Legal Indicators for Social Inclusion of New Minorities Generated by Immigration – LISI

Project funded by the European Commission - DG Employment and Social Affairs and the European Academy of Bolzano/Bozen

Partners of the Project are : EURAC (European Academy of Bolzano Bozen), the AIRE Centre (Advice on Individual Rights in Europe – London) and the ETC (European Training and Research Centre for Human Rights and Democracy – Graz)

Regional Report

London

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Section 1: Introduction

1.1 Background to the project

This report is part of a larger comparative project entitled “Legal Indicators of Social Inclusion of New Minorities Generated by Immigration” (LISI), funded by the European Commission. The LISI project examines the situation pertaining to exclusion of new minorities in three study sites: Bolzano, the Province of South Tyrol (Italy), Graz, Styria (Austria), and London (Britain). It identifies analyses and compares conditions and processes leading to social exclusion of the target group in these three different contexts. The project envisaged that the indicators identified in this comparative study would have the EU-wide applicability, because the three areas examined encompass very different typologies of social exclusion.

The LISI project consists of three phases:

- Phase 1, preparation of regional reports
- Phase 2, devising common legal indicators of social inclusion/exclusion with the active involvement of stakeholders
- Phase 3, dissemination, awareness rising and public consultation on proposed set of indicators.

Regional reports, therefore, are only a first, initial phase of the project. As such, they are not ‘stand-alone’ reports. Rather, they form a basis for further analysis and write-up of the LISI project report. Consequently, each regional report should be considered as ‘work in progress’, yet as a fairly comprehensive mapping of the processes leading to social exclusion in the study sites. The project is expected to be completed in June 2003.

Partners involved in this comparative project are: EURAC, Bolzano, Italy (the co-ordinating organisation), ETC, Graz, Austria, and Advice on Individual Rights in Europe (AIRE Centre), London, Britain. EURAC, as the co-ordinating organisation will consolidate a report of the LISI project.
1.2 Definitions and objectives

The LISI project is based on assumption that the degree of social inclusion of the target group is partially, yet importantly, determined by the legal framework defined at national and regional/local levels. Therefore, the point of departure in this project is the analysis of legal framework and their social implications for new minorities originating from immigration in the three study sites. Immigration represents one of the key risk factors which significantly increase risk of poverty and social exclusion and thus it is important to examine the situation of different group of migrants across Europe (European Commission, non dated – please check this reference and insert the date if you know it. The copy I have, downloaded from internet does not indicate any date as well as does not give any clear indication of the actual ‘body’ within the EC behind this report, which by the way is Draft Joint Report on Social Inclusion. Thanks!)

The project targets ‘new minorities’ defined as groups of newcomers and/or newly arrived immigrants, as opposed to ‘old minorities’. The latter either could be autochthonous national minorities, such as the Austrian minority in South Tyrol, or (relatively) established groups of immigrants and their descendants, such as ethnic minority groups settled in Britain in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Given the significant differences between the study sites, regional reports on South Tyrol, Styria, and London, focus on different groups of newcomers. This is to reflect specific contexts concerning the history of migration and the patterns of more recent immigration to each region.

1.2.1 Patterns of migration and ethnic minorities in Britain

The largest minority ethnic groups in Britain, according to the 1991 Census, are Indian, African Caribbean, Chinese, as well as those describing themselves as Black African. The main post-war migrants came from the Indian Sub-continent and the West Indies. People from India form the largest
minority ethnic group in Britain – 1.5 per cent of the total population (Census 1991). They first came in the 1950s and 1960s. Other large groups from the Indian Sub-continent are from Pakistan and Bangladesh. The latter group represents the most recently arrived migrants from the region. While immigration declined among other groups after 1980, it increased for this group. Nearly half of those of Bangladeshi origin who were born abroad had arrived in Britain since 1980 (Jones, 1993).

Mass migration from the West Indies took place in the 1950s. The majority of these men and women were young, aged between 15 and 25, and the highest population concentrations were in London and West Midlands. Nearly 1 per cent of the population in Britain describe their ethnic group as Black Caribbean (Census 1991).

After people from the Indian Sub-continent and African-Caribbeans, Britain’s Chinese population is among the largest minority ethnic groups. They make up just under 0.3 percent of the total population (Census 1991). The original settlers were mainly in the areas of Liverpool, Cardiff and London’s East End.

