Home Office

BUILDING A SAFE, JUST AND TOLERANT SOCIETY

Evaluating ERF and Challenge Fund Services report

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Home Office Online Report 22/06

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Executive summary

Study background

In 2000, two funds were established to support refugees in the UK. The Challenge Fund aimed to support projects focusing on social needs in refugee communities. The European Refugee Fund (ERF) targeted funding towards three types of project: those providing acceptable reception conditions; those encouraging social and economic integration; and those enabling displaced persons to make an informed decision to return home if they wished. This research focused on projects covering the strand relating to integration.

A study carried out in 2002 for the Home Office developed a framework for considering integration among refugees (Ager and Strang, 2004). This *Indicators of Integration* framework consisted of ten 'domains' that the research indicated were of central importance to the integration of refugees in the UK. The findings from the current research, described in this report, are discussed in the context of this framework and the authors draw conclusions about its relevance in explaining the integration of refugees.

In 2003, the Home Office commissioned a quantitative survey of refugees using services provided by projects funded by the ERF and Challenge Fund (Peckham *et al*., 2003). This research provided statistical data about refugees' support needs and their experience of the funded projects.

In order to build on this work and further explore the role of funded projects in helping refugees to integrate into UK society, in 2004 the Home Office commissioned a qualitative impact assessment, which is described in this report. BMRB Social Research carried out qualitative research with refugees using services within projects funded by the ERF or Challenge Fund (shortened to 'ERF/CF projects' in this report). This research aimed to understand the detailed views of service users, how they felt these services impacted on their quality of life and integration and how the services could be improved. In addition, the study aimed to gather contextual information about the lives of refugees in the UK and their aspirations.

Key points

- Refugees' own goals largely match the *Indicators of Integration* identified by Ager and Strang in 2004. From the time when refugees land in the UK their priorities move from reaching safety, to finding shelter and food, securing basic living conditions, pursuing their asylum decision and then moving towards longer-term goals. The learning of English is generally critical to the latter.

- Projects of each type – specific and holistic/wide-ranging – made material contributions to the quality of refugees' lives.

- Benefits arose not only from the direct service offered but also the opportunity to build social bonds, bridges and links.

- Projects appeared to be meeting clients' needs successfully and very little negative feedback was received. Improvements suggested by refugees were primarily related to lack of funding and a high demand for services, problems that are common in the rest of the voluntary sector.

Method

The study consisted of 50 in-depth qualitative interviews with refugees using services provided by a funded project. Ten projects were included in the research, four funded by the Challenge Fund and six by the ERF. Each of these projects was visited by the researchers and staff were initially interviewed informally. Following this, users were recruited with the help of the projects. The recruitment was carried out as far as possible by the researchers rather than by the project

directly. This limited the bias in the selection of the sample, which constituted a fair reflection of refugees' views. Users were purposively selected to reflect a range of demographic characteristics and experience and a diverse mix of gender, age range and country of origin was achieved.

Refugees' goals and priorities

The goals discussed by the refugees in the study fitted well into the *Indicators of Integration* framework. Their short-term goals when they had first reached the UK consisted of meeting their basic physical needs and attaining a level of security. The extent to which this was challenging depended largely on whether they were met by family, friends or an employer when they entered the country. After achieving food, shelter and safety, the next priority was often to establish their right to be in the UK. Refugees – who at the time were asylum seekers – found it difficult both practically and emotionally to work towards other goals whilst this was undecided.

Once they had received leave to remain, they usually had clearly defined medium- and long-term aims. In the long term, they wished to attain a good standard of living, matching what they saw other people in the UK achieving. This included finding housing that they liked and was suitable, and setting up a business or finding paid work that would allow them to reach this standard of living. As a result of these long-term goals, medium-term priorities often focused on acquiring the skills or qualifications that they believed would enable them to gain a sufficiently high income. This included learning English, completing disrupted education, acquiring new skills or qualifications and converting qualifications gained in their country of origin to ones that would be recognised in the UK. Projects helped refugees to achieve these goals through co-ordinating benefits and other help, learning English and other skills such as using computers, and accessing voluntary work.

Making social connections was not generally mentioned as a specific goal. However, it was clear that they were very important to refugees and it was greatly valued when they were facilitated by funded projects.

Challenges facing refugees

The challenges facing refugees in the UK were closely linked to their goals. The first main challenge was gaining leave to remain. This was felt to be a long, drawn out and difficult process with major practical and emotional effects. After this, refugees had to navigate unfamiliar benefits and housing systems and obtain an income to meet their physical needs. In addition, they often found it difficult to acquire cultural knowledge and forge social networks. Finally, gaining employment, particularly employment that was satisfying and provided a good income, was a major problem for many. Learning English was felt to be key in overcoming these challenges.

Help and support for refugees

Family and friends were often the most important source of support refugees mentioned, particularly when they were newly arrived in the UK. They provided financial and practical help as well as emotional support and assistance in navigating unfamiliar systems. Refugees also received help from contacts still in their country of origin and from neighbours or even strangers in the UK. In addition to these informal sources of support, refugees were also helped by people with whom they were in contact through formal channels, such as a solicitor, Student Union or local authority.

The funded projects complemented, supplemented and replaced these sources of help and support in several ways. First, they offered a service that was not available elsewhere (for example finding accommodation for 'non-priority' single refugees or couples without children). Second, they gave help that was more suitable to refugees' needs and background than other services. Finally, they offered support such as befriending, advocacy or co-ordination that might not have been available elsewhere.

Experience of funded projects

The refugees became aware of the funded projects through one of three channels: a recommendation from one of their initial sources of help (for example a friend or solicitor); the project's marketing activity (such as adverts on local radio in the relevant language); and chance (for example, asking a stranger where they might find help and being directed to a project that was nearby). Although all three channels were felt to be helpful, as by definition they had made refugees aware of the projects, word of mouth from someone who was or had been in a similar situation to their own was thought to be particularly good at letting refugees know exactly what to expect from the projects. It also helped to reassure them that they would be welcome. Other projects contacted refugees directly, and they did not become aware of the project until this happened. This may have meant that refugees who would not otherwise have contacted a project participated, although this is difficult to ascertain.

Refugees had some concerns before contacting the projects, principally worries about whether they would be welcome there, how well they would be able to explain their situation without speaking English (well) and what help the project would be able to give them. However, initial experiences of the projects were usually very positive. The welcome given to the refugees put them at their ease, their language needs were met and staff explained clearly to them what help they could receive.

When discussing their overall experience of the funded projects, the refugees generally continued to be very positive. The projects had helped them to achieve some of their goals, or had moved them closer to them. Staff were friendly, polite and went out of their way to help clients. This made the refugees feel welcome and contributed towards their development of social connections. Projects also helped their users to improve their social life and make links with other refugees and the wider community, both through formal activities and informally.

Negative experiences arose mainly where a project had failed to live up to a user's expectations. Those projects with a clear, single aim, such as finding accommodation, seemed more likely to attract some negative feedback, in part because their aims were more difficult to deliver than other projects' and were strongly constrained by external circumstances. In addition to this, some projects were perceived to be underfunded, leading to staff being very busy and refugees having to wait longer than expected for appointments.

The impact of funded projects

The projects in the study provided six main types of services: co-ordination and orientation, education, cultural services, social activities, referrals and finding accommodation. Each of these types of service was valued by refugees, had a positive impact on their lives and contributed towards their economic and/or social integration. Co-ordination and orientation services provided help in achieving or progressing towards goals such as finding suitable housing, education or training and employment. The process of being helped by project staff also helped refugees to develop social connections with staff and people met through education or employment. Additionally, this help increased refugees' own understanding of how to navigate institutions and systems. Finally, refugees also received emotional support as they did not feel that they were coping with problems alone and had a sense of progression towards their goals.

Referrals to other organisations formed one step in the progression towards goals such as housing, employment or education. They also helped refugees develop understanding of unfamiliar systems. Finding suitable housing was a key priority for many refugees and help in achieving this was very highly valued. Assistance in finding housing could also help refugees more intangibly by allowing them to make social links with staff and other people met at the project and helping them not to feel isolated.

Social activities provided a forum within which to create social links thus helping refugees to overcome isolation. Education and cultural activities directly assisted refugees towards their goals of training, employment and language skills. Additionally, these activities increased their

sense of belonging and of having links with other people in their community. English was viewed as being central to achieving a good standard of living and accessing opportunities in the wider community. Without good English, refugees were restricted to a community of people who spoke their language or had to rely on interpreters or intermediaries to interact in the wider community. Those people who were engaged in English language classes therefore felt that this was a major step towards achieving integration. The funded projects provided a bridge to the wider community whilst refugees were unable to interact directly with it and gave them the opportunity to gain the skills and confidence to take a more active part in life outside their own ethnic community.

The funded projects impacted on refugees in five main ways.

- Refugees were enabled to find, or become closer to finding, employment or further opportunities for study.
- Refugees became more comfortable about conducting processes such as applying for benefits on their own behalf, rather than relying on the project staff, friends, or other sources of help.
- Refugees found accommodation, became more aware of the processes involved in doing this, or were enabled to improve their existing accommodation.
- Refugees were enabled to improve their social lives and reduce isolation.
- There was also evidence that refugees had gained in confidence through their involvement with the projects.

The impact that the projects had on refugee's lives had little variation in terms of respondent's age, gender or length of stay in the country. However, clearly people who had been in the country for some years were further on in the integrative process because of a number of factors including psychological adjustment, speaking better English, having built up social bonds, bridges and links, and being more used to systems such as benefits.

Factors influencing projects' impact

Five main factors were identified as affecting the impact that projects had on refugees' lives: staff, equipment, venue, ethos and language.

Projects focusing on a single ethnic minority community and those serving refugees from many different areas seemed to provide similar benefits and to allow the development of social connections as well as more concrete achievements. Likewise, neither of the two projects that gave a single or restricted range of services seemed to be viewed by refugees as being more partial in its impact than did those offering a broad range of help, although this may be because of their differing expectations of these projects. For example, they did not expect a housing project to be able to help them with employment or learning English. However, this was also because of the flexibility shown by projects; it was very important that staff in projects that offered a single service were able to be flexible in their response to refugees and provide some help outside their official remit, such as allowing refugees to ask them for help with letters.

The stage of integration a refugee was already at could also influence the extent to which a project was able to help. Where projects had a co-ordinating or casework role it was comparatively easy for them to make a newly arrived refugee with few contacts in the UK substantially better off than they would otherwise have been, simply by giving them some basic procedural help with things like benefits.

Links with *Indicators of Integration*

The current study fitted well with *Indicators of Integration*. The goals refugees identified as being the most important to them fitted well with the domains identified in the *Indicators of Integration*. Refugees' goals were either explicitly concerned with integration, or had integrative implications.

The domains suggested by Ager and Strang largely reflected those raised by refugees, with the possible exception of 'Health'; however, this is likely to be because refugees were talking about their ambitions and aims, with the topic of health being covered elsewhere in the interview. In particular, the present study showed that the projects were helping refugees to form social networks within and between communities ('bonds' and 'bridges') and also social 'links', for example with project staff and other people in an official or semi-official capacity. Bonds and bridges were created through introducing refugees to each other, or providing occasions or a venue for them to socialise, and links were created by the projects both within agencies and between them (through referrals). Additionally, projects with an English language component in particular were helping refugees' attainment in the 'Language and cultural knowledge' domain, which assisted their achievement in the social domains and those under the 'Means and markers' heading (Employment, Education, Housing and Health).

Conclusions

Refugees' experiences prior to obtaining leave to remain played an important part in their practical and emotional situation as refugees. These experiences also led them to argue that more assistance was required for people in this position. They felt that the distinction between the help available to refugees and that for people who had not received their decision was artificial and unhelpful, as all refugees would at one time have been seeking a decision. In putting forward this view, refugees did not appear to be aware that a high proportion of asylum applications are rejected.

Project users tended to have clearly defined goals in terms of how they wanted their lives to develop. They were often not sure how funded projects would contribute to these before making contact with them, but quickly related the help on offer to their own priorities. Refugees' goals had a strong focus on escaping financial hardship and gaining a good income and therefore standard of living. They therefore tended to concentrate on obtaining suitable housing and a job or business that was associated with a high income. Refugees who were still at the project were generally not working in a job they viewed as being their final or chosen career, although some were in jobs that they were happy with. Similarly, some refugees had found housing (generally social housing) that they were happy with; others were waiting for better accommodation, or aspired to this once they had begun to earn more money. Learning English was often viewed as a vital step on this path. They often also believed that they needed to complete, convert or obtain a qualification or further education in order to achieve a good standard of living, by which they meant a good job and house, along with similar indicators of material success, such as holidays, to those born in UK.

No single model of the best way to deliver services emerged from the study; rather, the continuation of funding for a diverse range of projects seemed to be supported. Three main types of service delivery were evident: individual case workers (or other staff working on a one-to-one basis with users); organised group activities; and a venue for informal interaction. Each of these was appropriate for the delivery of particular services and therefore the achievement of different elements of integration. Likewise, each of the services provided by funded projects made a direct contribution to the development of integration. Funded projects appeared to be very successful in meeting refugees' cultural and language needs, and to establishing relationships with users that facilitated the development of confidence and trust.

The main problems that arose for project users were linked to a lack of funding and high demand for projects' services. This raises the wider question of the capacity and management of the voluntary sector (and parts of the public sector). In particular, the access of the BME voluntary sector to funding, especially long-term funding, has long been recognised by academics working in the field, government departments such as the Department for Work and Pensions, and the voluntary sector itself, as a problem (National Compact: *Getting it right together*). BME voluntary groups are often small and lack the 'professional' expertise necessary to put together a successful funding bid. Certain funds, such as the Big Lottery Fund are aware of this problem and carry out capacity-building work to help BME groups, and others that are small or less experienced, to access funding. Although by definition all the projects in the current study were already accessing funding, some might well benefit from some advice and support in obtaining other funding and developing their capacity.

1 Introduction

Background

The aim of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate of the Home Office is "to regulate entry to and settlement in the UK effectively in the interests of sustainable growth and social inclusion". When asylum seekers have been given leave to remain in the UK it is therefore important to the Home Office that they are able to participate in this sustainable growth and to integrate into the community.

A large number of voluntary and community groups work with refugees to assist them with a wide range of issues. These groups range from national bodies with highly developed strategies to small local organisations with an idea for addressing a specific need in their local area. Groups are generally funded by local authority, central government, European and lottery funding, or by local businesses and communities themselves.

Two funds were established in 2000 to fund projects to support refugees. The European Refugee Fund (ERF) planned to target funding towards three types of project: those providing acceptable reception conditions, those encouraging social and economic integration; and those enabling displaced persons to make an informed decision to return home if they wish. This study focused on those projects covering the strand relating to encouraging integration. In addition to the ERF, the Home Office Refugee Integration Strategy established the Challenge Fund. This aimed to promote projects that focused on social needs in refugee communities.

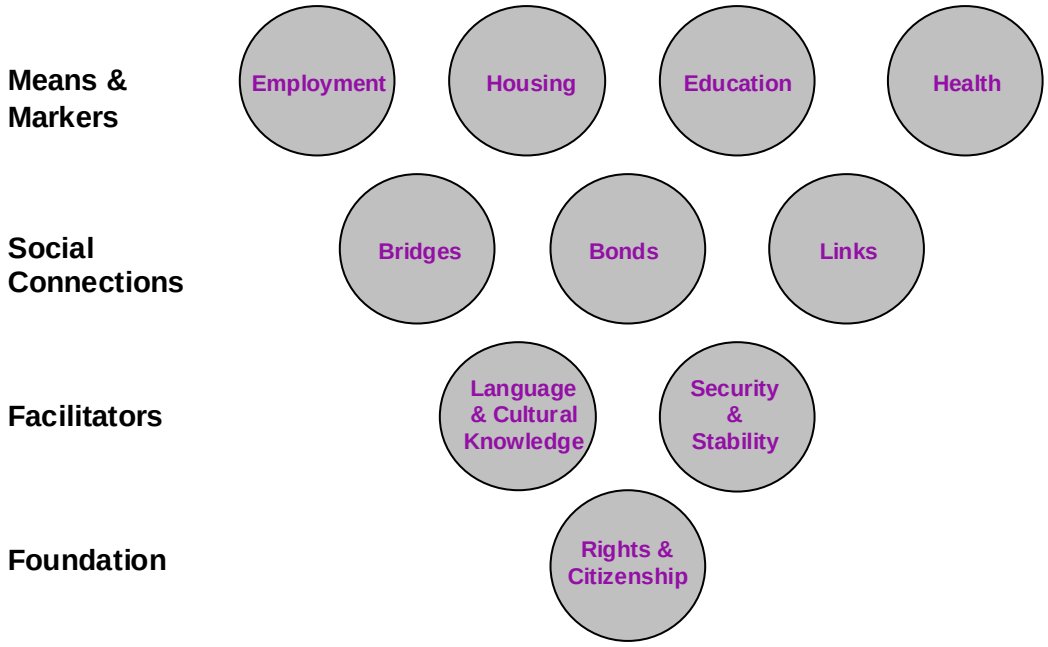
Previous research

Research has been carried out, demonstrating the wide range of barriers that can prevent refugees from becoming integrated and taking part in economic activity. In 2002, the Home Office commissioned Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh, to carry out a study focusing on understanding refugee integration (Ager and Strang, 2004). This study resulted in the development of a framework with a set of indicators that can be used to assess how far refugee integration has been achieved. This framework is referred to within this report as *Indicators of Integration* where it is relevant to the study findings. The framework consisted of ten 'domains' that the research indicated were of central importance to the integration of refugees. The ten domains were further grouped into four headings. Figure 1.1 is taken from *Indicators of Integration*.

Other research has provided data regarding the experience of refugees and their situation in relation to a number of the *Indicators of Integration* domains. The Home Office carried out a limited audit of refugees' skills in 2002- 2003 (Kirk, 2003). The audit indicated that there were great differences in the levels of education, English language skills and work experience among refugees from different countries and between men and women. The needs of refugees with high levels of education and work experience and good English would clearly be very different to those of refugees who had not been employed in their home country, did not have much education and who did not know much English. This diversity of needs, between refugees from the same country as well as refugees from different countries, suggested that a range of different support services should be available to help them to become established and integrated in the UK. It was therefore important that the current study included refugees from different countries and examined the impact of as wide a range of services as possible.

A study carried out in 1997 (before the establishment of the ERF and Challenge Fund) also emphasised the requirement for refugee services to have a flexible and individual approach and for services to be established to meet the needs of very different groups of refugees. The research, *Meeting refugees' needs in Britain: the role of refugee-specific initiatives*, used: interviews with statutory, voluntary and community agencies; case studies of initiatives specifically for refugees; and analysis of information on a wide range of refugee agencies (Carey-Wood, 1997). That study found that most of the services were focused on individual and

***Figure 1.1 The Indicators of Integration framework*[1]**



family case work, advising refugees about welfare rights, immigration and housing. The study also looked at refugee-specific health initiatives, which the authors argued appeared to be providing an economic and effective complementary service to the main health services. Their role in providing culturally appropriate mental health services, acting as advocates and intermediaries and involving refugees themselves (where they had linguistic, cultural and health service skills) was felt to be particularly valuable. At the time of the study, the authors found that refugee-specific services, particularly in relation to employment and training, seemed to rely on the existence of other groups to take responsibility for practical and social problems and focused their own efforts on case work. The employment and training issues that emerged as being most important were English language training, careers advice, help to study and re-qualify, courses about living in Britain, childcare for trainees and addressing discrimination.

