing them with free, impartial, and confidential services.***

## Main services that are provided in the first year:

- Registering in universal credit and GP's
- Finding schools for the children and helping with registering and filling forms.
- Finding colleges for adults and giving guidance.

Helping with booking appointments. In 2019, Birmingham City council started to fund the Navigator Project which is separate to the Resettlement scheme. It mainly focuses on helping refugees in their second to fifth year of resettlement. This project mainly focuses on increasing people's sense of belonging and reducing isolation, this is done by:

- Providing information about free/low-cost activities in Birmingham.

- Connecting refugees to activities and services via digital information sharing and group information sessions.
- Building relationships with other organisations to make their services more accessible to the Syrian community and helping them to understand their needs so that the information is suitable for their needs.
- Involving refugees that are "experts by experience" in the delivery of the services.
- Recognising the barriers that prevent Syrians from engaging in local services and helping them to overcome them by building confidence and knowledge.

The project has strongly focused on digital communication from the start, and this has increased due to social restrictions during the pandemic. The organisations' Facebook page was used to:

- Sharing useful information in both English and Arabic.
- Sharing ESOL resources
- Sharing information about virtual resources for children's learning and wellbeing.
- Organising virtual events with partner agencies which provided activities helping people to socialise safely and practice their English. Refugee action has also organised some face-to-face activities for families such as:
- A trip to the city farm
- A women's singing group
- A walk and talk event in Moseley Park.

The following are activity calendars that are launched by refugee action which are both in English and Arabic:

- Summer Holiday Activities:
- Free Adult Activities:

If you need any help registering for activities, please contact the Navigator Team & we can help you.

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/navigator-project>

**WhatsApp:** +44 7702 902787 (Julie)

# Welcome to Bosnia House

## Syrian project



21 09  
—  
02 10  
2021



THINK FREEDOM  
*twelve days of peace*

21.09. Центар за културу Семберија. Бијељина  
27.09. Опćinska vijećnica Velika Kladuša  
29.09. Културни центар Требиње

## Syrian Community Event

Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2021  
11.00am-1pm

Erdington Six Ways Baptist Church, Wood End Rd, Erdington, Birmingham B24 8AD

- Talk to your services providers
- Meet your old friends and make new friends
- A Syrian and Bosnian lunch will be provided.
- Limited places
- Confirm booking:  
[uknetwork.Aicha@btconnect.com](mailto:uknetwork.Aicha@btconnect.com)  
[Uknetwork.mohammad@btconnect.com](mailto:Uknetwork.mohammad@btconnect.com)
- Contact Tel: 0121 772 3052