There is a long history of African migration to Britain, and to the East End in particular. Black Africans make up nearly 0.4 per cent of the total population in Britain (Census 1991). In addition to the long-standing immigrants, there are also more recent arrivals who have sought asylum from areas of continent of Africa. Consequently, they along with people from Bangladesh are among the most recently arrived larger groups of immigrants in Britain (Jones, 1993).

The patterns of immigration to Britain have changed significantly in the past ten years, as will be discussed further below, thus this report focuses specifically on asylum seekers and refugees and processes leading to their social exclusion.
1.2.2 Use of terms: refugee and asylum seeker

‘Refugee’ is a legal construct that affects the lives and wellbeing of forced migrants settled in the EU states in fundamental ways, because different types of ‘refugee’ in legal terms imply different sets of rights. These differentiated rights, as it will be discussed further in this report, affect important aspects of settlement ranging from legality and duration of residence, access to assistance, services and the labour market, to possibilities for family reunification. In order to map-out different mechanisms of social inclusion and exclusion of forced migrants in London, this report covers the situation of asylum seekers, people with refugee status, and those with Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR). Asylum seekers are those awaiting decision on their claim for protection of another country. Refugees are those with status granted under the terms of the UN Geneva Convention 1951. Finally, people with ELR are those admitted temporarily, on humanitarian grounds. However, the term ‘refugee’ is used in this report as an ‘umbrella’ term to refer to all the three categories, except where distinction in status is relevant for the discussion.

1.2.3 Objectives of regional reports

The primary objectives of the three regional reports, including this report, is to gain better knowledge and understanding of:

- the extent, characteristics, processes, causes and trends of marginalisation and social exclusion of the target group
- the emergence of new forms of social inequality and social differentiation in each of the three host communities.

1.3 The report on London

1.3.1 Scope and design of the research
The coverage of topics relating to social exclusion in this report cannot be considered entirely comprehensive. The focus of this report had to be limited because of the complexity of the problem of social exclusion, as well as because of the size and diversity of London. Additionally, because of time constraints involved in the completion of this report, it has not been possible to examine topics presented in much depth. Consequently, rather than an emphasis on the specific situation of refugees at small area level, such as London boroughs, the focus is on mapping the main processes leading to social exclusion of refugees at a pan-London level.

This mapping exercise is primarily based on findings and data available in existing research and reports about the situation of refugees in the city. Additionally, interviews were conducted with key informants within local authorities, as well as NGOs and other statutory bodies involved in work with refugees. Interviews with representatives of the Greater London Authority, the Refugee Council, and the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants focused on the overall situation of refugees in London. They were also centred on problems in organising and delivering service to tackle various aspects of social exclusion of refugees. It was envisaged that this additional information would up-date already available data and bring more depth to the analysis.

Although the focus of this mapping is at a pan-London level, the report points as much as possible to a more specific situation of refugees in one borough of London. Consequently, interviews were conducted with key informants in the London Borough of Newham with the aim to gain a closer insight into the issues faced by refugees at small area level.

In selecting Newham two main criteria have been considered. First, the number of refugees, and second, the availability of secondary data on the situation and needs of refugees settled in the borough (i.e. the existing research and reports). Newham is the borough with the highest estimated number of refugees in London (Aldous et al. 1999). The problem with the lack of reliable statistical data on refugees in Britain has been well documented (Castles et al. 2001; Constable, 2002). Consequently, any data on overall
numbers and/or socio-demographic characteristics of refugees settled in specific localities are not available. Rather, researchers and service providers have to rely on estimates, which are often based on complex cumulative techniques of estimation and thus any such data cannot be considered entirely reliable.

According to the estimates made in 1993, for example, Newham had between 9,000 and 9,300 refugees (Bloch, 1994). The estimates made in 1999, indicate that the refugee population living in the borough was between 16,700 and 19,500 (Aldous et al. 1999). According to the 1999 estimate, around 80 per 1,000 residents in Newham were refugees, the ratio shared with the London Borough of Hackney. There is no other borough in London with the highest ration of refugees in the resident population. Because of different methods used in making these estimates, it is not possible to attribute this considerable increase in numbers solely to the increase in actual refugee population in Newham, between 1993 and 1999. Nonetheless, based on the statistical data on the increase of asylum applications in Britain during the same period presented below, there is a safe ground to assume that the number of refugees in Newham has increased sharply since 1993.