A range of types of evaluation and research has been carried out to assess the impact of the projects funded under the ERF and Challenge Fund programmes. In 2003, a quantitative survey was carried out among the users of ten funded projects on behalf of the Home Office by MORI (Peckham *et al*., 2003). The survey emphasised the high level of disadvantage among the clients of ERF and Challenge Fund services. It demonstrated that funded projects did make a real difference to their users' lives. Users' situations with regards to housing, employment and language had all been improved as a result of the services provided by the projects. In order to build on this work and further explore the role of funded projects in helping refugees to integrate into UK society, in 2004 the Home Office commissioned a qualitative impact assessment, which is described in this report.

[1] Ager and Strang, 2004.

Research aims

The study aimed to discover 'what works' in the provision of services funded by the ERF and Challenge Fund and understand the impact of the projects that have been funded. The specific objectives of the research were to:

- understand the detailed views held by users of the services provided by projects funded by the ERF or Challenge Fund;
- examine users' perceptions of how these services have impacted upon their own quality of life and integration;
- discover how the services funded by ERF/Challenge Fund could be improved; and
- explore the experiences of refugees on a wider basis, understanding what their lives are like and what they aspire to.

2 Method

Conduct of the research

This study adopted a wholly qualitative methodology. It was felt this would most appropriately meet the aims of the research, by allowing a thorough exploration of the issues, looking at the underlying views and expectations of refugees, their experiences and views regarding the projects they attended, and also their lives more generally. To explore these issues effectively it was deemed necessary to spend time with the users in order to develop a rapport and to adopt a flexible approach to collecting the data, to allow interviews to be exploratory, interactive and responsive. Furthermore, it was deemed necessary to undertake in-depth probing of respondents' views to uncover which elements of the projects had affected users and how other aspects of their lives interacted with the support received from the projects.

In-depth interviews were adopted as the main method as they not only enabled individual experiences to be explored flexibly, but also provided a more relaxed and secure environment for participants to discuss potentially sensitive issues (particularly in comparison with a group situation). It was felt this enabled respondents to discuss issues, such as their views of the services they received, openly and honestly and this was seen as being particularly important given the close-knit nature of some of the communities involved in the project.

All the in-depth interviews were undertaken by experienced qualitative researchers, using non-directive interviewing techniques. Interviews were guided by a topic guide developed by BMRB, in close liaison with the Home Office (see Appendix 1). Although topic guides ensure systematic coverage of key points across interviews, they were used flexibly to allow issues of relevance to respondents to be covered.

Prior to the interviews, all participants were asked whether or not they would like to use an interpreter during the interview to help with any language barriers that might exist. However, interpreters accompanied researchers to all of the interviews in order to assist should they be required. The English language needs of respondents who took part in this study were said to have varied enormously and, where it was deemed necessary at the point of the interview (either by the interviewees or the researchers' assessment) an interpreter was, with the consent of the interviewee, used for either the whole or for part of the interview.

Although views on using an interpreter were not explored with respondents following the interviews, researchers felt this approach had worked effectively as it had facilitated a more in-depth and meaningful discussion. This was said to be the case not only in instances where the respondent had a pronounced difficulty speaking English, but also for those with a less marked need. Specifically it was felt to have enabled researchers to explore and probe the issues more precisely and in depth and also ensured greater understanding of the issues. Moreover, in some instances researchers had enough knowledge of the interviewee's language that they could understand (much or elements of) the interpretation and they felt confident that the interpreters were accurately relaying their questions and the answers given, word for word. Further detail on the ethical considerations in using interpreters is in Appendix 2.

Contact with the projects

The researchers were provided with a full database of the projects funded under the ERF and Challenge Fund and selected ten to be involved in the study. These were chosen primarily to reflect projects of different sizes and types, with different types of client groups and in a range of locations across the country.

The Home Office wrote to each of these projects to introduce the research and request help with it. Following this, the researchers contacted the projects directly to gain their support and to seek access. Researchers contacted the group by telephone initially in order to introduce

themselves, to provide information about the study and to arrange a date for a face-to-face visit. Face-to-face visits were carried out for a number of reasons, including to:

- develop trust with the project and obtain their co-operation with the recruitment process;
- look around the projects in order to understand the set-up in terms of refugees visiting, activities, number of staff and so on, and generally to find out more about the services provided and running of the project;
- see the database (if one was kept) in order to assess how useful it was likely to be in recruiting respondents and discuss use of this; and
- discuss alternative methods of recruitment if no database was held or BMRB was not allowed to use it.

Each project was visited by a researcher who met staff and talked to them. The meeting took place with one or more contacts at the project and typically lasted for one to two hours. The meeting was tape-recorded and transcribed for future reference. These first interviews were intended primarily to orientate the research with refugees. Findings from the projects, when used in the current report, are therefore only to contextualise the main findings from the interviews with refugees.

Recruitment of participants

Participants were purposively selected to provide insight into the impact of projects funded under the ERF or Challenge Fund. They were therefore all people who had used the services provided by the projects and were recruited through them.

From the ten projects chosen to take part in the research, a total of 50 individuals were recruited to participate in the study. Participants were all recruited directly via the projects using one or a combination of the following four methods.

- A full database of the project users was provided by the project. Potential contacts were then given the opportunity to opt out before any users were contacted. This method of recruitment was used wherever possible. (Two projects).
- In one case the project wanted to organise the opt-out process, rather than allow the researchers to do this. In this case, the researchers provided advice and a letter template. The full database, minus those who had opted out, was then passed to the researchers, who carried out the recruitment. (One project).
- Staff collected the details of as many of their users as possible over a defined period of time and passed the list (with the users' permission) to the researchers. The researchers then recruited participants from that list. This occurred where no database existed. (Five projects).
- The researcher visited the project and recruited users on site for interviews, either carried out immediately or arranged for a later date. This method was utilised where none of the above methods was feasible. (Two projects).

In order to ensure that a range of users were involved in the study, researchers agreed suitable quotas with each project. Where possible, these included a mix of:

- men and women;
- age;
- experience of a range of services (depending on which were funded by the ERF or Challenge Fund); and
- country of origin.

It was felt that setting quotas would not only provide a good mix of respondents, but also that it would reduce the influence exerted by the projects regarding which participants did or did not take part in the research. However, it is important to note that in some instances the projects worked with a limited number of refugees, in some cases far below the 50 names generally considered standard practice by the research team to recruit a sample of five respondents. In these instances there was very little choice about who to contact. Furthermore, the demographic composition of the group also often lacked variation, for example, consisting of mainly women, and again this further reduced the scope for achieving the quotas and providing a mix in all cases. To some degree the choice of projects was led by the willingness and availability of individuals to participate and this accounts for the over-sampling of certain ethnic groups, such as Sri Lankan participants (see Table 2.1). Notwithstanding this, it was felt that the sample constituted a fair reflection of refugees' views and in some instances, the lack of choice was felt to have reduced bias – especially where staff were directly involved in recruitment, as it meant they were less able to chose or 'cherry-pick' respondents.

Because of the limited numbers (highlighted above), in two projects it was not possible to speak to the five refugees originally intended and so fewer refugees were interviewed at these projects. Numbers were made up from other projects in order to retain the same number of interviews overall. Qualitative research does not depend on numerical strength of responses but instead seeks to identify and compare the range of views existing across a given group of people. A total of 50 respondents were chosen because they would provide a large enough sample to capture this range of opinion. It is therefore unlikely that the uneven sampling from two projects has affected the research findings.

The research aimed to focus on refugees rather than asylum seekers. However, it was agreed with the Home Office that asking respondents for their status at recruitment stage could be intimidating and might affect participation. It was also thought that asking respondents about their status might affect the willingness of projects to participate in the research, as they might think they would be criticised if they had offered help to asylum seekers and were only funded to offer help to refugees. Projects themselves often do not make a distinction between refugees and asylum seekers because they find it difficult to exclude asylum seekers who are in need of support. Previous experience had also shown that immigrants were not always sure of their exact status, or expressed it in a number of different ways.

The researchers therefore did not screen out asylum seekers from the research but did ascertain participants' status during the interview so that it could be taken into consideration in the interpretation of the findings. Only five out of the 50 interviews were with asylum seekers, and whether or not the respondent was an asylum seeker was indicated when the interviews were analysed, so the fact that some asylum seekers have been included should not have had any important effect on the findings.

The recruitment process was iterative and in total it took approximately one month to organise the interviews. The fieldwork was carried out between October 2004 and January 2005.

The full sample profile is provided in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Sample profile

Location (code) of project	ERF/Challenge Fund	Individual's country of origin[2]	Gender	Age	Total
London (A)	Challenge Fund	Sri Lanka (Tamil) x 7	Female x 4 Male x 3	18-25 x 4 26-39 x 3	7
Newcastle (B)	Challenge Fund	Iran x 2, Ivory Coast, Sudan, Zimbabwe	Female x 2 Male x 3	18-25 x 2 26-39 x 3	5
Cardiff (C)	Challenge Fund	Afghanistan, Burundi, Cameroon, Jamaica, Palestinian Authority, Somalia	Female x 1 Male x 5	18-25 x 1 26-39 x 4 40+ x 1	6
Liverpool (D)	Challenge Fund	Yemen x 3, Zimbabwe, Uganda	Female x 3 Male x 2	18-25 x 2 26-39 x 2 40+ x 1	5
Belfast (E)	ERF	Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe	Female x 1 Male x 2	18-25 x 1 26-39 x 1 40+ x 1	3
Leicester (F)	ERF	Congo, Iraq, Rwanda, Somalia	Female x 2 Male x 2	18-25 x 2 26-39 x 2	4
London (G)	ERF	Nigeria, Sri, Lanka, Togo, Uganda x 2	Female x 5	16-17 x 2 18-25 x 2 26-39 x 1	5
London (H)	ERF	Turkey (Kurdish) x 5	Female x 1 Male x 4	18-25 x 1 26-39 x 4	5
Glasgow (I)	ERF	Albania, Georgia, Iraq (Kurdish) x 2, Iran	Female x 1 Male x 4	26-39 x 2 40+ x 3	5
Stockport (J)	ERF	Angola, Chechnya, Czech Republic, Iran x 2	Female x 1 Male x 4	26-39 x 3 40+ x 2	5
Total	Challenge Fund x 23 ERF x 27	Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Chechnya, Congo, Czech Republic, Georgia, Iran x 5, Iraq x 3, Ivory Coast, Jamaica, Mauritius, Nigeria, Palestinian Authority, Rwanda, Somalia x 2, Sri Lanka x 9, Sudan, Togo, Turkey x 5, Uganda x 3, Yemen x 3, Zimbabwe x 3	Female x21 Male x 29	16-17 x 2 18-25 x 15 26-39 x 25 40+ x 8	50

Analysing and presenting the findings

The analysis of the qualitative material was carried out using a system known as Matrix-Mapping (see Appendix 3). Matrix-Mapping begins with a familiarisation stage that includes reviewing the audio tapes and/or transcripts. Based on the coverage of the topic guide, the researchers' experiences of conducting the fieldwork and their preliminary review of the data, a thematic framework is constructed. The analysis then proceeds by summarising and synthesising the data (contained in interview transcripts) according to this thematic framework. When all the data have been sifted according to the core themes, the analyst begins to map the

[2] One of each nationality unless otherwise stated.

data and identify features within the data: defining concepts; mapping the range and nature of phenomena; creating typologies; finding associations; and providing explanations. The key issues, and the features that underpin them, are then used as the basis for constructing the written report.

Adopting a qualitative approach has made it possible to report on the range of views, experiences and suggestions reported by participants. The purposive nature of the sample design as well as the small sample size, however, means that the study cannot provide any statistical data relating to the prevalence of these views, experiences or suggestions. Where there were differences in the views of different types of respondents, this has been highlighted within the text.

Ethical considerations

The following ethical issues were identified.

- The level of control ceded to staff in the funded projects to select respondents for the study.
- Meeting the language needs of respondents and ensuring they could articulate their views fully.
- Confidentiality.
- Ensuring that respondents understood the nature of the research and addressing any concerns they had about it.
- The vulnerable state of some of the respondents.

A fuller discussion of how these ethical questions were addressed is included in Appendix 2. However, briefly, a number of measures were taken to minimise the possible adverse ethical consequences of these issues. Various measures were taken to ensure that:

- staff at the projects had as little control as possible in the selection of respondents, and also understood that there was no need for them to carry out the selection;
- the research was carried out using a mixture of bilingual researchers and English-speaking researchers working with professional interpreters not connected to the projects;
- wherever possible, interviews were held away from the project premises to help respondents feel able to express any negative views about the project and, as is standard, participants in the research were assured that everything they said was anonymous and that no personal details that would identify them would be reported to the Home Office or anyone else;
- time was built into recruitment and interviews to discuss the research with respondents, listen to their concerns and explain the researchers' role and aims; and the researchers experienced in working with vulnerable groups were used.[3]

[3] All researchers are trained as standard in coping with upset or emotional respondents.

3 Findings: goals and challenges

Introduction

On arrival in the UK, prior to being given leave to remain, refugees said their initial aims had centred on meeting their physical needs (and those of their family in some cases) and pursuing refugee status so that they would have a right to stay in the country. The importance of this was emphasised in instances where individuals did not have a pre-existing support network to help them in the earliest days, such as family or friends. In the longer term, respondents hoped to integrate into the country by obtaining housing, education and employment of a similar standard to those of British citizens. They often suggested that learning English was key to meeting these goals.

People received support and guidance from a range of places, including both informal and formal sources. Different types of projects fitted into these support systems in a variety of ways, depending on how strong the individual's pre-existing support networks were.

Refugees' goals and priorities

The goals highlighted by refugees who engaged in this study fit well into the Indicators of Integration framework. For example, some refugees suggested that initially they wanted to achieve a basic level of security in terms of reaching a safe place, being able to survive and having somewhere to live.

> *"When I come to here it doesn't matter, UK or different country, doesn't matter for me…just I had a problem [in my] country. I come…or must be I now die…[I just] wanted safety country."*

Primary goals

Pre-existing contacts and physical needs

The precise situation in which refugees – who were initially without any right to remain in the UK – found themselves on their arrival naturally varied according to whether or not they knew anyone in the country and on the type of relationship they had with that person. In some instances, respondents were already familiar or close to the family member/s or friend/s they met, for example they met their spouse or sibling(s), whereas in other cases they were less familiar and met more extended family members or friends.

Some respondents were met at the airport or other terminus by family or friends who had prepared accommodation and in some instances employment, such as au pair work in the family home. The type of accommodation organised ranged from a spare room where the refugee could stay long-term, to being fitted in elsewhere in the house on a long- or short-term basis. Although the accommodation was not always seen as being ideal in that it could be very basic, short-term or overcrowded, it still provided somewhere to stay that represented security from sleeping rough or having to manage independently. As a result of the accommodation, participants were immediately able to think beyond the need for shelter and food towards their longer-term future.

> *"I have friends of course, first night, I spent with some friends, in a small room, or hall, all of us, really when we arrived here, we were very, very tired, and we looking for anywhere, we went to sleep, and we sleep really in very small area, room, it was really big suffering, and really, if I remember that it is a big headache".*

Other people were left to fend for themselves. In some cases refugees had expected to have to do this, but for others it came as a surprise as they were deserted by either family/friends or by their agent. For example, in one instance, which was not typical of those interviewed, a refugee was let down, having expected to be met at the airport by a friend; in another a family was left by their agent on the roadside in what they thought was London, but later turned out to be

Belfast. The agent gave the family £20 and said they would be back, however they did not return.

> *"When I came I was just left on the roadside and they gave me £20 and said they'll be back, but they never came back. I waited so long, and then after that I was asking so many people where to go. My children were very hungry and wanted to eat."*

Where it came as a surprise, people had often given no thought to what to do on arrival, trusting that their agent or family/friends would have made the necessary arrangements. In these situations, refugees' primary goals were likely to be physical, i.e. somewhere to stay and food.

Right to remain

Once participants' basic physical needs had been met, their next goal was often to establish their right to be in the UK (the 'rights and citizenship' indicator under the heading 'foundation') and it was often said that one of the first things undertaken was to find legal representation; in some cases this was organised by family/ friends on their arrival. It was thought that this action was linked to the desire for stability and safety and refugees found it difficult both practically and emotionally to work towards other goals until this was settled or being dealt with. After this, they focused on medium- and long-term goals, which ranged across the other domains: Employment; Housing; Education; Social connections; Language and cultural knowledge.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the different needs that had to be met and priorities considered before refugees were able to concentrate on working towards their longer-term aims. Although this was not a rigid model (there were some refugees who had begun to think about future employment, courses and so on even before arrival), Figure 3.1 does show an approximate ranking of needs, both in terms of their importance to refugees and of the order in which they were able to work on them. One respondent explained how initial difficulties had resulted in them choosing not to attend an English course. However, once resolved they did subsequently engage in a course.

> *"They did tell me about [the English course] but I had this problem with the Home Office, interview … and all that. Because of that I didn't attend classes [at first]."*

One refugee reported having undertaken odd jobs for family and friends on an *ad hoc* basis, and one student had continued attending university lectures before being legally entitled, while the decision was being processed.

> *"So I was doing that illegally which was wrong again, but I was doing that for my own good because at the end of the day, I've got to do something for myself. No one is caring about me, I would care about myself. So I kept on illegally coming to lectures, but not tutorials, so I have to do double work at home … sometimes I won't understand, so it was really a very bad experience which is sad."*

Apart from this none of the interviewed refugees suggested they had not stayed hidden in the country and worked illegally and nor had they considered this. This finding might have transpired for one of three reasons.

- It may be that respondents did not disclose this during the interview because they were not specifically asked about it (although respondents were probed in detail both about what they had done in their first days, weeks and months in the country and other jobs they had done before their current one) – or even when given the confidentiality assurances – felt this information might jeopardise their right to remain, their benefits, or other aspects of their relationship with the Government.