- Number of applicants in 1993 22,370
- Number of applicants in 1994 32,830
- Number of applicants in 1995 43,960
- Number of applicants in 1996 29,640
- Number of applicants in 1997 32,500
- Number of applicants in 1998 46,015
- Number of applicants in 1999 71,160
- Number of applicants in 2000 80,315

Source: Constable 2002

As these data show, there were 22,370 applicants in 1993 and 80,315 in 2000. The rates of increase on previous year for this period were very high
and reached their peak in 1999, when the percentage increase on previous year was 55 per cent (Constable, 2002).

Newham is also a London borough in which the situation and needs of refugee population has been relatively well researched in the past ten years. This indicates that the local authorities and voluntary organisations were keen on tackling the problems of social exclusion of this particular group of newcomers. Research about the characteristics, needs and problems faced by refugees facilitates better planning and organisation of social services and support for this type of migrants. For all these reasons, this report points to the situation of refugees in Newham, more than in any other borough of London. Nonetheless, wherever possible, the report will refer to the issues concerning social exclusion of refugees in other London boroughs.

1.3.2 Structure of the report

The report is in four sections, including this introduction. Section two outlines the main characteristics of the legal framework in Britain, in order to set-out the legal context and point to the main legal barriers to social inclusion of newcomers in the country. This section specifically examines the legal framework pertaining to asylum seekers, refugees, and those with ELR in Britain. The discussion maps-out the main changes in legislation in the past decade and their impact on processes leading to social exclusion. Section three discusses the specific situation of the target group in London. It provides an outline of social inequality in London, as a way of contextualising the situation of refugees. It then maps-out the institutional mechanisms of exclusion emanating from differentiated legal position of forced migrants concerning economic, social and cultural rights, as well as civil and political rights. The discussion outlines the situation of refugees in London regarding housing, education, re-training and employment, health, as well as the formation, development, and role of refugee community organisations (RCOs) in settlement and social inclusion/exclusion processes. Section four summarises the discussion in the report and points to the main problems
relating to the situation of refugees in London and processes leading to social exclusion.

Section 2: Setting the context – Legal framework

2.1 Legal routes to Britain: Migrant categories and their rights

The number of people coming to Britain each year has risen substantially over the past decade. According to the Home Office data, in 1990, there were around 50 million arrivals at British ports. By 2000, this had risen to almost 90 million (White Paper, Home Office, 2002). Although the large majority of these arrivals, around 86 per cent, were either British citizens returning from abroad or European Economic Area (EEA) nationals, there were also 13 million arrivals from outside the EEA (ibid.). Of these, according to the Home Office data, around 600,000 came to Britain as students, to work or as family dependants.

Although immigration policies have tightened considerably since the early 1990s, there are several legal routes to gain entry to Britain. Two main routes of legal entry, relevant for discussion in this report, are based on economic or humanitarian grounds. Those permitted entry for economic reasons are migrants who come for the purpose of skilled, low skilled or unskilled work. There are different schemes for this group of economic migrants. For example, there is the work permit system for those skilled and the seasonal agricultural workers scheme for unskilled migrants. Additionally, the category for investors also allows entry for economic reasons. Those permitted entry for humanitarian reasons are migrants who come for the purpose of family reunion or asylum.

According to the Home Office data, the following categories of non-British citizens entered the country in 1999*:

- EEA nationals for more than 12 months 65,700
- Asylum seekers 91,230
- Family reunion and other dependants 66,300
The data presented above indicate that the proportion of people seeking asylum in Britain is significant. A recent report on patterns and trends of immigration to Britain, shows that asylum seekers accounted annually for...
between one sixth to one third of all non-British immigrants to the country during the 1990s (Dobson et al., 2001). It is not surprising, therefore, that the question of asylum started to dominate the political and public arena in the country, as in Europe in general, what caused considerable tightening of entry policies in the past decade. It also affected restrictions to rights and entitlements of legal migrants in general, and of asylum seekers in particular. Although there has been a positive move towards more relaxed work permit schemes, since 2000, those permitted entry on humanitarian grounds, face continuous legal barriers to social inclusion in Britain.