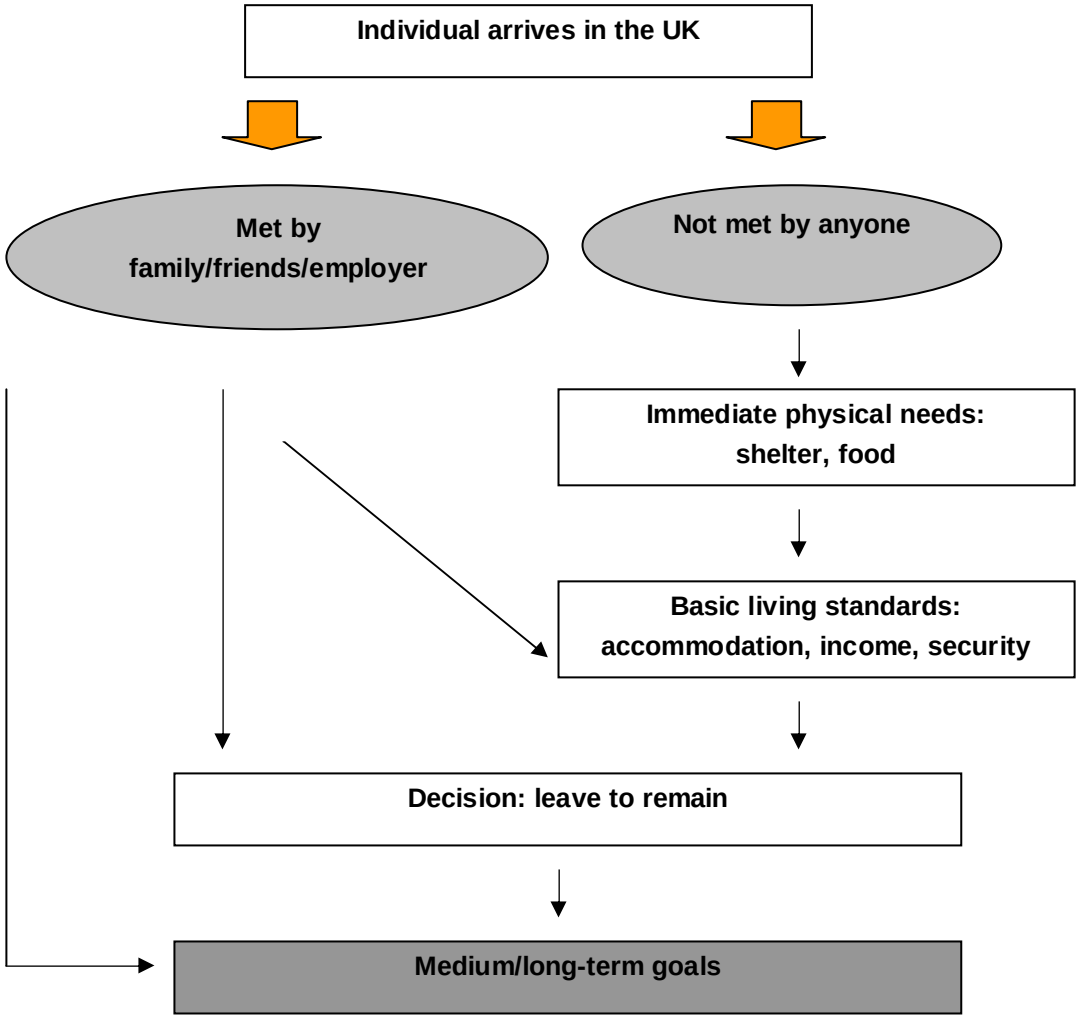
- A refugee helped by one of the projects, who had lived or worked illegally in the UK, might not have been willing to be interviewed as part of a research study carried out on behalf of the Government.

- Possibly the refugees interviewed had not worked illegally as either (a) they claimed asylum quickly (and were granted quickly) and consequently had been able to work legally (which would also have meant they were likely to earn more) or study for qualifications, or (b) they were unwilling morally to act illegally. This latter point was backed up by one participant who

reported having refused to take a job illegally when offered one. Although it is difficult to calculate the numbers working illegally it may be that, as a percentage of the total, the numbers are small enough for it not to be surprising that none had worked illegally in the current sample of 50 refugees and asylum seekers.

Figure 3.1 shows how individuals who were met by family, friends or an employer were enabled to think beyond their immediate physical needs for food and shelter, and progress to the further stages of thinking about leave to remain and medium/long-term goals, sooner than those who were not met.

Figure 3.1: Refugees' priorities



Once the decision had been received, refugee status granted and refugees had found at least a temporary means of support, the main difficulties were said to be those involving integration, whether or not the respondent stated explicitly that they wanted to fit into British society or whether this could be inferred from their goals.

Although refugees' primary aims were safety, which they associated with ILR, they were also thinking at a very early stage about their medium- to long-term goals in the UK, although they did not necessarily do this in any great depth or pursue such goals until ILR had been granted.

Some refugees also spoke of the psychological difficulties of living without ILR and the fact that they were not able to make long-term plans while waiting for this. One respondent also spoke about not having claimed asylum for some time after his arrival in the UK because he was worried about being refused. Although atypical of refugees in this study further research would be needed to determine whether or not this view is shared by other people who choose not to apply for asylum as soon as they enter the UK.

Medium- to long-term goals

Refugees' medium- to long-term goals centred on securing a good standard of living and this was defined in two ways. For those of working age, a good standard of living was very much defined in terms of having a good job or running a business that produced a good income. For those at all life stages, the definition also included owning a house or flat which they liked. Those still in full-time education, whether or not they were living with their parents, still aimed for a good job and good accommodation, but were, as a primary goal, trying to secure the qualifications or English skills necessary to get them. Echoing the definition of integration provided by *Indicators of Integration*, they aimed to secure the same standard of living as British citizens by finding housing, including adequate or better housing than their initial accommodation, and taking the steps needed to find paid work or set up a business. There were also some who discussed other aspects of achieving a good standard of living, for example affording luxuries such as holidays and toys for children.

Employment and education

As a result of these long-term goals, medium-term goals focused on acquiring the skills or qualifications to ensure a sufficiently high income to support themselves. Long-term ambitions were as varied as opening a hairdressing salon and becoming a veterinary surgeon. Those who did not consider themselves to have finished their education tended to concentrate more on attaining initial qualifications, while those who had begun to work in their country of origin generally preferred to concentrate on learning English or updating and translating their skills to enable them to work in the UK.

> *"I had no concerns, I just wanted to learn, that's all I thought about."*

> *"They got a community development course going on, Level 2 Community Development class, so since I expressed my interest in studying, you know social work, they got me involved as soon as possible."*

The choice of job was determined by judgements as to what would provide a good income and by past experience in particular areas, and also by the respondent's own abilities and preferences. However, career decisions were often not fixed, as the age of many respondents meant they had not completed their education or had not settled on one career path. The age of those who had not yet finished their education varied from 17 to 30, meaning that the age group covered by those who were undecided about what they wanted to do was a large one, and one about which it is difficult to generalise. However, as would be expected, the older students were, the more ideas they tended to have about what they wanted to do.

The need to learn English

Those who were not fluent in English felt that language was a particular barrier to integration. Even those who had learned English at school experienced problems at first when trying to apply it to everyday life. The learning of English was therefore often the next goal after being granted Indefinite Leave to Remain. As the quote below typifies, refugees felt that fluency in English would enable them to find a job or attend classes or courses delivered in English in order to pursued qualifications. This is discussed further in Promoting Integration (Section 6, below).

> *"[I] studied English in Cameroon originally to take [my] exams. Spoken English wasn't at the time very important, but it is now."*

> *"[With English I] can find a better job or [I] can do [my] own business. If [I have] good English [I] will get promotion as well.".*

The few who did not feel as pressing a need to learn English were:

- those who were able to meet all or most of their requirements within their own ethnic community;
- those who were past retirement age and therefore did not need to work; and
- some women who expected their main role to be within the home with the family.

Some refugees managed to live entirely within their own ethnic community and meet all of their needs in terms of employment as well as friendships and other relationships. Although exceptions may exist, in the present study this was more likely in one of two situations: where the community was large enough to support employers who ran businesses where a single language other than English was spoken (there were at least two cities supporting single ethnic communities of this type in the current study); or where respondents did not want to take an active role outside the family and therefore did not need to seek employment. One community was able to supply other needs too, such as legal advice and GPs, in the relevant language. Some women who did not need or want to work felt they did not need to learn English, or to attain fluency. However, other women who intended to remain at home emphasised that it was still necessary for them to learn English, for example to liaise with their children's schools. Refugees who were able to meet all their needs within their own family or ethnic community appeared to prioritise and develop social bonds at the expense of social bridges.

Other medium-term goals

Another medium-term goal, for those at a life stage where they had a spouse or family, and had left them in their home country, was bringing them over to the UK. Unlike the respondent's own refugee status, however, this did not tend to occupy thoughts and energy to the exclusion of being able to progress with other goals in the meantime. Indeed, it could act as a spur to action, as respondents who wanted to bring a spouse or family over also wanted to provide them with a home.

Social connections were not mentioned explicitly as goals, however, they were clearly very important to refugees and therefore can be classed with the medium- to long-term goals because it was clear that refugees expected: social links to follow as a natural result of contact with agencies, education or employment; contact with projects with a social element; and to be a consequence of any subsequent integration. This could be seen, for example, when people were discussing the effects of learning English – one of which was being able to talk to people in shops, at work and school, and so on.

> *"[My wife is] interested to learn English, that's the important thing... anything you want to do, you can pass all the problems that you face [if you do that]."*

Among the benefits of contact with the funded projects, making links with other refugees and non-refugees in the community was valued greatly, as was assistance in navigating government services (characterised as 'social links' in *Indicators of Integration* report). Another domain under the Means and Markers heading that was not mentioned explicitly as a goal was health. This may have been because interpreters were provided by the NHS and so refugees were able to access this from the earliest stage of their arrival. However, as with social connections, there were refugees who said that having learned English had enabled them to communicate more clearly with health providers: it therefore improved the ease rather than the possibility of access to this domain.

Long-term future

In considering their long-term future, respondents were divided between those who wanted to return to their country of origin when the situation that had led them to leave had improved, and those who did not, or thought it would not be possible. Those who did not plan to return tended to be more determined to learn English (if they felt they needed to), get an education, or UK qualifications equivalent to those held in the country of origin, gain employment and settle as a British citizen.

However, those refugees who intended to return home in the future also emphasised the need to pursue studies, gain employment and find somewhere to live in the meantime. They made the point that it was difficult to know how long it would be before they were able to return to their home country. There were also those who had initially planned to return, but had since decided to stay because they had become settled in the UK.

The current study and previous research findings

The information gained from the qualitative interviews with refugees for the current study may provide additional understanding of the results of the survey of refugees in funded projects carried out by MORI (Peckham *et al.,* 2003). This survey found that, in answer to a question about which elements of their lives needed improving, refugees answered as follows: housing 64 per cent; health 37 per cent; decision (about their leave to remain in the UK) 35 per cent; employment 33 per cent; family reunion 29 per cent; adult education or training 23 per cent; crime and safety 20 per cent; social life 18 per cent; isolation 15 per cent; local services and amenities 13 per cent. These answers seem to reflect in part the stage that respondents in this survey had reached in the process of integration.

The current study demonstrates that those who had not received permission to stay in the UK found this extremely stressful and regarded it as the main problem they faced. The issue of housing occurred at a number of stages in refugees' experience. First, it arose when they initially arrived in the UK. Next, it was important if they found somewhere to stay (either while awaiting a decision or after receiving one) but did not like it very much. Finally, housing could also be a concern when they were living somewhere 'decent' but, as with many UK citizens, wished to live somewhere that was larger, more pleasant or in a preferred area. The urgency of the housing need varied depending on which of these stages refugees had reached and how inadequate the current accommodation was considered to be.

Employment and training or education issues likewise arose at different points. Refugees were very keen to establish a secure source of income so that they could support themselves and their families. However, they also had longer-term goals of gaining more satisfying and better paid employment, sometimes after gaining a qualification. In addition to this, refugees who were concerned about adult education or training also included those who wished to continue education that had been disrupted or who wanted to convert a qualification gained in their country of origin to one that would be recognised in the UK. Respondents who wanted to update or translate their skills had already qualified in their own country of origin, and some had been working for many years, meaning that these refugees were comparatively (in the UK) old to be in full-time education – typically in their 30s. However, such respondents emphasised that allowing them the initial time to study would mean they could pursue their chosen career path, earn more, and make a valuable contribution to society (such as practising as a GP).

The current study also suggested a possible explanation for the fairly low proportion of respondents to the MORI quantitative survey (Peckham *et al.,* 2003) who mentioned social life and isolation. This may reflect the links that they had been able to make through the ERF/CF project or which existed in any case within their family, community of people from a similar ethnic background or they had gained through training or employment.

Issues relating to health did not emerge particularly strongly in the current study, despite the relatively high percentage of respondents mentioning it in the MORI survey. However, refugees participating in the current study did often discuss mental health, in particular, as having been an issue for them or their families at some stage since they had been in the UK. Stress and depression were the problems that seemed to have been most difficult for these refugees to cope with. The current study did not focus specifically on health, but rather included it as one issue to be explored among others. The study of mental health problems is always complex and highly sensitive, and is even more so when the issues are understood differently depending on cultural background. It may therefore be advisable for further research to be carried out in order to understand better the health problems facing refugees.

The current research largely reflects the range of priorities identified by MORI. However, as the current study is qualitative in nature, in contrast to the quantitative MORI survey, the issues cannot in the same way be ranked in order of importance.

The challenges facing refugees in the UK

The challenges felt to be facing refugees in the UK were closely linked to their goals. Before the attainment of refugee status, participants thought the main challenge facing them was obtaining leave to remain. They felt this was a drawn-out process which left them unable to pursue work, education, housing or any of their other long-term aims. They thought that individuals could be left psychologically and emotionally adrift while the decision was being made, as the quote below typifies. The system was also believed to be inconsistent and unfair on occasion: for example, accepting some but denying others apparently in similar circumstances; or treating applicants more favourably who came from countries where the political situation was making headlines, also described in the quote below.

> *"When everyone knew there were problems … like in Congo, the decisions were made very quickly. Other people, it's all [my] impressions, they were not helped very quickly, they had to wait and were not believed when they were talking about their own problems. Once [I had] received [my] decision, the psychological problems [were] over."*

Benefit systems

Before receiving their decisions, respondents said they had found the period when they could not apply for state benefits particularly difficult. Where it was mentioned, the money respondents received from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) (before being granted state benefits) was deemed insufficient to live on. The views of those who went on to claim state benefit tended to vary regarding how adequate they found benefits to be, with views ranging from those who felt it met their needs either easily or with difficulty to those who felt they were unable to manage on the money they received.

For the most part, participants who had experienced the voucher system, during the period they were being supported by NASS, found the vouchers difficult to use. This was because of the limited shops at which they were allowed to use them and other practical reasons, for example, having to use the value of the voucher exactly and not being able to use them for second-hand goods. They also found the system humiliating, as it marked them out as 'different' from the rest of the local population. Refugees also found it particularly difficult not to be working, as is discussed further below (Other help the Government could offer refugees).

After receiving their decisions, refugees had to navigate unfamiliar benefit and housing systems in order to find a temporary place of shelter and means of support. NASS, other organisations and friends and family helped with this, typically they helped respondents complete the benefit forms and gave general advice; more exceptionally, they accompanied the participant to the Jobcentre.

> *"They helped us with housing benefit. We went to the council and got housing benefit form which they filled in for us. It was all okay, they looked at the form and it was okay so they gave us the money."*

> *"He took me to the Jobseekers office and we handed the form in there. He took me as well to the council where I can find a flat (housing benefit). He fill in the form for a flat and he follow the process with me as well until I got this flat."*

Despite this it was still thought to be a difficult process and one that was even more difficult for those who did not speak English as the language acted as a barrier.

> *"Because of the language problem we had trouble filling in the forms – the benefit forms and things. We were given a list if you want to go for benefit that we had to attach with that. The next time we went I took all the things that were required. Then she filled in the form and I took it straight to the council."*

Some refugees appeared to have 'slipped through the net' and had been unaware that benefits existed until alerted by one of the projects. However, this lack of awareness of benefits appeared to be because they had not applied for refugee status, at least initially. In the case where the refugee had not done this for a period of two years, it was the project that had finally informed him of his benefit entitlements.

Social networks

Another challenge for refugees was to forge social networks for themselves. Although, as mentioned previously, this was not often mentioned as an explicit goal, it was something refugees did envisage as being part of their future. Refugees made social contacts in various ways: through the funded projects and people met at the funded projects, and through employment and education. On at least one occasion this was through voluntary work found for, or education provided to, the refugee by the ERF/CF projects, but could also be through work or education found independently. Refugees also created social networks through making friends in everyday social interaction such as going shopping, visiting pubs and similar social situations. Although this was easier for those for whom English was their first language, it was also possible for those who were socialising within their own ethnic communities or had learned English as the following quote typifies.

> *"I arrived here and it was completely strange to me, the country, the culture itself. I realised that I had to learn the language and the culture so I would be able to integrate and become a part of society itself."*

Acquiring cultural knowledge was also felt to be desirable. Refugees wanted to learn more about the culture of the UK for several reasons: because they were interested; because they felt that it would help them to fit in with society and allow them to communicate with people; and because they felt it would improve their chances of getting a job (see below). They did not necessarily perceive such cultural exchanges to be one-way; more than one respondent specifically mentioned joining in with and exchanging customs at major religious festivals, such as exchanging Christmas cards, as one respondent explained:

> *"I have a good experience with all my neighbours, especially in the last Christmas, our last Eid, we sharing, and all my neighbours sent card for me, before that I have Eid, so that really I was really happy with them, and so I brought some cards and sent them at Christmas time, so I got very good experience with my neighbours."*

Finding employment

Refugees also often found it challenging to find employment, especially that which fitted in with their goals. Although, as with UK citizens, there were some people who had taken low-paying jobs in order to support themselves while they were still in full-time education, there were also those who were obliged to take such work despite being fairly highly qualified in their own countries. This was because their qualifications were not recognised in the UK, or because they could not speak English well enough to carry out the same job in the UK. There were also those who did not have a great deal of work experience in their own country because of their age or other factors, and so were not expecting to start work at a high level. Although there were some refugees who had obtained work that did not require them to speak English, within their own ethnic community, this was not generally prestigious or highly paid, and for those who were ambitious and did not speak English fluently, learning or improving this was a goal.

However, English Language needs were not the only barrier to employment for refugees. Those who already spoke English to a native or fluent level, also experienced difficulties and this was said to be a result of a range of factors, including, cultural barriers, racism, and an assumption that overseas education was poorer and therefore that the person would be unable to do the job. The quote given below provides a typical example of such cultural and racial barriers.

> *"Maybe, not because I'm black, I'm not saying that, but because maybe they think if you do not have that education here, you are not capable of doing some of these things, I mean, that's what other people think, I think that way, but I'm not accusing, I'm not saying like, they don't want us, but looking for a job, even if I had my file I could show you and you'd believe me, I've been to many places looking for a job, many places."*

As an example of the cultural differences that applied in certain areas, the following quote comes from someone living in a city where religious differences existed, making his circumstances fairly extreme.

> *"Because even if I was to get a job as a social worker, it's going to be very difficult to blend in, you know … I'm going to be talking to people where they're already have differences within themselves … it's like there is a lot of [religious] segregation and differences within themselves, let alone an African trying to get involved, so it's more challenging."*

Sources of help, support and guidance used by refugees

Refugees used a wide variety of informal, statutory and voluntary sources of help and support. Informal support came from the wider community, both within and beyond their own ethnic group, as well as from friends and family and from the projects.

As previously discussed, friends and family provided respondents with an important first point of contact on their arrival in the country.

> *"When I arrived here it was very difficult. A man put me in a cabin. He telephoned my sister. I didn't know that at that point I was in England. My sister came to collect me. I went to her house. My sister took me to a lawyer and the lawyer sent me to the Home Office in Liverpool. From there they sorted me out a house and in August of last year they gave me the document."*

Those who had claimed refugee status themselves were able to help new arrivals navigate the benefits system and tell them what they needed to do in order to pursue their claim to stay in the country. They were also able to give practical help, such as with childcare. In contrast, those who did not have this help took more of a passive role, presenting themselves at the airport or the police station and waiting to be led through the various official processes.

Accommodation and financial assistance

Those who were staying or living with friends and family appeared from their descriptions of their housing situation to be benefiting from more pleasant accommodation than those in NASS housing. This may be for one of three reasons. First, refugees – who at this point were asylum seekers – may not have been offered long-term accommodation with family and friends unless the room for them to stay genuinely existed. Although some respondents had undoubtedly stayed with friends or family for a short time initially, either on arrival in the UK or after leaving NASS accommodation, those who lived there for several months or years tended to do so either because there was room for them to stay, or (if younger respondents) because they were living with their parents and siblings. Second, although overcrowding could also occur in these conditions (one respondent was sharing a room with her four sisters), it seemed to be more acceptable than sharing a room with someone outside the family or someone they did not know (as appeared to have happened in some NASS accommodation). Third, respondents might also have been more inclined to complain about NASS accommodation than that provided by family or friends, whatever their actual living conditions.

Those who had stayed with friends and family as well as NASS also said that staying with friends and family was more pleasant. Where the respondent had left NASS accommodation it was because they had found it impossible to live in, for example because it aggravated a health condition or their spouse was not able to stay there with them. Again, the few respondents where this had happened appeared to be staying where there was room for them and so it may be that they would not have been offered accommodation unless there had been room. Some respondents found the 28 days they had to leave NASS accommodation (after being given their decision) to be inadequate to find somewhere else to live, and so were forced to seek shelter anywhere they could.

Friends and family also provided financial assistance, either before respondents were able to claim benefits or to supplement benefits once they were received. Friends and family who gave this support were usually from the respondent's country of origin. However, a more unusual

source of support was a British partner whom the refugee had met in the UK. Financial and practical assistance could also be provided by contacts still in the respondent's country of origin, or by neighbours or even strangers in the UK.

Although assistance with accommodation or finance was undoubtedly valued and in many cases beneficial psychologically and physically, in some cases the support given by friends, family or a partner acted as a disincentive for asylum seekers to pursue their claim to refugee status. In these cases, the individual could see little point in pursuing a claim that had a chance of being rejected while they were able to survive without the benefits or accommodation they would be able to claim as a result of doing so. The following quote shows some of the reasons refugees might not want to claim asylum immediately.

> *"Actually since I've been here until this time, I've just been supported by friends, and my daughter's mum's family…. I only went to apply for asylum say about a month ago, that's two years [I was in the country before I claimed]. It's a very, very long time, which worked at my disadvantage. But do you know why, one, nobody quite informed me about how do I do it and stuff, [and two], I approached [name of solicitor] and he told me about it, and he said to me, because I gave him the reasons why I was here, I said to him I'm here because of this and that. He said to me this is what will happen, if you apply it's up to you, but you might be detained and they might say no, and you might go back home."*

Semi-formal sources of support

Refugees also used semi-formal sources of support, such as voluntary organisations and societies (other than the projects being examined). They got in touch with these in various ways: through existing contacts (particularly voluntary groups dealing with a single ethnic group, where the friend or relative was of the same ethnicity); or by chance, for example by meeting a representative or beneficiary of the group in the street. They might also be referred to them by the funded projects.

Such organisations provided two kinds of help: giving practical assistance, and acting as a psychological and emotional form of support. Practical support took the form of helping the refugee claim benefits, apply for housing, or pursue other aims. For example, the Red Cross visited certain refugees and helped them to find their way around town, register with health providers, and so on, although the Red Cross were not generally mentioned. There were also organisations that offered immediate reception services, such as allowing people to stay the night before claiming asylum.

> *"They came to my house, Red Cross people, because I'm very new [to] this place, I don't know anything, so the Red Cross people came and helped me, where are the shops to get uniforms and everything. Where can I get things cheaper, what can I get cheaper, where are the place[s]. We are Asian, where can we get some Asian food. All this, two people they came and checked every week and they just, until we're used to certain experience[s], then they… they guide us [around name of city], where we go and everything."*

Psychological support came from listening to refugees, or by putting them in touch with people they could talk to. Particularly valuable in terms of offering psychological support were felt to be those organisations where refugees could meet other people from their own part of the world, especially their home country. Such support had a twofold benefit: to counter isolation by putting refugees in touch with other people (particularly those who spoke the same language) and to allow them to feel they were maintaining links with their home country. The following quote shows one of the ways in which this process typically worked.

> *"They helped psychologically and also it was important for [me] because they were obviously talking about the country they left behind ... Talked about Africa in general. Each country is different, different problems and of course there, it was all about being helpful to each other."*

Formal sources of support

Finally, some refugees obtained help through channels they were obliged to access, or had been brought into contact with in a formal way. Although in many cases this help was what refugees were expecting (for example, receiving legal help from a solicitor when they were asylum seekers), in other cases the help given went beyond that which the source was obliged to give. This was generally personal support such as befriending, or practical support such as help and advice with forms, letters or applying for education. It also involved (for asylum seekers) help associated with obtaining a decision or allowing the individual to continue with normal life while waiting for one. One example was help given by a university Student Union to allow a student to continue studying despite delays in his or her decision. Sources of such help included university or college tutors and officials, landlords, GPs and solicitors.

The role of funded projects

The projects involved in the study complemented, supplemented and replaced these sources of help and support in several ways. In general, refugees used projects for one of three reasons.

- They offered help, or a particular service, which according to the projects was not available anywhere else. The only project of this type involved in the current project was the home-finding service.

  > *"Actually before that project that she was doing, there wasn't any such kind of help, so before that those who was without accommodation they were looking by themselves, it's the first time that I heard that somebody can help and can look for us. So I was happy with any kind of help."*

- They offered help which was more suitable or targeted to their needs than other places (e.g. groups offering a service to refugees of a particular nationality or age, delivered in a specific language, or tailored towards refugees generally).

- They offered extra help of a kind refugees would theoretically have been able to access elsewhere (e.g. befriending), or provided services in one place that refugees would otherwise have had to access in several different places.

In the first and to some extent the second cases, refugees were enabled to access help that friends and family, or informal sources of help were not able to give them. Even those refugees with a strong support network needed to access these projects, as the kind of help available, according to the projects, was simply not available elsewhere. The help given by the project offering a particular service not available elsewhere was strongly practical. The help offered might, for example, involve form-filling and applying for housing. Despite the fact that the projects did not tend to have a strong psychologically supportive role, refugees did gain indirect benefits from knowing that someone was trying to help them or that help was available if they needed it.

In the second and third cases, refugees were enabled to access help in an easier way than was available elsewhere. This was because the project was particularly targeted to their needs. For example, a homework club set up to give extra support to children who did not speak English delivered support in a way that was targeted both to their age and to the fact that they did not speak English as a first language.

These types of project also tended to have a psychologically supportive role and were therefore particularly valuable to those who did not have a support network of family and friends, or who felt confused about aspects of life in the UK. This was because they allowed refugees to feel linked to their home country as well as receiving help constructing their new life in the UK. However, those with existing support networks also found these projects helpful.

A full discussion of the ways in which projects helped refugees is provided in Chapter 5.

Chapter conclusions

Primary goals varied according to whether or not respondents knew anyone in the UK prior to becoming refugees, and therefore whether they had to think about their initial physical needs. Some had not expected to have to think of these and therefore were initially very traumatised. They then moved on to securing basic living standards in terms of accommodation and an income (if not already supplied by their contacts). They then pursued their refugee status before turning both attention and effort to medium- and long-term goals.

Goals pursued and challenges faced by refugees, not in order of priority, are listed below.

- Finding employment – whether at all or sufficiently utilising their skills.
- Finding accommodation – again, whether at all or of a type they liked. NASS accommodation was thought to be inadequate. Those staying with family and friends reported being in more pleasant accommodation, although this might still be crowded.
- Securing an income – whether applying for benefits or moving on from these to find work or take qualifications leading to better-paying work.

In pursuing these goals, both semi-formal (e.g. voluntary organisations) and formal sources of support were used.

Policy level

The research suggested that refugees used projects because they offered: a particular service that was not accessible anywhere else; help that was more targeted to their needs than that available elsewhere; or several services of a kind refugees would previously have had to access separately in more than one place. It might therefore be helpful to direct funding towards:

- reception services aimed at refugees who had very recently arrived, and putting them in contact with NASS, arranging short-term benefits, and so on;
- services filling a gap in existing provision;
- targeted services (for example, aimed at different age groups or delivered in specific languages);
- holistic or multi-service providers.

Refugees also felt that, when they had been asylum seekers, NASS accommodation could be very difficult to live in, although it did at least provide shelter and thus fulfil a physical need. They also found the 28-day cut-off point for leaving difficult to work with. It might therefore be helpful to fund support workers and housing and benefits advice, thus removing refugees from somewhere they often did not particularly want to stay and freeing up the space for others who needed it. The new SUNRISE pilot programme, which allocates a caseworker to a refugee in this crucial 28-day window, is designed to assist refugees to access such services. The impact of caseworkers will need to be evaluated before any firm conclusions can be drawn on this.

Practice level

Refugees should prepare to leave NASS accommodation and pursue their other goals as soon as is practical after being given a positive decision and securing their other basic living standards, such as a basic income, in particular to:

- find out as soon as possible about alternative sources of accommodation;
- enrol on an English course (if this is necessary to achieve their goals);
- find out about the benefits and other sources of income available to them as a refugee; and
- prepare for work, for example, by assembling evidence of qualifications and compiling a CV, as far as is possible.

4 Findings: initial contact with funded projects

Introduction

This chapter explores the ways in which refugees became aware of the funded projects and what they expected to receive from them. Users' initial contact with projects is also discussed. Aspects of initial contact with projects did not tend to vary by age, gender, or length of stay in the country. Differences did occur when initial contact was made by parents on behalf of younger children or by those who already spoke English (whether as a result of a longer stay in the country or because it was the language they spoke anyway), as they were potentially less nervous about whether the project would meet their language needs.

Sources of awareness

Refugees became aware of the funded projects through four main routes.

- Sources of initial help (for example voluntary groups refugees had contacted or been put in touch with by a friend or family member).
- Marketing activity such as leaflets, posters and media campaigns.
- Being contacted by the project directly.
- Chance (for example meeting someone and hearing about the project).

Sources of initial help

Refugees who had heard about their project through a source of initial help tended to have been in contact with that source in order to pursue their initial goals. Thus refugees who relied on friends and family were most likely to have heard about the project through these people, while others had been referred on by a statutory source of help (such as their solicitor, local authority or NASS) or a voluntary organisation they had accessed for other purposes. Sometimes they had been given an address or contact details to pursue on their own behalf.

> *"I went to a lawyer and the lawyer went and registered me with the Tamil Welfare Group. With their help, they were the ones who told me about NASS, the National Asylum Support."*

Marketing activity

There were also refugees who had heard about a project as a result of its marketing activities. Given the size and scope of the projects, marketing was inevitably low-key and limited for the most part. Sources highlighted included local radio stations in the relevant language and leaflets either given out or left for refugees to pick up. Typical examples were given by one respondent who explained how they had heard about the group via the local radio station and another as a result of a leaflet they were given.

> *"[I] heard from the radio … Tamil radio. Even this English class [we] heard from the radio."*
>
> *"First of time I heard about them was this youth camp, they were giving out leaflets in Wood Green. They were going to the Lake District I think. It was 1998."*

However, there were projects with multiple sources of funding that advertised more widely. They were not necessarily advertising the ERF or Challenge Fund element of the project, but could nevertheless attract refugees to use this element of the project once they had come in to use something else. Although projects did not usually advertise on TV, in one exceptional instance, a participant explained how they had initially heard about the group via this medium.

"I actually saw their advert on TV one time. But it was about, just racism, like if you're encountering racism. It wasn't about support or anything it was about racism and stuff. And when I went, I took their number and I went there once and we just spoke about, they were asking you basic things, like facing racism and stuff, and then when I went to apply for asylum then they sent me to my solicitor, to go and see this organisation."

Being contacted by the project

In some cases refugees did not hear about the project until it contacted them directly (for example, the local authority resettlement worker making contact based on a list of names and contact details of refugees in the area).

Chance

There were also those who found out about the project through a chance comment from an acquaintance or stranger, whether as a result of asking them for help or via a recommendation received in conversation. They then followed up this word-of-mouth recommendation, as typified by the quote below.

"There's one of my friend who is their neighbour, who tell me that I … [should] send the kids to go there. … they said they learn how, the kids how to do computer work."

Following this word-of-mouth recommendation the participant then followed this up and contacted the group. In one case, the respondent had stood in the street asking passers-by for help until someone who was aware of the project took him to the door.

Preferences

Refugees had little view about which sources of awareness they preferred. By definition, their source of awareness about the project had worked for them, which may explain why no sources of awareness were viewed negatively by refugees. However, word-of-mouth recommendation from a friend or other refugee who was or had been in a similar situation appeared to be particularly trusted. Refugees could see that the projects helped people like them and this helped to overcome some initial doubts about whether or not they would be welcome. However, some projects suggested that, while word of mouth was a valuable method of spreading awareness of the project, it could lead to misunderstandings about exactly what the role of the project was. The MORI quantitative report (Peckham et al 2003) also suggested that projects needed to use marketing channels other than word of mouth to reach as many refugees as possible, so it may be that those projects that contacted refugees, rather than waiting for refugees to make initial contact, may have reached people who would not otherwise have heard of a service.

Understanding projects' aims

Perhaps unsurprisingly, those who were not aware of the project until it contacted them tended not to be very aware of what its aims were. They knew only what the projects had told them about their aims. In cases where the project had contacted refugees, the information they gave them tended either to concentrate on a single service that they could offer to provide immediate help, or to be couched in terms of generalised 'help' without being specific. The quote below demonstrates this lack of clarity in some respondents' awareness of the project's aims.

"Before I no understand, just that person tell me, after I go to [name of project contact]… just for help, help for living to here, understand area and community. Maybe if you have some problem maybe."

For other refugees, their understanding of the project's aims arose from what they had been told about it by third parties. For example, if they had been told that the project would be able to help them with a particular problem, or if a certain element of the project had been emphasised in the recommendation or marketing material, they expected the project's aims to be primarily or wholly the delivery of this service, as the following quote demonstrates.

"Just when we talked to Civic Centre they introduced [name of project contact] to us, to help us to sort out all of the board, to find accommodation."

Hopes and expectations

Some respondents did not expect to be given a great deal of help from any source (other than existing family and friends) after their arrival in the UK, and were surprised at the fact that support was offered. Others had been aware that support was offered, but were surprised at the extent or scope of it. They compared this favourably to the support available in their own country. The following quote provides an example of this. Refugees tended to report having hoped that the project would be able to help them, rather than having known that they would.

"In this case, in my particular case the government [in my country] wouldn't give me anything [if I were in the same situation]… In my country it's not like this."

In contrast to this, interviews with staff at the projects revealed that they sometimes had difficulty where somebody came to the project having heard about it from third parties and expected them to help where it was not possible. Such people believed the project was legally obliged to help them despite in some cases not fitting the eligibility criteria. The following quote from a project worker shows what happened when respondents were not aware of these strict criteria.

"It is their perceptions really. We found that working with the families of people that are going to be housed by the Council – they all want to be housed in the city centre, and we have had a lot of problems recently where they have actually refused offers of accommodation, so Homeless have discharged their duty, and then [they] are sort of calling on [name of worker] – have you got any landlords with family houses."

Expectations of help tended to be more specific among those who knew someone who had already received help from the project, or who had received detailed information about what it was and what it offered. In these cases, refugees knew exactly what they wanted the project to help them with, although after making contact they might go on to use the project for another service if it offered more than one. The issues refugees wanted projects to help them with tended to be related to their goals, for example obtaining benefits and housing to give them an initial place to live and money to live on. For others, the making of contact with a project offering more than one service was driven by a perception that they needed more general support.

"I need some support, for example [to deal with the] bank [or with] … someone else. I need somebody behind me, somebody showing the way."

Positive attitudes before attending

Those who made contact with the project themselves tended to have a positive attitude to them prior to attending and they were hopeful that they would be able to help them. This was particularly the case where refugees believed that the projects would be able to help them achieve their goals, such as learning to speak English or finding housing. Projects that aimed to impart skills such as these were therefore perceived especially positively. Refugees also pointed out that there were few other sources of help in existence and said that they were therefore grateful for those that did exist. The following two quotes provide typical illustrations of this point.

"[I] was grateful for the help. [My] main worry was finding a place."

"I knew that there was nobody here for you except [name of project]."

Concerns before attending

Few concerns were expressed about any aspects of the projects, apart from users fearing that they would not be able to help them, or not knowing what to expect. However, two concerns were raised about education. First, respondents who did not speak English and were accessing education other than English classes were worried about whether the class would be delivered in their own language or in English, and were therefore concerned about how closely they would

be able to follow it. Second, some older respondents were anxious because adult education was not common in their own cultures. Their fears focused on whether or not they could cope with the course, or would look conspicuous. One refugee over retirement age said he did not want to take part in English classes because he felt he was too old to study; however, this was also because he felt he did not need them. This concern was far from universal even among refugees from the same country and culture, but the following quote shows an example of where it did exist.

> *"I was concerned that in our country you study at a certain age and after a certain age you don't and so I was thinking of the age. I had a concern about the age. Then I came to the class and I found that was not a problem. I could study at my age, go for lessons."*

There were also those who had no idea of what to expect at all. Although this was particularly likely where refugees had been contacted from a list by the project and had therefore never heard of it at all before receiving a call from a worker, it could also happen where they had received a referral from, or been told to go there by an official agency. As a source of information, voluntary groups (other than the projects funded) appeared to be better than official sources at letting refugees know what to expect, in part because the information often came from people the respondent considered to be friends or had built up a relationship with and who might also have used the service themselves. In these cases, the explanation about what the service offered was also more likely to have been facilitated by being offered in the respondent's own language. In contrast, information received from official sources was likely to be received either in a language other than the respondent's own, or through the medium of an interpreter who did not have any direct experience of the service.

Experience of initial contact

Before contacting the projects for the first time, some refugees said they had felt nervous. Three reasons were given for this.

- They were unsure about how warm their reception would be.
- They were worried about how well they would be able to explain their situation without speaking English (well).
- They were unclear about the aims of the project and therefore did not know what to expect.

In reality, the first visit to the project was generally very positive. The initial contact usually took the form of a meeting with one of the project workers to discuss refugees' situations and determine their needs. Those who were not fluent speakers of English found that they managed to communicate their needs themselves, took an English-speaking friend along, or communicated through an interpreter. Although some of these projects had staff who spoke other languages, others were staffed only by one or two people who might or might not speak any other languages.

> *"They are very easy; they make it very easy for us. We were very scared at the beginning because we knew no English at all and wondered how it would be."*

Interpreters

Interviews with project staff indicated that they sometimes had difficulty finding interpreters. This was also mentioned by some refugees who said either that the project could not always find an interpreter or that the interpreters did not always keep their appointments. Problems with interpreters were said to have arisen for a number of reasons, including: lack of funding; clients not keeping appointments at the times arranged with the interpreter to attend (according to the projects); or because the interpreter was deemed to be unreliable (according to some refugees, but by no means all who had used interpreters). It was also said to be difficult to find interpreters for certain languages. Ensuring that interpreters were available was obviously easier for projects where only one or two languages were spoken than those where multiple languages were required.

One refugee had gone to the project before doing anything else on his arrival in the country, having been taken there by a passer-by.[4] They said that the staff had attended to their immediate needs for food and warmth and allowed them to relax for a while before anyone interviewed them. It should be noted that this tended only to occur in exceptional cases. One respondent explained how they had been given food and refreshments when they visited the project on arrival from Sri Lanka, although this was in more extreme conditions than reported by other refugees:

> *"It was freezing cold for us, even though it was September, but for us it's very cold because our temperature is different. So we needed something to help us. I went in there and we spoke and straight away one of the officers came in. The first thing was food, they gave us tea and whatever they gave. Then we started to talk. One of the officers came and sat down and explained everything. They said relax and sit for a while, then they took my particulars."*

Although refugees said that staff were friendly and polite, it was also evident that in some cases projects were keen to demonstrate that they were working within constraints that were not within their control, for example availability of housing or finance. The help offered, although delivered in a friendly and sympathetic way, was therefore tempered with realism. For example, one respondent explained how they had been shown how long the housing waiting list was by the project and initially told they would be placed on the end of the list; however, in this instance the participant had been helped but only as a result of having asthma.