2.2 Asylum in Britain – legal instruments and their impact on processes leading to social exclusion

Since the 1970s there has been an increase in the number of refugees entering industrialised countries from Africa, Asia and Latin America following the crises in these regions of the world. Hein (1993) termed these new influxes of forced migrants ‘new refugees’. Between 1975 and 1990 countries of the developed world gave refuge to 2.5 million of these ‘new refugees’ (Hein, 1993).

2.2.1 Refugees in Britain: countries of origin and demographic structure

Refugees have long been a feature of British society, and they have come from all over the world. This report focuses on more recent arrivals, that is ‘new refugees’, who came since mid 1980s. The following figures show the major countries of origin of refugees in Britain over the past 16 years:*

- Sri Lanka 40,115 or 8% of total applications
- Somalia 36,995 or 8% of total applications
- FRY 27,195 or 6% of total applications
- Turkey 25,685 or 5% of total applications
- Pakistan 25,000 or 5% of total applications
- India 20,830 or 4% of total applications
- Nigeria 20,525 or 4% of total applications
*Iraq* 18,230 or 4% of total applications

*DRC* 17,895 or 4% of total applications

*Other former Yugoslavia* 17,380 or 4% of total applications

*Source: Constable (2002)*

**Federal Republic of Yugoslavia comprises of Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia.***

***Until 1996, the Home Office did not distinguish between the various countries that made up former Yugoslavia, notably Bosnia and Croatia. That FRY features within the cumulative top ten asylum applicant producing countries for the period 1985-2000, when figures were only available for five of those years, is indicative of the situation.**

Sri Lanka, Somalia, Turkey and Pakistan have all featured within the top ten refugee producing countries since 1984. Moreover, Sri Lanka has featured within the top five every year, with only one exception - in 1996 (Constable, 2002).

Refugees from Sri Lanka in Britain are Tamils. They started to arrive in larger numbers in 1985 and since 1987, when the Indian army sent troops to Sri Lanka to end the conflict between the government and the Tamils. This intervention and the subsequent continuation of the conflict forced more than a million Tamils to become internally displaced. Many sought refugee outside Sri Lanka.

Somalis have been resident in shipping areas of Britain, including East End of London, for over hundred years. The size of the Somali community in Britain has increased over the last thirty years because of the family reunification process that took place between 1965 and 1977. In the late 1980s the civil war in Somalia worsened and this forced thousands of people to flee to neighbouring countries of the Horn of Africa, the Gulf States and the West, including Britain.

The most recent large influxes of refugee were from countries with internal civil conflicts, such as Kosovo (FRY), Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Turkey. Furthermore, there were a considerable number of refugees from countries with documented human rights abuses, including Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, and Democratic Republic of Congo.
Demographic characteristics of the refugee population in Britain differ significantly from the most common demographic characteristics of refugees in the world. Between 1996 and 1999, nearly three-quarters of refugees (72 per cent) in the country were male and young (GLA, 2001). In 2000 alone, 81 per cent of refugees were male and the vast majority was between 18 and 34 years of age (Constable, 2002). During the 1990s around 87 per cent of refugees in Britain were single (Aldous et al., 1999).

2.2.2 Tightening of asylum policies and erosion of rights to protection

With the increasing numbers of ‘new refugees’ arriving in the West since the late 1980s, issues of asylum and settlement have ascended the policy agenda. This has resulted in series of measures to restrict entry to European countries including Britain. The process came to be known as ‘Fortress Europe’. Measures to restrict entry to Britain have included the imposition of visas on people from a number of countries. The process started with people from Sri Lanka in 1985, after the violent conflict there caused widespread persecution of Tamils, leading to their flight to other countries including Britain (Joly, 1992). In 1989, visas were introduced for Turkish nationals following the crisis in Turkey causing more than 4,000 Turkish Kurds to seek asylum on arrival in Britain (ibid.).

The situation leading to the tightening of immigration rules in Britain in 1993, however, was not as alarming as it may seem if we only look at the increase of the total numbers of asylum applicants from 1989 to 1992, presented below:*

- Number of applicants in 1989: 11,640
- Number of applicants in 1990: 26,205
- Number of applicants in 1991: 44,840
- Number of applicants in 1992: 24,602
Although the growth of 191 per cent between 1988 and 1989 was high, comparative data on the situation in the rest of EU states put this sharp increase into a perspective.