> *"When [I] first went there they showed [me] the waiting list and how many people are waiting for their house. They said, you'll go at the bottom of that list. But because [I've] got an illness… and… can't go to hostel, because of the condition…. they told [me] for that they will try and help [me] out… she was really, really nice, she helped [me] a lot."*

Chapter conclusions

Refugees made contact with funded projects through suggestions from friends, family or other voluntary groups, referrals by official bodies, marketing or chance. Word of mouth was particularly useful in letting refugees know what to expect in terms of treatment or possible outcomes; however, projects felt that such information could sometimes raise expectations too high. Projects that contacted refugees themselves may have reached those who would not otherwise had been aware of any projects, although clearly in this case refugees would be less informed about what to expect. There were no negative views on sources of awareness.

Refugees were often surprised to be offered help, as they said refugee services did not exist to the same extent in their countries of origin. Those who knew help was on offer were overwhelmingly positive about it; others were more cautious about their reception, unsure what to expect, or worried that they would not be able to access the service (for example, because they were too old). First visits were generally very positive, with language needs being met. However, some projects did attempt to demonstrate the realistic limits of the help they would be able to offer.

Policy level

Word of mouth was thought to be very helpful at letting refugees know what to expect, although projects felt the information thus spread could be inaccurate. It might therefore be worth encouraging projects to undertake marketing activity to reinforce or contradict popular word-of-mouth messages according to need. Information on the need to do this, and the possible benefits to the projects in terms of saved time for them and their clients that could be

[4] This project had a wider role than solely dealing with the refugee community. Little evidence emerged of non-refugee awareness of projects across the sample, although it must be remembered that the topic guide did not specifically cover this. Almost certainly, especially for projects dealing with non-refugees as well as refugees, there would have been some non-refugee awareness of such projects, but it is difficult to measure the extent of this in a qualitative study without interviewing non-refugees.

concentrated on their key aims, could be included as part of the funding process by the Home Office and ERF.

Messages to reinforce would include:

- precisely what the project does (and does not) offer;
- that refugees are welcome;
- to whom services are accessible (whether all or specific ages/languages).

It may also be that the method of informing refugees about the project used by some support workers reached those who would not otherwise have been aware of it. The Home Office and ERF could also therefore encourage projects to make greater use of information available through other agencies on refugees in the area (subject to Data Protection) in order to undertake outreach work of this kind.

Practice level

Refugees should be realistic in their assessment of what a project can do and be clear that they understand its aims before recommending it to avoid unnecessary raising of hopes as well as to ensure the time of project staff is used as effectively as possible.

5 Findings: impact of projects

Respondents' views about the projects depended on the kind of services they had received, the extent of contact they had had with them, and the staff employed there. Their views were also inevitably coloured by the impact the projects had had on them. The impact of the projects depended on refugees' situations and the services provided. These factors also affected how far the projects promoted integration. Suggestions for improvements to the services provided by the projects or by the government generally focused on increasing access or funding to the projects rather than changing their services.

Views about projects

Services delivered by funded projects

Services received were broadly divisible into the following categories.

- Co-ordination and orientation.
- Education.
- Cultural services.
- Social activities.
- Referrals.
- Finding accommodation.

Often a single project would provide several of these services.

Co-ordination and orientation

Most projects took on some sort of co-ordination role in terms of helping respondents fill in forms or write letters, or making telephone calls on their behalf. For those projects with a generalised resettlement role this was the most important element of the service offered. At varying times, these projects helped people with their applications for refugee status, translated letters and helped them fill in forms for housing, utilities, grants, benefits and education, and provided advice.

Interestingly, however, projects without a generalised resettlement role, such as those funded to help refugees with accommodation or education, also helped refugees with form-filling, translation and phone calls even when the matter did not strictly fall under their remit. For both types of project refugees simply asked their ordinary contact for help. This did not always happen, but when it did might typically take the form of the following low-key and short-term help:

> *"She said that she could help a lot with small problems, particularly about education."* [NB: project was a housing project]

Co-ordination and orientation services could provide assistance in achieving goals or progressing towards goals in relation to a number of the *Indicators of Integration* (Ager and Strang, 2004). Such help assisted refugees in gaining suitable housing, finding and accessing education or training and entering employment. However, the process of being assisted by project staff also helped refugees to develop social connections, to staff and to people met through education or employment. It also increased refugees' own understanding of how to navigate institutions and systems. Finally, this type of help provided emotional support by helping refugees to feel that they were not coping with problems alone, that they were welcome in the community and that they were progressing towards their goals.

Education and cultural services

Projects offering classes did so in three areas: English language; information technology; and culture, including arts and language. English classes were delivered both by projects focusing on one ethnic minority community and those working with several communities. Refugees attended them because they wanted to learn English either as a means of integrating into the community directly, or in order to obtain or progress in employment or education with the aim of integrating into the community. Others simply thought learning English would help them in their everyday life, for example with shopping and at parents' evenings.

> *"Yeah, because English Certificate, English Language Certificate, it's very important for me, because if I go to University, the first thing they ask me they say, you need a English Language Certificate."*

The education and cultural activities provided by funded projects assisted refugees towards their goals of training, employment and language skills; they also increased their sense of belonging and of having links to the community and to their home country. This, along with the opportunity to develop relationships with other participants in classes or activities, helped refugees to form social connections.

Language

The principal motivation expressed by the respondents for enrolling on IT courses was the desire to update their skills or simply learn about computers – some of the respondents had no computer knowledge prior to attending the course. Others hoped that the course would equip them with the necessary IT skills to help them in their studies (e.g. whilst completing a Master's Degree) or in their current or future employment. Topics covered included starting up and shutting down a PC, working with Microsoft Office, e-mail and Internet, and CV writing. Some of the respondents simply used the equipment provided at the course as a drop-in centre when they wanted to type or print a letter or use the photocopier.

> *"They had a in there a Kurdish community, they opened a course for those people who want to learn a computer, Just one person in there, ******, and he's opened this course for those people who cannot understand English, the Kurdish teacher teach you how the computer, it's easier, and I've been in this course three time, I know something about computer."*

Although refugees in both types of project found the classes useful, those from multi-ethnic projects found them especially effective as they said the fact that a multitude of languages were represented meant that the students had no alternative but to speak English to each other. The frequency of English classes ranged from once or twice a week to every day.

Although English classes were delivered in English, IT classes were delivered in either English or the respondent's own language (at single-language projects). Refugees believed that being taught IT in their own language enabled them to learn more quickly and made them feel more comfortable. The following quote provides an illustration of this.

> *"I am more comfortable being taught in Turkish and I learn more quickly."*

Equipment and quality of teaching

Both English and IT classes were said to be well equipped with all the necessary materials in sufficient quantities, for example dictionaries, laptops and course material. Refugees were impressed with the quality of teaching, which they said was delivered in a less formal manner than in other countries, with the result that people were enabled to keep up. Respondents said that teaching was delivered in small groups and that the teaching was tailored to different levels, both factors which they felt encouraged learning. Students were given homework, which they thought encouraged them to interact and supported their learning. The following two quotes demonstrate the general feelings of satisfaction with the standard of teaching on offer.

> *"They've become friends and the way the teachers teach, because they've got a level, intermediate and everything, so first we went for the basic, then from basic to*

intermediate. The teachers are great. If [I] think back to my country, their way of teaching, there the teaching is entirely different… Here, even though so many people in the class, the teachers make sure everybody understands things, whatever they teach. One question, if the teacher couldn't answer that moment, they would come back and answer my question. Whereas [in] my home [country they] wouldn't."

"It is a very good standard, I learn a lot, what I didn't know before I understand a wee bit more now. For example an individual would come in and show me where to study so the next day you have to learn that. We were given topics as well, for example yesterday we had a topic on celebrations, Christmas and you have to write 300 words. I had my son help me, but I wrote it."

Cultural classes

Finally, cultural classes, for example in music, language and folk dancing, were felt to allow refugees to maintain links with the culture of their home country, or educate their children in their cultural heritage and traditions. They usually took place at projects dealing with refugees of only one ethnicity or geographical origin. People also enjoyed participating in them and they helped create social bonds (see section 'Social activities', below).

Social activities

Social activities, such as bowling, swimming, picnics, keep-fit, traditional music and dancing, and football, plus spaces for social interaction, were appreciated for three reasons. First, they allowed refugees to maintain links with their cultural heritage and mix with people who spoke the same language (as discussed above) *within* their own ethnic communities. Refugees were therefore enabled to form relationships and strengthen bonds with people from the same community, referred to in *Indicators of Integration* as the process of creating 'social bonds'. These strengthened refugees' sense of belonging to particular groups and communities; without these affiliations the report suggested "integration risks being 'assimilation'".

Second, projects allowed refugees to mix with other people (both other refugees and staff) across ethnic communities, which they thought was valuable because it facilitated cultural exchange and interaction. These exchanges and interactions were referred to as 'social bridges' between communities in *Indicators of Integration*, which stated that creating these bridges 'supports social cohesion'. Additionally, the report indicated that the building of social bridges had the potential for widening economic opportunities.

Third, the activities provided people with a chance to participate in interesting activities at minimal cost. The quotes below show how both forms of social interaction typically worked.

"There were people I knew from Turkey there, hello, hello, we had tea. That's how it was."

"I think everybody enjoy. Many people, because that's where we meet many people, even though we don't know each other. When we organise things we meet people and we communicate. Such cultural diversity, so many cultures there, so many food differences. …If they didn't organise things we can't meet people and we can't take part in anything. I don't have enough money to go to bowling, I can't afford to pay, but [name of project] took us for the bowling."

Social activities helped users to expand social networks beyond the people they had met at the project. By helping people to forge closer links with each other, introductions to other refugees' friends and families were made more likely and social networks expanded.

Projects that did not have a specific remit to provide social activities were also able to facilitate these networks along the lines of social connection in *Indicators of Integration*. First, refugees were enabled to forge social links within their own ethnic community (this was more likely to come from a single-ethnicity project, but could also come from a multi-ethnicity project). Second, refugees were enabled to make social connections across ethnic communities but with other refugees in the same situation. This only happened at multi-ethnic projects, and at those that enabled people to interact with each other rather than those that entailed interaction with a

resettlement worker working on a one-to-one basis. Finally, refugees were provided with the skills (for example English) or confidence necessary to make such links for themselves. Projects that did not necessarily have to have a specific remit to provide social activities to have an impact on integration in terms of friendships and social relationships.

Referrals

Occasionally projects made referrals to other statutory or voluntary organisations. For example, a project with a co-ordination and befriending role referred a young mother to a mother and baby group. These referrals were valued for two reasons. First, the projects knew more about such sources of help than did refugees, and were therefore able to direct them towards sources of help that they could not have accessed on their own behalf. Second, refugees valued the advice or help received as a result of such referrals.

This fits with the 'social links' identified in *Indicators of Integration*, which suggests that engagement with statutory and non-statutory services provides, civic duties and political processes provides a 'third dimension' of social connection, alongside social bonds with those from the same ethnic community and social bridges to other ethnic communities. It also fits well with research carried out into funded projects by Michael Bell Associates (MBA, 2005), which suggests that projects with good partnership or referral arrangements in place constitute examples of good practice.

Referrals to other organisations were one step in a progression towards stated goals such as housing, employment or education. They also helped refugees to navigate an unfamiliar system and develop understanding of that system, thus contributing towards their social connections.

Finding accommodation

Refugees appreciated accommodation services for several reasons.

- Projects were able to access landlords and other housing providers that would not have been available to a lone refugee either privately or through the local authority.
- Projects helped them with accessing housing benefit, community care grants, furniture-providing schemes and so on by helping them fill in forms and putting them in touch with organisations.
- The projects helped overcome the language barrier for those who did not speak good English, as they carried out the liaison work on the refugees' behalf.
- The projects helped refugees with the practical details of looking for a home, such as searching property pages and taking them to viewings – this was felt to be helpful in terms of convenience as well as by those who did not speak English.
- Financial help with the deposit was made available, sometimes making the difference between someone being able to afford the flat and not. Data from the projects indicated that some projects offered this regularly where it was needed.

Assistance in finding accommodation was, of course, vital for many refugees and moved them directly towards achieving their goals within the housing domain. As was the case in relation to the co-ordination and orientation services, help with finding housing could also assist refugees in less tangible ways by providing them with links to staff and to other people met at or through the project and by helping them not to feel isolated or alone as they tried to establish a life in the UK.

Satisfaction with services

An earlier survey of users of ERF/CF projects (Peckham *et al*., 2003) indicated that overall, three-quarters (75%) of all project clients interviewed found the service they received from the funded project to be good and only 12 per cent found it to be poor (the remainder were either

neutral or said that they did not know). Within projects, the same research showed that the majority of clients found all types of the services provided to have been useful.

The present study largely supports this. Generally refugees were extremely positive about the service they had received and had few complaints. As has previously been discussed, they tended to be very grateful for the help they had been offered and were therefore reluctant to criticise it, although they were encouraged by the interviewers to be as open as possible. Possible reasons for this reluctance may be that refugees genuinely found it difficult to think of ways that the project could be improved (whether because their experiences had been overwhelmingly positive or because they understood the context, such as lack of housing, within which the projects were operating) or that they felt criticising the projects would be ungrateful, although they were then invited to give constructive suggestions for improvement that were then probed for possible criticisms. The fact that the recruitment process was as tightly controlled as possible, and that there were some negative experiences that were discussed freely by refugees, such as a need for more realism in what was promised to clients, or shortcomings in terms of venue or equipment, make it unlikely that the lack of criticism is purely as a result of sample bias.

The quantitative research carried out by MORI revealed that the most useful services provided by funded projects (as rated by clients) were welfare benefits advice (79%) and English classes (75%). This is supported by the current study, which also found that refugees believed these services to be useful. In the MORI study the services with the highest proportions saying they had *not* been very useful were housing (19%) and employment (17%). However, this still reflects fairly high levels of user satisfaction of 67 and 58 per cent respectively. As with the MORI study, satisfaction with these was high in the current study, for a number of reasons discussed below. Respondents generally felt they had received high quality service in terms of attention paid to them, flexibility of the project or outcomes achieved. Again, this fits in well with the MORI study, which found that 75 per cent of project clients thought the service they received to be good and only 12 per cent that it was poor. However, it may well be that the goals of projects working specifically on housing or employment (e.g. provision of accommodation, or access to a job) were more difficult to deliver than the outcomes aimed at by other projects (such as providing advice on benefit claims).

Although the present study did not include a project that specifically aimed to get refugees into work, some projects did focus on employment indirectly by improving refugees' skills or getting them into voluntary work. The present study suggests that those who did find housing or employment services useful were very satisfied, either because they had been enabled to reach one of their goals, such as finding a house that they liked, or progressed towards a goal, for example moving into a shared house while waiting for their own flat, getting a job, or learning English to enable them to get a better job or take qualifications leading to one.

It seemed that there were two major factors in determining whether refugees had a positive or negative experience: whether or not the project met their needs and whether or not it met their expectations. Thus, for example, people were likely to have a negative view of an accommodation-finding service if they had not managed to find a house through it, and they had expected that they would be able to. This may also explain why, although clients were positive about all the projects, certain types of project – i.e. those with less definite aims such as generalised 'help' or resettlement – seemed to attract less negative feedback than others.

Positive experiences

Positive experiences are discussed in detail throughout the report. However, broadly speaking they stemmed from a mix of factors relating to practical details of the way in which the service was delivered and the extent to which the service assisted refugees to make progress towards integration or their own goals. The main sources of positive feedback are shown below.

- *The project had helped refugees to achieve a goal, or brought them closer to achieving it.* Although this did not need to be something that refugees could not have done on their own for them to feel positively about it, they were likely to feel more positive towards projects that did offer something they did not feel they could have managed, or managed as easily, on

their own. For example, refugees improved or were helped to improve their financial circumstances by having their benefits arranged or becoming more qualified to get a job (whether formally qualified or improving their skills).

- *The staff had been friendly and polite, or had gone out of their way to help the client.* Both centre staff and support workers were praised for being friendly, sympathetic, helpful and flexible. The role of staff is discussed in further detail later under 'Staff'.

  - *"They are very helpful. As much help as they can offer, they are helping us. They came and … teaching here, I could understand it. Also the bus ticket … give me the bus ticket, they would try and see if they could reimburse the money."*

- *The project had enabled refugees to improve their social life, or had given them somewhere to go at minimal or no cost.* This is discussed in detail in the section 'Social activities', above.

- *The project was particularly convenient to attend.* This was particularly the case for those projects working with a single resettlement worker or other worker who visited them in their home, meaning that refugees did not have to travel at all. However, other people who had to make changes to agreed times or set limits on the times they were able to attend were particularly positive about projects that were able to meet these needs. As mentioned above (see second point) they felt that this allowed them to pursue other goals, for example by attending college or working, as well as going to the project.

Negative experiences

As previously indicated, respondents reported negative experiences mainly when the project failed to live up to their expectations in some way. This tended to happen as a result of one of the following factors.

- *The project did not help refugees to achieve their aim, or did not help them in the way or to the extent they had been expecting.* As discussed previously, this was more likely when a project had a single, clearly defined aim rather than a generalised aim. Examples of negative experiences reported therefore included a refugee who had not had a home found for him within the timeframe allowed by the project, and another who had had a flat found and secured for her, but was surprised to find that it had no furniture: she had expected it either to be furnished or to receive money for furnishing it.

- *The help the project was able to offer was limited because of its aims, priorities and what it had been funded to do.* This tended to happen where people were unaware of the project's precise remit and asked it to help them with something outside its role. An example of this was a refugee who had been successfully rehoused by a project whose aims were to rehouse single people and couples without children. When his wife and family joined him in the UK he asked the project for help in finding a larger house, but was refused and referred to the local council instead. Even where the reasons the project could not help were explained, people found it difficult to accept if a project had been helpful in other ways, and then refused to help with new problems.

- *The project was understaffed, under-equipped, or situated in an inadequate venue.* Although refugees understood that funding was limited, when asked about negative elements some mentioned ways in which they felt this lack of funding had impacted on delivery. Where projects had few, busy staff, respondents could find themselves waiting a long time for an appointment to see someone; this was felt to affect matters such as benefit applications. Other complaints were relatively minor. For example, respondents taking a class complained that the noise of a music class taking place next door disturbed their learning, and refugees attending a two-site education programme were unhappy at having to go to the more remote site.

Staff

Staff were highly praised across all projects. Respondents felt they were knowledgeable and accommodating in the areas with which they were asked to help. For example, resettlement officers were said to have a good grasp of benefit systems and procedures, and tutors were said to be competent at teaching, patient and willing to explain things. Friendly centre staff made people feel welcome and encouraged them to participate in the project, something which respondents thought made a particularly big difference during their initial visits, and which helped refugees to create social links with staff and social bonds and bridges with others at the project (see section 'Social activities', above). Those who worked with support workers also felt positively about inviting them into their homes, and were encouraged to ask them to arrange things like utilities, furniture, benefits and housing issues. This then helped refugees to feel happier and more settled in their housing and neighbourhood, and by extension in the UK.

Personality

Refugees commented that staff were friendly and sympathetic, helpful and supportive, and treated them as equals. Some respondents appeared to have developed an emotional connection with the staff at the project: they spoke of staff being 'loving and kind'; and viewed them as friends or even, less typically, relatives. Refugees appreciated being related to on a personal level, and not just because staff had to speak to them as part of their job. Although this did not always happen, it was appreciated when it did.

> *"She was really nice… I could take her as an aunt."*

> *"I would say they have been helpful, you know like supportive. They've been supportive, I mean individuals, there are some individuals who would relate to you on a personal level, not just because of work. I mean sometimes when you're doing something, you're doing it because it's your job, and somebody is relating to you, you know on a personal level. So I would say some of the staff, they are amazing."*

Flexibility in help offered

Staff were also felt to be flexible. Refugees who had other commitments, such as work or studying, said that staff were very willing to work around these and give them alternative appointments, schedule the appointments according to their timetable, or see them out of hours within reason. This made it easier for refugees to pursue activities such as college courses. The following quotes typify the kinds of concessions made to refugees such as staff allowing the respondent to come to the centre marginally later than the official opening times.

> *"The things I prefer, the teacher, our teacher can be friendly, when you ask anything, sometime we ask him, need [help with] some things, maybe out of class he is explaining, maybe he has crossed his time… The teacher stay with us in the break, not have anything different between us and the teacher… the grammar is explaining good, maybe for one point the grammar is [explained] many times … I am happy with the course and the staff."*

> *"Just to go and see someone there they have to make an appointment, but [I'm] in college so they know that college time and their working time is the same, so they help [me]."*

Alongside this willingness and ability to help, there were refugees who said that the staff at projects had gone beyond their remit in order to help them; one member of staff at a housing project gave a client informal but helpful advice about applying for university and how to access benefits. Others said staff had undergone personal inconvenience for their clients' sake; there were degrees of this, varying from staying slightly longer to help a particular refugee, or forgoing a scheduled break, to coming in on a day off. The quote below shows an example of this; however, it was not a universal occurrence.

> *"They are all organised and so willing to help. … They were helpful because the second appointment it wasn't really his day but he came in for the appointment."*

Staff mentioned that they sometimes offered help of the type mentioned above in individual cases, although this may not have been true of all projects. Projects were not specifically asked about the extra work they did, but some did mention this when discussing the services offered. Those that did said that it was not difficult for them to, for example, work small amounts of overtime or go slightly beyond their remit in the type of help they gave. They did this because they were committed to the job and felt the results would be worth it. Although staff were not specifically asked about the stress that this put them under, the day-to-day job appeared to be more significant in creating stress than were the occasions where they underwent slight inconvenience for a specific reason.

Language and cultural understanding

Refugees who attended single-ethnicity projects, where the staff therefore spoke their own language, felt that this made them even more helpful. In this case the staff were able to function as a bridge between the respondent and the rest of the community, undertaking translation of documents and helping with forms, and dispensing advice in a way that was directly accessible to the respondent. However, this did not mean that those who attended multi-ethnic projects, where they therefore had to speak to a member of staff who did not speak their language, felt that this was an inconvenience or impeded communication. This was because interpreters were made available, or in some cases another member of staff or friend was able to help. Clearly, whether or not there were speakers of the relevant language employed at multi-ethnic projects was to a large extent a matter of luck and as such far from universal, but the following quote shows how a coincidence between languages spoken was useful.

> *"There's Somali workers there, there's always someone to interpret."*

Interestingly, those who did not share a language with the staff, but shared an ethnic background or broad geographical origin, also felt that this was helpful in increasing rapport and not understanding. As with language, however, those who did not have common ethnicity with members of staff did not feel that this made staff unhelpful, or that they were therefore disadvantaged as clients in any way.

The issue of cultural understanding was often not felt to be very important, depending on the type of project. For example, refugees commented that there was little scope for a housing project to be culturally insensitive. In part this appeared to be because projects were already very culturally aware and avoided potential problems (for example, by housing all single women in single-sex households because they were aware that mixed-sex households were a problem for some cultures). Interviews with project staff suggested that they were alert to the needs of different cultures, meaning perhaps that their services were provided in a way which led to refugees believing that no issue existed. However, there were also projects where refugees noticed and appreciated that staff tried to take account of the needs of different cultures, often discussing and comparing cultural differences between different groups of refugees and staff. This helped with the process of building 'social bridges' between communities (see also section on 'Social activities', above). No respondents suggested that staff had been culturally insensitive. The following quote comes from an area where religious differences were more marked than elsewhere in the UK, but a similar degree of understanding was shown at projects elsewhere.

> *"Everybody knows about Arabic culture now and their holidays, Ramadan, there was one girl and she was a Muslim girl as well and she was allowed to leave …due to our customs and I think Muslim people were off as well during the Ramadan. All teachers are Catholics and they are orthodox and they are very similar. It is a good relationship."*

Extent of projects' impact

As discussed previously in chapter 3 ('*Findings: goals and challenges*'), refugees' goals were largely concerned with integration, whether this was explicitly stated by the respondent in terms of 'fitting in with British society' or implied in terms of their desire to reach a similar standard of living as other UK citizens and to make progress in relation to one or more of the *Indicators of Integration*. The funded projects helped refugees to attain their goals either directly or indirectly. Where the refugees had not been able to achieve their goals (at the time of the research) the

projects had often brought them closer to doing this. As discussed in the earlier section, refugees' goals focused on:

- reaching a place of safety and satisfying their immediate physical needs;
- obtaining accommodation of a good standard; and
- obtaining employment or qualifications leading to employment (or for someone in the family to do this).

The funded projects impacted on refugees in five main ways.

- *Refugees were enabled to find, or become closer to finding, employment or further opportunities for study.* This was achieved in several ways. Firstly, refugees learned both English and other skills, which widened their range of opportunities in both employment and education. Some of those already in employment or education reported improved performance because of training given by the projects.

  > *"Because my niece came that time… [to] this country, she is like me, she don't know English, I want to put her [in English classes at the project], [other people] are talking or something, she want to learn [to understand them], that's why I put her there, because she can catch up learning English, that's why I put her there, now she is very good in school… Report came last week, it was very good, everything excellent and good, it was good."*

  > *"My job. Yeah, they know; I said I'm going to [computer classes] … They was very happy, because before that, I'm asking everything to [colleagues], can you do this… I need to provide the telephone number, [process] the grades, they [were having to do] it for me."*

  Other refugees were shown education and employment opportunities, or they were helped to apply for these through advice, assistance with form-filling, application for jobs and grants, CV writing and so on. One refugee got a job as a washing machine repairer as a direct result of having an application form found and given to him by his support worker. After trying unsuccessfully to find work on his own through the job centre, his support worker looked around local companies on his behalf and obtained the form, then helped him fill it in.

  > *"I long time have asked for job, but [I] can't… like different kind of jobs, [my support worker] give me the application form, fill the application form … He find application [form] … That's my … job [now], got that for money this job."*

- *Refugees became more comfortable about conducting processes such as applying for benefits on their own behalf, rather than relying on the project staff, friends, or other sources of help.* This happened for two reasons: refugees either achieved sufficient improvement in English, or were made aware of the agencies they would have to deal with and how to deal with them. Typical outcomes included those who were applying for benefits becoming able and confident, through improving their language skills, to conduct meetings with staff alone, or becoming aware of exactly which benefits were available and where to obtain these. Those using healthcare said that they were more able to communicate with providers.

- *Refugees found accommodation, became more aware of the processes involved in doing this, or were enabled to improve their existing accommodation.* The project either directly found this accommodation for them, enabled them to find accommodation by imparting knowledge about the housing application process, or indirectly gave them the chance of getting better accommodation in the future by improving their chances of finding a job or a better job.

- *Refugees were enabled to improve their social lives and reduce isolation.* This was an issue for those who had friends or family in the UK as well as those who did not. Those who had family in the UK did not necessarily live near them, whether as a result of dispersal when they were seeking asylum or because they chose to become established in different areas after receiving a positive decision, or as a simple result of preference for different areas or lifestyles. Refugees improved their social lives either directly, through social bonds and

bridges made at the project, or indirectly through learning English and therefore being enabled to participate in the life of the wider community. Something as simple as being able to participate in a transaction in a shop or understand how much the fare was on a bus could reduce isolation.

- *There was also evidence that refugees had gained in confidence through their involvement with the projects.* This confidence was gained in two ways: either refugees became more *socially* confident about forging their own social networks and getting to know people, or they were more *procedurally* confident with applications, benefits and so on. Learning English played an extensive part in improving both types of confidence.

Factors influencing projects' impact

The following were mentioned as factors that led to the projects having a beneficial impact on refugees' lives.

- **Staff** were sympathetic and welcoming, across all projects, which made refugees feel more comfortable about accessing the help offered and reassured them that they were wanted at the project. Additionally, refugees said that staff frequently went beyond their stated hours and job descriptions in offering them the most effective help. Those involved in teaching were also described as both patient and technically competent.

- **Equipment** in sufficient quantities and of the correct specifications was thought to help refugees learn. For example, enough textbooks so that people did not have to share them for an English class, or computers that were fairly modern.

- **Venue** of a welcoming nature, with space for equipment and for the activities carried out by the project to be delivered. Additionally, refugees preferred that the activities were carried out all on one site.

- **Ethos of project** in terms of atmosphere: refugees wanted it to be a welcoming place which they felt comfortable attending. Also the ethos of the project in terms of its aims: refugees wanted the projects to help them achieve one or more of their goals. However, where the project was willing to be flexible to some extent and to help the refugee with something they were not strictly funded to do, this was appreciated.

- **Delivery of service in the respondent's own language:** refugees who attended a single-language project felt that the services being delivered in their own language made the project particularly valuable. This was especially felt to be the case for IT classes. However, those at multi-ethnicity projects did not feel that delivery suffered where it could be achieved through an interpreter. At either single- or multi-ethnicity projects, English classes were thought to be more effective when delivered entirely in English.

Interviews with refugees suggested that the projects were achieving their own aims as defined by project staff. However, as previously discussed, it was more likely that a project with a single, specific aim would fail to meet it. Refugees overwhelmingly felt that the projects had benefited their quality of life and improved their situation, although there were also those who felt that the project had had less impact on them, whether this was because the project had failed or partially failed to meet its aim; the project had initially helped them but was now not able to because the respondents' circumstances meant they were no longer eligible; or because refugees felt they would have managed to access the help given either alone or with the help of friends or family, even if this had been more difficult.

The following quote, although atypical as it shows a refugee who felt he had received no benefit from the project, shows that if projects could not help people with what they considered to be their primary needs then refugees were likely to consider that it had had no impact on them. The respondent below was also offered help for his family with accessing English classes and day trips, but rejected this on the grounds that he had already found this for himself through his ethnic community. However, this quote is also typical in that it displays a lack of blame for the project because the respondent feels that it lacks the power to change decisions made by statutory bodies.

"They give us help, they give us hope, only hope, because they sent a letter for the housing office but nothing happened.… I think they are doing what they can do, but really we get some hope when they visit us… when they visit us in the house, my wife, she met them and she talk with them, and she was very happy, she thought that all our problems solved. … They promised me that they will visit me again, really when I moved I forget them, because they don't, I feel that they can't do anything for me, that's why. … They not failed but, we can't say that, but they did what they can … Because I think they don't have the power to force the housing office to do something."

However, even those who felt the projects had had less of an impact on them felt that the fact they existed was positive. This bears out the findings of previous quantitative research, which found that many refugees' living conditions remained bleak in comparison with the rest of the UK population, even for those who had spent the most time in the country (Peckham *et al*., 2003). However, it also showed that 'services provided by the ERF and Challenge Fund have been well regarded by this group and had had some impact on aspects of individuals' quality of life.'

Managing expectations

The quote above also demonstrates the need for projects to manage the expectations of refugees. If they will not be able to provide help, or have to withdraw their help, then projects need to inform refugees so that they do not feel that they cannot deliver on promises that were made. It may also highlight the need for better referrals so projects are able to direct refugees to organisations that will be able to effect real change.

The only indication of a problem arising from a clash of expectations between users and project staff was where a project was offering a particular service and was not set up to continue to help a user once that service had been provided and the outcome achieved. Occasionally, refugees felt that they had made a relationship with the staff and that this was then not maintained or the staff member was no longer interested in them. Most projects did not face this problem, however, as they either offered several services, offered services that were ongoing or functioned as a community centre so refugees could stay in contact with the people they had met there.

Single- versus multi-country projects

Three of the projects included in the study focused particularly on refugees from one part of the world, while the other seven did not have a focus on a particular group of refugees. As has been indicated above, the data did not appear to show any great differences between these projects in terms of the benefits they provided to refugees or the impact that they had. Instead, the impact of the project depended on the particular services offered and the needs of individual refugees.

Single-service versus holistic projects

A second difference between projects was that some offered (at least in theory) a single or very specific set of services whilst others provided more diverse or general support services. There were three projects offering a single or limited range of services (finding accommodation, running a course, and educational and cultural activities) included in the current study. In practice, refugees reported that staff in the projects of this type were still willing to help them with some other matters, such as translating letters or giving them advice, although they could not meet all their needs at these projects. Extra help of this kind beyond the specific service they were offering was highly appreciated and played an important part in the benefits gained from involvement with the project. Users created relationships with staff and expected to be able to turn to them for advice and help. However, they did not expect staff to provide whole services which were outside the project's remit. For instance, a housing project was not expected to run English classes and a computer course was not expected to run social activities. However, for example, the quote below illustrates how an English teacher, providing a single service, was sometimes asked to help with forms. It was very important that the staff were able to show this

flexibility. If projects choose to adopt this flexible approach, it is important that they consider how any extra work will impact on staff time and resources. However, the flexible approach seemed to reinforce the projects' impact on the *Indicators of Integration* related to feeling welcomed, making social connections and gaining confidence.

> *"The [teachers at my language course] help us, for sometime you have some problem with the, you don't know the rule of this country, sometimes we get a letter from the other way, if we didn't understand, we show the form teacher. [We] say, you come from this country, what's this letter? … For example, last week they sent a letter for the court in my house, penalty £75, I show my teacher, [and said], I didn't do anything, I don't know what they are talking about. He said, no problem, he phoned them up and said, this person you are talking about; it's not him, don't send a letter again for them. They help us for everywhere."*

This type of single service project appeared to be meeting the needs of refugees successfully. However, a report written by Michael Bell Associates (MBA, 2005) states that holistic service provision provides an indicator of best practice. This does not mean the findings of the current study necessarily conflict with this report. Explanations for the apparent discrepancy in findings may be found as follows.

- The two areas covered by the single- or limited-service projects were the two most important to refugees: housing and English language. A positive impact in either of these two areas, especially the latter, moved refugees very much further towards their goals, and also helped them begin to move themselves further to their goals. For example, someone who learned English was better able to deal with Jobcentre staff on their own account instead of through an interpreter.

- Linked to this, one of the limited-service projects was primarily aimed at educating schoolchildren. The impact of this project, although very positive on children's education, may therefore appear less in comparison to projects dealing with adults, as children did not have to, for example, find their own housing or access their own benefits.

- Staff at the projects included in the current study were flexible (within reason) in the help offered to refugees, as discussed above, and projects therefore in practice could have a more holistic role than their descriptions might have indicated. It may be that staff at other funded projects were not so flexible or knowledgeable.

- The projects indicated made referrals where necessary, although this appeared to be done in a limited way; for example, the housing project referred a refugee to the local authority to apply for a grant to furnish the house. The MBA report also refers to partnership work and networking as examples of good practice and holistic working.

Learning English

Refugees thought that learning English was key to achieving their goals. After achieving leave to remain, refugees thought that learning English was the most important means of integrating, as it would help them to access similar social, educational and employment opportunities to other UK citizens.

Some refugees said explicitly that they wished to integrate into the community in order to build a life for themselves in the UK, although without, in this study, using the specific term 'integration'. Refugees also implied their desire for integration or likelihood that they would integrate by using terms such as *"making a life"* in the UK, by which refugees meant getting a job and house, putting their children in school, learning English and so on.

> *"[I thought] when I came here: once I am here I will fit in."*
>
> *"And now I'm trying to make my home here because I have, my son has school, I have house, my wife is pregnant. My dream is maybe … now, I try slowly to make home for all my family here".*

Others had the ultimate aim of returning home, some of whom set themselves intermediate goals such as obtaining qualifications while they were in the country. However, there were still integrative implications to this, as people felt that finding a job that paid well enough or obtaining qualifications were still dependent on learning English.

As mentioned previously, a further group did not express a wish to integrate with the wider community because they felt able to meet all their needs within their own ethnic community (such as the ethnic community in London served by one of the projects), or because they did not see a need to interact with many people outside the family environment. Examples of this type of refugee were those past retirement age who felt they were too old to learn English, or women who saw their primary role as being mother to their children or within the house, and therefore did not need to work. This should by no means be taken to mean that all women expected this to be their role, however, others, particularly some of the younger women, were very ambitious. Such refugees sometimes actively resisted integration, for example by refusing to attend English classes, or by moving to somewhere they knew they could meet all their social needs within their own ethnic community.

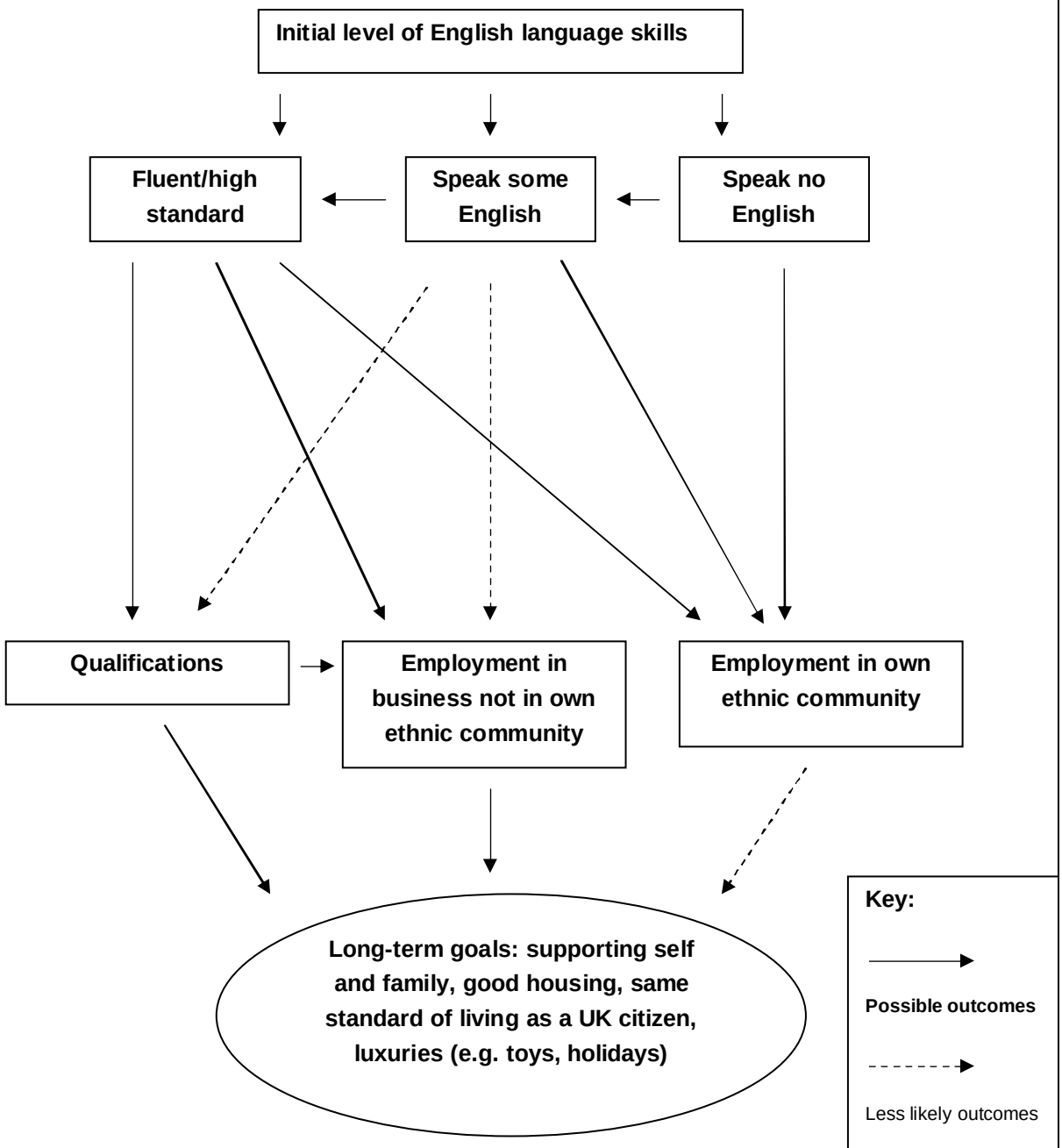
> *"In Birmingham yes, it was good for us, but… there was no Arabic community there, so I can't go shopping, I didn't go to learn English. Yes, I know lots of English people there, they are nice and they won't harm [us] … and everything was good in the house, but [I] didn't feel well, [I] was crying always because [I] didn't have anyone to talk to, and [I] moved here to Liverpool because [I] knew that there was [an Arabic] community here and [I'm] happy with it."*

As Figure 5.1 shows, refugees who were fluent speakers of English were enabled to access employment either within or outside their own ethnic community, or to gain the qualifications that would allow them to do this. Refugees who spoke some English were able to access jobs within their own ethnic community and, in some cases, menial jobs outside their own community. However, they had to attain fluency and possibly pursue qualifications before they were able to access most jobs outside their own ethnic community. Finally, there were those who spoke no English. Although these refugees would be able to take a job in their own ethnic community, they would not be able to access work outside it, nor would they be able to gain most qualifications. In any of these situations, the long-term goals of refugees (beyond employment) remained the same: to attain a good standard of living.