Comparative data on the number of asylum applicants in the EU show that in 1992, for example, Britain received only 3.71 per cent of the total number of asylum applicants in the Union (European Commission, 2001). Furthermore, only a tiny proportion of Britain’s population at the time of the tightening of entry regulations was refugee, nonetheless, the government’s desire to weed out bogus refugees resulted in the 1993 Asylum Act (Paul, 1992). The situation remained much the same in 1995, when asylum seekers accounted for one in 3,431 person resident in Britain (Joly, 1997). Finally, the most recent examination of the “numerical crisis” in asylum in Britain shows that the ratio of refugee population in the country is considerably lower that in a number of EU states (Mcloughlin and Bagilhole, 2002).

The 1993 Asylum and Immigration (Appeals) Act was the first act in British history to deal almost exclusively with asylum (Schuster and Solomos, 1999). It introduced legislative measures to reduce the increasing number of asylum applicants, which was the first aim of the policy (Macdonald 1993). The figures presented below show the trend in decisions on applications for asylum since 1993:*  

- Percentage of refusals in 1993  27
- Percentage of refusals in 1994  74
- Percentage of refusals in 1995  76
- Percentage of refusals in 1996  79
- Percentage of refusals in 1997  76
- Percentage of refusals in 1998  65
- Percentage of refusals in 1999  44
- Percentage of refusals in 2000  70

*Source: Constable 2002
These data show that the percentage of refusals increased sharply in 1994. This trend in percentage of refusals continued throughout much of the rest of the 90s.

The second area that was addressed by this Act relates to the social and economic citizenship rights of those seeking asylum in Britain. It restricted the right of asylum seekers to be housed in permanent local authority accommodation, and introduced changes to the appeals system (Cohen, 1994). The 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act, as well as the 1999 Asylum and Immigration Act have only eroded the rights of asylum seekers using strategies such as limited welfare entitlements and restrictions on entry into the labour market.

The 1996 Act included a close that changed employment practices. Under the legislation, any employer found to be employing people who do not have permission to work would be subjected to a penalty fine. This legal measure, as research documents, affects the propensity of employers to employ someone who is from a ‘visibly different’ minority group (Morris 1997; Shiferaw and Hagos, 2001). This and other legal measures have led to a new type of racism, the one that is not colour coded.

The 1996 Act also removed entitlements to social security benefits for those who made their asylum application in-country rather than at port of entry and for those who are appealing against a Home Office decision on their case. This legal measure meant that in-country applicants could not access housing benefits and thus they could not be considered for temporary accommodation as homeless persons. Moreover, they were not eligible to income support either. These provisions in the 1996 Act have left many asylum seekers destitute and dependent on family, friends, churches and voluntary organisation for their subsistence (Carter, 1996). The 1996 Act was introduced in July and the Refugee Council estimated that by September of the same year, over 10,000 people had no access to benefits (Pile, 1997).
The aim of these restrictions was to reduce the number of those who do not have a genuine claim and who resort to asylum after exhausting all other options. The reasoning behind these legal measures, however, does not acknowledge that there are a number of reasons why people in need of protection might not claim asylum immediately on arrival. As the Refugee Council emphasises, some arrive in confused and frightened state, some fear officialdom, some have language difficulties that might present barriers at the port, and some fear deportation (Refugee Council, 1998). Data on asylum applications by place, that is in-country or at port of entry, demonstrate that applications made in-country have continued to rise since 1997, as evident from the figures presented below:*  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Applications at Port</th>
<th>Applications in-Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Constable, 2002

Moreover, whilst port applications also increased between 1997 and 1999, this was not at the same rate and in 2000 when they were noticeably reduced (Constable, 2002).

Under the 1999 Act, asylum seekers are allowed to work after six months in Britain, if still awaiting a decision. Asylum seekers do not have, however, the right to work while appealing against a refusal. Employment is also allowed on request for those granted ELR and who are consequently allowed to stay in the country for up to four years. Those given ELR are eligible for settlement after four years. Those granted refugee status have the right to work and settle in Britain immediately after the status has been granted. Refugees and those with ELR have the right to British citizenship five
years after gaining settlement rights - that is indefinite leave to remain in the country.