It was also clear that English language skills affected the level of integration achieved by refugees beyond their economic position. The possession of good English language skills affected the degree of choice and opportunity open to refugees. Those refugees who did not speak English but were part of a community of people from their own ethnic or linguistic group were able to achieve integration within that community. However, they were dependent on assistance by statutory agencies, voluntary groups or friends and family for access to the wider community and services within it. With increasing English language skills, refugees were able to access services and make links outside their own ethnic minority community and they gained confidence in doing so.

The funded projects were viewed as providing a bridge to a life within the wider community, which refugees found difficult to access on their own, and as giving them an opportunity to gain the skills and confidence to take a more active part in life outside their own ethnic community.

Figure 5.1: Model of economic integration: perceived role of English language skills



The figure shows the role that refugees perceived English language skills to have in facilitating economic integration and the attainment of a good standard of living.

Views about funding

Levels of awareness of the fact that the projects derived their funding wholly or in part from the European Refugee Fund or Challenge Fund were extremely low, although respondents were aware that the projects were receiving funds from somewhere. Refugees tended either to think that it was a good idea for the project to be funded, but not to be concerned about where the money came from, or simply never to have given it any thought. No respondents mentioned the Challenge Fund or the European Refugee Fund, although one did refer to the 'European Fund', which he said a project worker told him had funded the project. When asked from where they thought the projects received their funds, people generally either answered that they did not know, or guessed at central or local government funding. Some also mentioned other bodies, such as voluntary groups, or were aware that the project applied for funding from several different sources.

When asked whether they had heard of the European Refugee Fund or Challenge Fund, again respondents were unlikely to recognise either of the names. The following quote demonstrates much more awareness of, and interest in, funding than was commonly seen.

> *"[Name of project] is not only one [fund] they're applying for funding and get some funding from different sources.* [In answer to whether respondent was aware of ERF/Challenge Fund funding] *Yes… they organise some of the things, events for the refugees. We took part in … all this."*

Having given little thought to the ways in which projects were funded, refugees generally had few opinions about ERF or Challenge Fund funding. One respondent, however, found it difficult to believe that the Home Office had anything to do with funding the project, as he felt he had been badly treated during the process of seeking leave to remain.

> *"I would never think that the Home Office would fund this, I know they have funding capabilities, but I think it's a voluntary funding groups that fund this, I wouldn't think that the Home Office would fund something like this… Because the Home Office, the name of the Home Office brings different feelings, because of the things we've gone through … and the pressures we went through, I can't see the Home Office funding something like this."*

Suggested improvements

As discussed elsewhere, refugees were very reluctant to criticise the projects, and there were therefore few suggestions for improvement. Not all these suggestions were realistic or feasible, and others would have major resource implications if adopted. However, those that were raised can be grouped into the following categories.

- *Help should be given over a longer time period*: even after living in the country for many years, refugees may not know everything they need to about processes and procedures. Projects did not cease contact with refugees until they judged them to be able to cope alone but there may be scope for them to offer a telephone number in case of further need (although there were projects that already did this). However, given the existing demands on project staff, it is possible that this would result in further stretching of resources and mean that it was more difficult to concentrate on those in the most need.

- *The scope of the help offered by the project should be extended*: for example, the project offering housing help to single people and couples should be extended to families. Suggestions could also be made without regard to services on offer elsewhere or the feasibility of offering such help: one refugee had been told that the local authority offered this help, but wanted to move as quickly as he had into the flat that the project had found for him. Alternatively, some respondents suggested that the project should offer a service it did not have at the time of the interview, or which it was not funded to deliver, for example providing interpreters at job interviews.

  Suggestions about extending the scope of the project tended to be made in response to the question of how the projects could be improved, rather than expressed as a spontaneous

need. As an example of this, one refugee suggested that the multi-service, single-ethnicity centre he attended to get IT lessons might offer training to refugees who wanted to become electricians. Suggestions for extending the scope of projects followed no clear pattern in terms of what refugees wanted, and it is therefore likely that following all refugees' suggestions would have major resource implications. Considering the issues of context, extent of need, and avoiding duplication, extension of services might also be of limited value.

- *The target audience should be widened*: respondents thought, for example, that asylum seekers could be included. Refugees said that it was unfair that they were allowed to access services that asylum seekers were not. One respondent even suggested that the local non-refugee community could be included in the activities run by the project, funds permitting, as he felt this would aid integration by allowing refugees and non-refugees to meet in a social setting. Where a particular target audience, for example children, was identified, this was because a particular need had been identified. It is therefore unlikely that projects would be able to extend their target audience without either requiring extensive extra funding or compromising delivery on their core services.

- *More financial help should be given*: this is perhaps unsurprising given the straitened circumstances of many refugees. Financial support was thought to be something that refugees needed, but was in short supply. Although the financial help refugees suggested tended to be small in scale, and the need for it was only mentioned by a few, any financial help would be likely to have a serious effect on projects' finances without extra funds being allocated,

- *The project should take more of an outreach role* and look for opportunities of informing refugees about their services. Although projects did appear to be doing this, there may be more scope both for projects to increase the extent to which they market themselves, and for other agencies to help them to do this, for example by putting leaflets in places such as GPs' surgeries, places of worship, and so on. This was felt to be particularly important for those who were newly arrived, so it may be that NASS could help in this way.

  > *"I think there is a lot of organisation they can do something for [refugees], but nobody knows about it, they haven't the people are already there, they are sitting here, or they are already settled, but we need something for the man or the person, he's just arrived and he don't know anything about the services [they] can provide."*

- Finally, one improvement to a particular project suggested was the provision of a crèche. Although this was only suggested by one refugee, it seemed to be an important point given the focus of many of the projects on improving social networks and contacts, and the isolation of many mothers with young children.

In reporting these suggestions, it is not implied that such improvements would be feasible in all cases. Neither is it implied that ERF/CF projects have never themselves considered similar potential improvements. The issue of resource limitations, which applies equally to many other organisations and sectors, may be the overriding factor.

Ideal project target group

Refugees made few suggestions about the ideal target group for projects. Generally they were keen that the projects should offer help to anyone in need of it. Some felt that the projects should help asylum seekers as well as refugees, given that the only difference they saw between the groups was that one had received their decision and the other had not.

> *"It's only by one letter … after one day he didn't get a letter from the Home Office. This letter is not very important, it's not our fault they didn't get a letter to say you have to stay in this country, I didn't make any different between myself and [the asylum seeker who] one day didn't get a decision. It's no different I think, some people get the decision, and some people not, it's not right to make the difference between those people."*

The only suggestions made about the possible target audience for such projects were, in apparent contradiction, that access should be made either narrower or wider. Narrowing access to the project was raised, but in a very general and limited way. Respondents thought that this might allow projects to concentrate on those who most needed their help. They thought that these people would be most likely to be those at most risk of isolation – the two groups suggested were those who did not know anyone in the country already, and lone parents. However, it is likely that these groups could be helped (for example through outreach work) without narrowing access, and indeed refugees said that they did not want others in need to be excluded.

Widening access was much more generally felt to be an issue, with the aim that everyone who wanted help could access it, or as many people as possible participated. Possibly this is something that could be achieved at the same time as concentrating on those at risk of isolation, given more outreach work.

Other help refugees thought the Government could offer them

Refugees did not tend to think there was a great deal more the Government could do to help refugees, i.e. people who had received their decisions and been permitted to stay. However, they thought that there were two main ways it could help people before this stage, although some suggestions were unrealistic.

First, people thought that the Government could make decisions faster, something which the Government recognises and has set a Public Service Agreement (PSA) target in order to improve. This was because they felt waiting for the decision was psychologically very difficult. Some said that even if they were not to be allowed to stay, they would prefer to know as soon as possible so they could make further decisions about what to do. Second, the time taken to make a decision was thought to make integration very difficult. Without permission to stay, asylum seekers were not able to access benefits, work, education or services and therefore had little to do except stay in the house. Those at a life stage where they had a family found this difficult, and those who were single, particularly those with few or no contacts in the UK, even more so.

Next, people said that asylum seekers should be permitted to work. This was for four reasons, not all of which applied in all cases.

- People did not want to be dependent on the state.
- Not allowing asylum seekers to work was thought to be economically wasteful.
- Not working was psychologically difficult.
- Not working made it more difficult for people to integrate into society.

Although people in general did not want to be dependent on the state, this was particularly the case for men, and especially those who were at a life stage where they had families to support. Culturally they often found it difficult not to be able to support their families as they would both expect and have been expected to do so in their own country and culture.

Voluntary work

Some respondents said they would prefer to work for the benefits they received rather than take them for nothing, even if they were not allowed to do work that earned them money. Some asylum seekers had carried out voluntary work rather than do nothing. Types of voluntary work undertaken included advising other refugees from the same ethnic community, working at a local charity, or work related to the career path the respondent aspired to or had already been following in their country of origin – for example, youth work for someone who had done this before coming to the UK and who aspired to be a youth or social worker.

Not allowing asylum seekers to work was thought to make little sense economically. However, this did not take into consideration the possible effects on the labour market of allowing asylum seekers to work. They said that many asylum seekers had skills that could be used to benefit the country, but which were not being used. It was also thought to make little sense to pay people to be idle who wanted to work. One suggestion, which to some extent overcomes the issues of impact on the rest of the UK labour market, was that the Government should run work schemes for asylum seekers to allow them to feel that they were earning their benefits. They felt that this would also benefit the country, as asylum seekers would therefore not cost the country as much. However, the possible administration costs of such a scheme were not discussed.

> *"I should work, I'm a man. I can't sit in the house doing nothing, I need to work. I can't work because I don't have NI [National Insurance] number. Wherever I go I can't work because they said asylum seekers cannot work. So don't tell me I can only sit in the house doing nothing. It's a waste for me. Even now I strongly emphasise and request they should do something for this, asylum seekers cannot work. I'm a good plumber and I'm a good joiner. This is wasting. Even now I work in [voluntary work] but if I [get paid] work I get money, I can support my family. I don't depend on state."*

> *"So economically I would say to let people work, you know just doing, clean the streets even. Or maybe they should have the kind of jobs, to say these are the jobs [that asylum seekers can do] or, I don't know if this makes sense, maybe a Government industrial site for asylum seekers to say, okay you work here, or something like that."*

Not working was also thought to be difficult psychologically. If someone did not work, they were denied the social contact and sense of purpose that work brought.

Finally, refugees said that not allowing them to work while they were still asylum seekers slowed the process of integration. This was stated both explicitly, and in terms of prolonging the financial gap between those established or born in the country, and those newly arrived. However, this does not take into account the fact that the majority of asylum claims are refused. Asylum seekers are therefore different from refugees and so may not need to integrate if their claim for asylum is unfounded and they are refused the right to remain.

> *"The problem is, as soon as they come in this country, they deny them the right to go, the right to work, and how can people integrate if they don't?"*

Given that there were asylum seekers who were working voluntarily, and also that some respondents expressed the belief that asylum seekers should have to work for the benefits they received, it may be that there is scope for encouraging voluntary work among asylum seekers. This would allow them to gain experience to use when they were allowed to work legally, while also allowing them to form social connections. It might also combat some of the psychological effects (for example isolation) associated with not working, although it would be unlikely to help with the psychological impact of not being able to provide financially for the family. It would also not address the issue of the financial gap between established residents and those seeking asylum.

Chapter conclusions

Refugees were very positive about all services provided by ERF/CF projects.

This positive attitude stemmed from one or more of a number of factors that could apply to each project.

- First, the project had helped refugees to achieve a goal, or brought them closer to achieving it.
- Next, the staff had been friendly and polite, or had gone out of their way to help clients.
- Additionally, the project had enabled refugees to improve their social lives, or had given them somewhere to go at minimal or no cost.

- Finally, the project was particularly convenient to attend.

Very little negative feedback was received about the projects. Where this did occur it was generally related to a project with a very specific aim not being able to deliver it as quickly as was hoped or to a lack of funding leading to staff being very busy. Refugees had generally put little thought into how projects were funded, and were not particularly interested in this.

The projects impacted on refugees in five ways.

- First, refugees were enabled to find, or become closer to finding, employment or further opportunities for study.
- Second, refugees became more comfortable about conducting processes such as applying for benefits on their own behalf, rather than relying on the project staff, friends, or other sources of help.
- Alternatively, refugees found accommodation, became more aware of the processes involved in doing this, or were enabled to improve their existing accommodation.
- Next, refugees were enabled to improve their social life and reduce isolation.
- Finally, there was also evidence that refugees had gained in confidence through their involvement with the projects.

The role of English language skills was strongly emphasised in relation to both economic and social integration. Several factors influenced the extent of projects' impact on refugees' lives and integration. These included staff, equipment, venue, ethos and delivery of service in the respondent's own language. The type of project, in terms of its target group or the range of services it delivered, did not appear to have great effects *per se* on its impact on users. Neither did the benefits received seem to vary by age, gender or time spent in the UK. Rather, benefits arose from the services delivered, regardless of whether only one service was provided or several were on offer. However, it was important that staff were able to be flexible and provide some help outside the official remit of the project.

Policy

Projects should ensure that refugees are aware of the precise limits of the service offered by the project, and the reasons that this is so (e.g. funding context, Government priorities, shortage of housing or other resources), at the time of recruitment or the first visit. Government may also be able to help projects do this, for example by producing leaflets about the funding context in which the projects operate.

Projects should examine refugees' suggestions for improvements while bearing in mind that they were reluctant to criticise. Broad suggestions may be applicable across several projects, for example:

- projects should take more of an outreach role;
- projects should try to help as many people as possible, but also target help towards those most in need – the newly arrived and the isolated;
- the scope of some projects should be extended;
- resources should be improved in order to enable projects to make necessary improvements;
- help should be given over a longer time period; and
- projects should give more financial help to refugees themselves.

However, other suggestions were very specific and varied according to specific individuals. It may therefore be worth projects setting up some sort of mechanism by which such suggestions

can be gathered from refugees in order to see whether there are specific needs for particular services from area to area.

Refugees found co-ordination services, or services that provided advice along some sort of co-ordination element, particularly helpful but also sometimes very difficult to access because staff were too busy to allow them to make an appointment when needed. It might therefore be worth providing extra support workers at projects where it was already provided, or funding provision of this facility where it was not provided. The key was for refugees to be able to take small things, such as forms, as well as more important things such as benefit applications, to staff and have them dealt with and explained quickly.

Refugees also found English and IT classes very useful. It might be worth the Home Office examining the exact extent to which these are oversubscribed in order to gauge the likely need for more to be provided.

The Home Office and ERF should encourage organisations to develop partnerships with each other in order to facilitate refugee integration.

Organisations could use the positive aspects of refugees' experience in marketing materials.

Organisations should increase the prominence of ERF/CF logos and other materials at both the project site and in marketing materials, if the Home Office or ERF as funders believe it to be particularly desirable that refugees know who funds the project.

Practice

Projects and the Home Office should work to ensure that the aims of the project and the funding/political context in which it operates are clear to all the refugees who use the funded services, in order to ensure both hopes and suggestions are realistic. This is particularly important where a project has a very specific aim that refugees hope can be delivered quickly.

6 Conclusions

The conclusions that can be drawn from this research relate to broad issues around the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees, the way in which refugees themselves approach their lives in the UK and learning for the Challenge Fund and ERF programmes.

Experiences before receiving leave to remain

It was clear that refugees' experiences whilst they were awaiting a decision about their right to remain in the UK played an important part in their economic and emotional state once they became refugees. There was therefore strong demand for projects to provide more support for asylum seekers. It was also interesting that the refugees considered the distinction between refugees and asylum seekers in terms of delivering services to be artificial and unfair.

Refugees' goals

The refugees usually had fairly clearly defined goals when they reached the UK. These chimed well with the *Indicators of Integration*. People's priorities developed as they spent more time in the UK. They often began by focusing first on their immediate physical needs and then on their right to remain in the UK. Once these had been resolved they were able to pursue medium- and long-term goals. These included obtaining housing that they liked and getting a job (or starting a business) that gave them an income sufficient for a good standard of living. They judged a good 'standard of living' relative to what they saw of the opportunities available to other people living in the UK and what they wanted to be able to give their family. Financial hardship and a focus on obtaining a good income were dominant themes in many interviews.

Education and training were also high priorities, either as a means of gaining a good income or because it had been disrupted. Learning or developing English language skills was often viewed as being a crucial step in the path to integration and other goals. Refugees recognised that, without English, they were restricted to a community of people who spoke their language or to relying on interpreters and intermediaries. Day-to-day life, as well as economic and social development, was perceived to be made easier and to include far more choices with good English.

Using funding most effectively

Models of service provision

In terms of funding decisions within the Challenge Fund and ERF, the data did not suggest that a particular model of service provision should be given particular support. Benefits were delivered in four main ways: through individual case workers (in refugees' homes); through staff accessed at a centre; in organised (group) activities; and providing a venue for informal social interactions. Each of these methods was very important. Staff members (whether dedicated to such a service or met through group events) working with a refugee individually were able to provide tailored and effective help with housing, benefits and learning to navigate unfamiliar systems and situations. Organised activities provided a good forum for education and training and help with CVs and job interviews. Organised social and cultural activities were beneficial in facilitating social links and more informal learning. Providing a venue for informal activities reinforced and added to the benefits of reducing isolation and developing relationships, and also gave refugees somewhere to go outside the home.

Effectiveness of different models of service provision in varying circumstances

Although the data did not suggest that one method of service provision was intrinsically 'better' than another, it did indicate that refugees might find one of these models more useful than the others according to their circumstances. Those who did not have family members or friends who had already settled in the UK, and therefore did not have anyone who could help them with claiming benefits, found the individual caseworker model very helpful. Those with young children also found this method helpful, as it meant they did not have to leave home to access the service. Single parents also found that this method helped them feel less isolated, as the quote below shows.

> *"If you've got a partner you can share ideas, talk to your partner, but now if you don't have your partner, you need someone to talk to, you need someone to tell your problems. If I'd had a partner, it was better, maybe I would [still have needed] them, but not like every time like the way I used to. But now I've got no one to tell my problems, I need them."*

Refugees accessing similar help through staff at a centre appeared to find it just as useful, with the key proviso that this was as long as they were able to access staff as necessary rather than have to wait a long time, perhaps therefore missing out on benefits, before anyone could see them. The fact that home workers came to the house and helped refugees as the need arose, or at set times, rather than having to make an appointment as a need arose and then wait to have it dealt with, seemed to be key. This may explain why this help was particularly valued when refugees were at the stage of needing to sort various things out at the same time, usually just after arrival or receiving their decisions.

Caseworkers tended to contact refugees, rather than refugees needing to self-refer or at least make initial contact themselves, and this may be another reason that their help was particularly valued by those who had just arrived or who were trying to arrange many things at the same time. In these cases, refugees did not have to worry about locating a source of support. This may also have meant refugees who would not otherwise have accessed a project found out about it. Those accessing other types of help often said they had either heard about the service from another agency, meaning they were already receiving some kind of help, or through family and friends, meaning they had another source of advice and support. In contrast, those using the caseworker model were contacted from the local authority's lists, meaning that the caseworker was in some cases the first source of support refugees had received, although this was not universally true and some using caseworkers had also received help from other sources. As a source of awareness, word of mouth appeared to be particularly valued and trusted by refugees, and it may be worth projects thinking of ways in which this can be utilised. However, word of mouth could also spread false information about what the projects were set up to do, so it may be necessary for them to make sure those sharing information were absolutely clear about the aims of organisations.

In other cases, different models appeared to work more effectively. For example, those who wanted to acquire new skills in order to progress in employment or education (especially, but not exclusively, younger people) found organised educational or employment activities useful. Older people who valued the social or interest elements of these classes also said they gained a great deal from them. Providing an informal arena for social interactions helped those of any age who wanted to get out of the house and meet other people, but single parents were particularly likely to want to do this.

Progression and linkages between different service provision models

Projects offering caseworkers tended only to offer service provision through caseworkers. However, more than one of the other models of service provision might be offered at the same time by other agencies. For example, a centre might provide advice on a drop-in basis but also run various courses and provide an arena for social interaction.

It may be that refugees would be able to progress from one project to another, depending on specific language needs and the number of services provided in their area. For example, they

might use a caseworker in the initial stages of their stay in the country to help them to claim benefits, arrange schooling and housing and so on. When refugees had done this and needed less intensive help, they might then be able to progress to a centre which offered help on an as-needed rather than a constant basis. At this point they might also be enabled to start thinking about education and forging wider social links, if they did not already have these or had not already done so, and therefore use organised activities or informal meeting arenas.

Types of service provided

Six types of service were provided: co-ordination and orientation, education, cultural services, social activities, referrals and finding accommodation. Each contributed directly to one or more *Indicators of Integration*. Some services did seem to be more difficult to provide than others, in particular, services which aimed to find refugees a job or a house. These services attracted more negative feedback than others but were immensely valuable.

Cultural and language needs

Projects appeared to have been very successful in meeting users' cultural and language needs (although the supply of interpreters was a problem in some areas). Refugees, whether in a project focused on one community or on many, felt that their beliefs and habits were catered for, and they valued exchanging cultural understanding with others.

Interpreters

Interviews with project staff indicated that they sometimes had difficulty finding interpreters, and this was also mentioned by some refugees. Problems with interpreters arose because funding was not available, because clients did not keep appointments (according to the projects), or because the interpreter did not keep the appointment, although this was not felt to happen often enough to be a major issue. Ensuring that interpreters were available was obviously easier for single-country/ethnicity projects where only one or two languages were spoken, or where staff almost certainly spoke the language themselves, than for projects dealing with refugees from many countries. There were some languages for which it was difficult to provide an interpreter.

Although lacking an interpreter obviously had serious implications for refugees being able to access projects, or to access them at a particular time, projects seemed to be finding interpreters almost all the time. The issue of interpreters therefore did not influence overall preference for single- or multi-country projects, although a refugee who had had difficulty in finding an interpreter would be likely to be disposed to favour the former type of project.

Need to change funding strategies

There was no evidence of any need for funding strategies to be changed: projects seemed to be operating successfully and creating the type of effects that are required. The research did indicate that the continuation of funding a diverse range of projects would be beneficial. It also highlighted the importance of acknowledging the 'softer' benefits of many services and enabling staff to interact flexibly with users and respond to their needs as they arose. No suggestions relating to the optimum size of projects were made. Where refugees commented on the size of the project it was in a general way, focusing on giving help to as many people as possible.

The problems that were raised, and suggestions for improvements generally, related to a lack of funding and high demand for project services. It is difficult to draw any conclusions about the amount of extra funding needed; however, refugees were clear that there was a need for the projects. This being the case, it was predictable that they said they would like to see them as well funded as possible.

The need for funding highlights two issues: first, the issue of the capacity of the voluntary sector. Many voluntary sector organisations believe they are underfunded and it is likely that the issues attributable to funding in the present study also apply in other voluntary organisations that provide services. Second, the present research highlights another issue: the extent to which

organisations working with BME groups are able to access the funding and other forms of support available to them. This research did not aim to explore this issue in depth and discussions with project staff did not focus on their capacity, sustainability or how they could be helped. However, there did appear to be the potential for help to be given to projects to assist them in identifying and obtaining other funding and managing demand for their services.

Appendix 1 Topic guide

ERF/Challenge Fund – impact assessment

Aims of the project

- To understand the detailed views held by users of the services provided by projects funded by the ERF/Challenge Fund.
- To examine users' perceptions of how these services have impacted upon their own quality of life and integration.
- To discover how the services funded by the ERF/Challenge Fund could be improved.
- To explore the experiences of refugees on a wider basis, understanding what their lives are like and what they aspire to.

1. Introduction

- About BMRB
- About the research
- Commissioned by the Home Office to look at refugees' experiences
- Length of interview – 60 minutes (up to 2 hours if interpreter is being used)
- Confidentiality – stress that nobody knows who we are speaking to and that nothing they say will be revealed to the Home Office or to the project that has recruited them
- Nothing they say will affect their entitlement to remain in the country, their status, or any benefits they may receive
- Tape recording – tapes not available to the Home Office or to the project

Section One – Respondent's background and experience in the UK

Note to researchers: this section should cover as little of the interview as possible: no more than c. 20 minutes.

2. General background

- Country of origin
- Age
- Family – in UK and in country of origin
- Length of time since leaving country of origin
- Length of time they have been in the UK

3. Summary of activity in UK

- What have they been doing since they have been in the UK?
    - Talk through their first week, month, year
- What were their immediate, short-term, medium-term, long-term/future priorities?
- How did they set about achieving these?
    - Probe for help from:
        - family/friends in UK
        - people from own ethnic minority community/country of origin in town living in/rest of UK
        - any outside organisations (return to these later)
            - Government

        - Voluntary (NB respondent may not be able to distinguish between these and Government)
- Progress they feel they have made towards achieving goals

4. Other aspects of experience in the UK

Note to researchers: the aim of this part of the research is to identify issues that can be explored in Section 2. Be alert for ways in which the project has had an impact (or has tried to make an impact) and do not feel that you have to cover all the areas below in depth if they are not relevant to the project.

Accommodation

- Type of accommodation – e.g. house/flat/hostel, size, location
    - People they are living with
    - How long they have lived there
    - How they feel about where they are living
    - Different places they have lived in; reasons for moving on (if applicable), comparison between them
    - Where they want to live in the future
        - How does this differ from present

Employment and education

- Current employment/education/training activity (i.e. what they are doing at the moment)
    - How does this differ (whether this differs) from their country of origin
    - Other jobs they have done in this country
    - How they feel about their current activity
    - Whether they would like current activity to change, how
        - Ambitions for the future
        - What needs to happen in order for these to be fulfilled
        - Likelihood of this happening
    - Children's education

Benefits and finances

- How they are living (what they are living on) at the moment
    - Extent they feel they are able to support themselves/family on this
    - Benefits received
    - Any other help they have received

Health

- How has their health been since arriving in the UK (physical/mental)
    - Extent to which this is different from previous state of health
    - Access to GP, other facilities (e.g. antenatal care, dentistry)

5. Life in the UK – overall

- How do they generally find living in the UK
    - Positive elements
    - Negative elements
    - Extent to which these have been different from expectations

- Familiarity with English language
    - Extent to which this has changed over time

- Familiarity with processes and procedures
    - Benefits
    - Taxation
    - Banking
    - Getting an NI number
    - Housing

- Relationships with people in UK
    - Neighbours
    - Family
    - Friends
    - People who are from their area of origin/not from their area of origin

Section Two – Respondent's experience of ERF- or Challenge Fund-funded project

Note to researchers: This is the main focus of the research. Explore the impact or lack of impact the project has had on any of the issues identified in the background information gathered in Section 1, and any ways it has aimed but failed to help.

6. First contact with and expectations of project

- How did they first hear about project?
    - Who from?
    - What other things have they heard about from this source to help them?
        - What have they heard about from other sources?

- What did they hear about the project?
- Understanding of its aims
    - Why did they think it was set up/existed?
- What did they expect it to be like/to do for them?
- What did they hope it would do?
- How relevant did they see it as being to them?
- Nature of any concerns about the project?

- Why did they decide to make contact?
    - Length of time they have now been in contact with project

- Experiences of initial contact – can they talk through their first visit
    - How does this differ from present experience of contact

- Extent of knowledge about how the project is funded
    - Prompt about Home Office, ERF/Challenge Fund
- How did they find out about this?
    - How do they generally find out about things relating to the project?
    - How do they generally find out about other services in this country?

7. Views about services received

- What services have they received from the project?
    - What have these services entailed?
    - How have these been delivered?
- Positive and negative experiences with the project
    - How has the project helped?
    - How has the project not helped?
    - How could it have been more helpful?

- Nature of any difficulties combining contact with project with other activities, e.g. ETE
    - Whether/how resolved

- What have the staff been like?
    - Positive and negative experiences
    - Nature of communication they have had with staff
        - Have there been any difficulties in communication
    - Understanding shown by the staff

        - Nature of any cultural difficulties
    - Are there any ways in which the staff could have done things differently?
        - How would this have changed things for them?

8. Impact of the project

- For each service the project has delivered or way they believe the project has helped:
    - Extent of the impact this has had on them
    - Extent of the impact this has had on their family (if applicable)
    - Whether it has made a difference to them, nature of any difference
        - How they think things would have been different if the project had not existed
    - Why has it had this impact/lack of impact?
        - What is it about what the project has done?

- Nature of the difference it has made to other people (if known)
    - How they think this would have been different if the project had not existed

- How far do they think it has helped them achieve their goals? (refer back)
    - Any ways it could have helped them further with this

9. Changes and improvements/summary

Project

- Are there any ways they think the project could have been improved?
    - What difference do they think this would have made to them/to others?
- Who do they think it ought to be aimed at? (i.e. wider/narrower audience)
- Thinking about the project aims, how far do they believe these have been achieved?
    - In own case
    - In others' cases
- Any other ideas for improvement or comments about project
- What advice would they give to someone who was setting up a project for refugees in their areas?

General

- What do they see as being the challenges facing refugees in the UK?
    - How successful do they feel they have been in overcoming these?
- What else would help refugees to integrate into British society?
- What else would help refugees have a better life in the UK?
- What more could the government do to help refugees?

The future

- Aspirations for the future
    - In next few months
    - In next few years
    - Longer term
        - What they feel they need to do in order to achieve these aims

Establish respondent's status: whether refugee or asylum seeker (NB refugees have permission to remain whereas asylum seekers are still in the process of seeking this)

THANK RESPONDENT, REASSURE ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY AND CLOSE

Appendix 2 Ethical considerations

The level of control allowed to staff in the funded projects to select respondents for the study. It was important that staff at the projects were not able to select the clients taking part in the research as this could bias the findings. In order to minimise this danger, a number of measures were taken.

- Researchers spent time with project staff explaining the research and reassuring them that their project was not being evaluated individually and that feedback about individual projects would not be passed to the Home Office.
- Wherever possible, researchers encouraged projects to provide a full list of their clients (either before or after an opt-out process).
- Where this was not possible, researchers agreed that staff should provide the details of a much larger number of clients than would actually be recruited for the study. They also agreed quotas that this sample should follow.
- If researchers were recruiting on site they approached as wide a range of clients as possible.

Meeting the language needs of respondents and ensuring they could articulate their views fully. The research was carried out by a mixture of bilingual researchers and English speaking researchers working with interpreters. If interpreters had to be used they were professionals who were chosen by the researchers and were not connected to the project. They were selected to have experience of similar work where possible. Researchers briefed interpreters in depth about the research process, the principles of qualitative research interviewing and the content of the interview. The venues for the interviews were chosen to be convenient and comfortable for respondents. Researchers discussed with each respondent where they would prefer to carry out the interview. Venues included respondents' homes and local hotels and community centres. Wherever possible, interviews were held away from the project premises to help respondents feel able to express any negative views about the project.

Confidentiality. Participants in the research were assured that everything they said was anonymous and that no personal details would be reported to the Home Office which would identify them. This was also discussed with staff at the projects so that they could reassure respondents if they were asked about the research. Interviews were taped with the permission of the respondents. Sufficient time was allowed at the start of interviews for respondents to raise concerns or questions about the research and for these to be discussed before starting the interview.

Ensuring that respondents understood the nature of the research and addressing any concerns they had about it. It was expected that some respondents would be very suspicious about the research. They were likely to worry about the researchers' connection with the Home Office or other parts of the government and to be cautious about speaking to them in case it affected them negatively. Respondents might also not have been familiar with the idea of research being independent, neutral and confidential. Time was therefore built into recruitment and interviews to discuss the research with respondents, listen to their concerns and explain researchers' role and aims. It was also important for researchers to be very open about what they would be asking and how the data would be used.

The vulnerable state of some of the respondents. It was anticipated that some of the participants might be quite vulnerable and have ongoing practical and emotional difficulties. There was also the possibility that respondents might reveal to researchers experiences which were traumatic both to convey and to hear about. Researchers are trained to cope with this situation during the interview, for instance stopping the tape recorder if respondents became upset and offering to halt or reschedule the interview. The researchers involved in the study were chosen because they had experience of research with similar groups or on issues which were highly sensitive. Detailed briefing meetings were held with them and background material was provided to assist them to prepare for the work. The project manager kept in close contact with the researchers through the fieldwork, providing support and advice as well as a chance to talk about the issues arising in the interviews.

Appendix 3 Matrix mapping framework

On every sheet (sample details):

- **Interview number**
- **Project name**

- Country of origin
- Age
- Length of time since leaving country of origin/in the UK
- Whether refugee or asylum seeker, what kind of status (e.g. permanent leave to remain, leave to remain for 3 years etc.), when received refugee status
- Language interviewed in + whether an interpreter was used

1. EXPERIENCE IN UK BEFORE INVOLVEMENT WITH PROJECT /1 (ARRIVAL)

1.1 Background: any info on why left country of origin, family over here/over there (esp. partner/children), other countries they went to on their way here, how they got here
1.2 Priorities on arrival in UK: immediate, short-term, medium-term, long-term/future; how they set about achieving those (NB most of this will go into other sections)
1.3 Help they got on arrival from friends/family
1.4 Help they got on arrival from community
1.5 Help they got on arrival from statutory or voluntary sources
1.6 What they have been doing since arrival (e.g. ETE, voluntary work, application to stay)
1.7 Other

2. EXPERIENCE IN UK BEFORE INVOLVEMENT WITH PROJECT/2 (LIVING CIRCUMSTANCES)

2.1 Accommodation: type, who living with, adequacy, how feel about it, where want to live in future
2.2 Employment and education: current/past ETE activity, how differs from country of origin, ambitions for future, children's education (if applicable)
2.3 Benefits and finances: what living on at the moment, adequacy, any other financial help received and source
2.4 Health: since arriving in UK/comparison with previous health, access to health facilities
2.5 Other

3. FIRST CONTACT WITH AND EXPECTATIONS OF PROJECT

3.1 Summary of the project
3.2 How did they first hear about project: who from, any other helpful info they got from this source and when
3.3 What did they hear about the project: understanding of its aims, what did they expect and hope it would do for them
3.4 Any concerns they had about the project
3.5 Why did they decide to make contact: what need/desire did they hope it would fulfil, why did they go to this source of help
3.6 Experiences of contact: length of time they have now been in touch with it, initial contact, subsequent/on-going contact
3.7 Extent of knowledge about how the project is funded – who did they think the project was funded by, had they heard of ERF/Challenge Fund, how did they find out about this + interest/attitude to the issue of funding
3.8 Other

4. EXPERIENCE OF PROJECT

4.1 What services have they received from the project; describe how delivered/what entailed
4.2 Positive experiences
4.3 Negative experiences
4.4 Any difficulty accessing services e.g. conflicting appointments, combining contact with project with work, travel.; what was done about this
4.5 Staff: What have the staff been like, positive and negative experiences, contact, any difficulties in communication, understanding (any cultural difficulties), any way they could have done things differently and what effect would this have had on them
4.6 Other

5. IMPACT OF THE PROJECT

5.1 Direct service 1: Extent of the impact this has had on them; impact it has had on their family (if applicable), whether it has made a difference to them, nature of any difference, how they think things would have been different if the project had not existed, why has it had this impact/lack of impact, how far has it helped them achieve their goals
5.2 Direct service 2
5.3 Direct service 3
5.4 Direct service 4
5.5 Indirect benefits/impacts: e.g. integration, confidence, social contact etc)
5.6 Difference it has made to other people (if known)
5.7 Summary of impact/any general points they have to make about project
5.8 Other

6. CHANGES AND IMPROVEMENTS/SUMMARY

6.1 Any ways they think the project could have been improved, difference do they think this would have made to them/to others
6.2 Who do they think it ought to be aimed at (wider/narrower audience)
6.3 How far do they believe project aims have been achieved
6.4 Advice they would give to someone who was setting up a project for refugees in their areas
6.5 Their plans for the future
6.6 Other

7. INTEGRATION

7.1 General feelings about living in the UK; have these changed over time, why
7.2 Familiarity with language: has this changed over time; how (e.g**.** English classes), why
7.3 Familiarity with processes and procedures and how found out about these (source of awareness)
7.4 Relationships and friendships: with people in UK; who are these with (e.g. neighbours, friends, other refugees, other people from own ethnic community, people from other ethnic communities, British people); has this changed over time, where have they met these people/do they know them from
7.5 What do they see as being the main challenges facing refugees in the UK and how successful do they feel they have been in overcoming these; what more could be done to help refugees
7.6 What more would help refugees to integrate into British society

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