The 1999 Asylum and Immigration Act introduced changes that only further eroded the rights of those seeking asylum. Apart from changes to the decision making system, such as abolishing the four-year wait period for ‘permanent settlement’ for those granted refugee status, the Act also created a new system for the provision of public services to people awaiting decision. Under the current Act, the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) is responsible for providing support, that is accommodation and food, to these asylum seekers. The Act introduced the system of dispersal and the voucher system. NASS gives only one offer of accommodation to those in need, what means that the offer is ‘no-choice’. While awaiting to be dispersed and sent to any available accommodation in Britain, asylum seekers are housed temporarily, significant number in London. Those who have family or friends in the country may opt out from the accommodation scheme and receive a modest financial support.

The 1999 Act abolished almost all cash benefits for asylum seekers and introduced voucher system. This new provision consists of £10 cash per week plus vouchers exchangeable at a specified list of participating shops. The total weekly value of the subsistence package is 70 per cent of the value of income support. The voucher system is not only costly to administer, highly bureaucratic for both the distributors and clients, but also discriminatory, prompting humiliating treatment of people using them in shops.

The legal and policy framework outlined in this section is limited to the current legal system pertaining to asylum seekers and refugees in Britain. The discussion did not consider changes announced in the White Paper entitled “Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain”, earlier this year. The purpose of this report is to examine the current legal framework and its consequences for social exclusion of refugees. Thus, the discussion of the changes announced in the White Paper was outside the scope of this report.
The current legal and policy framework discussed here means that all asylum seekers in Britain are excluded from social welfare and that very many do not have the right to work. Consequently, it creates a large group of people in Britain facing profound social exclusion, shut off from any system of social support and faced with legal and other barriers to find employment.
Section 3: Mapping of social exclusion of refugees in London


The processes leading to social exclusion of refugees in London cannot be understood without an examination of the issues concerning social inequality and exclusion in the city. As reports on indicators of social exclusion in London demonstrate, it is a polarised city (Edwards and Flatley, 1996; Flately and Bardsley 1998). Although, according to average income and earnings figures, London is significantly richer than Britain as a whole, it also has an over-representation of households at both the top and bottom of the income distribution. Moreover, since the early 1990s, unemployment rates in the city have been consistently higher in London than the country average (ibid.). Consequently, rates of people on Income Support are higher in London than the British average (Flately and McIntosh Eds., 2000).

Some groups of residents of London are disproportionately affected by this income polarisation. Ethnic minority groups are among those most affected by low income and poverty (Edwards and Flatley, 1996; Flately and Bardsley 1998). Compared with the country as a whole, London has distinctive social structure. It is ethnically diverse city with relatively young population. According to the last Census, the proportion of London residents belonging to ethnic minority groups was five times higher than in the country as a whole (Census 1991).

According to a recent report, in Inner London people from ethnic minority groups account for 27 per cent of the labour force but also for 47 per cent of the unemployed (Flately and McIntosh Eds., 2000). The unemployment rates among people from ethnic minority groups are twice as high as for white people (Leeser et al. 2000). This is clearly testament to racial discrimination and lack of educational opportunities for ethnic minorities in London and Britain (Flately and McIntosh Eds., 2000). However, there are differences between ethnic groups. While rates for people of Indian and Chinese ethnic origin are similar to whites, for example, those for other
groups, especially Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and Black African are nearly three times higher than average (Flately and Bardsley 1998).

There is considerable evidence that low income and unemployment, both usually coupled with bad housing, are linked to other forms of social exclusion. A report mapping poverty and social exclusion in London further supports this evidence (Edwards and Flatley, 1996). With respect to housing, it shows that currently the tenants of social housing in London are more uniformly poor and disadvantaged group. According to the same report, social housing contains half of London’s black and ethnic minority households, as well as similar rates of other disadvantaged groups, such as pensioners, disabled people and those with low income (ibid.). Additionally, there is an increasing number of young homeless people in London leaving in local authority care (Edwards and Flatley, 1996). They are disproportionately represented among single homeless people, as are people from the black and ethnic minority groups (Edwards and Flatley, 1996).

There is evidence on links between low income or unemployment and ill health, which often leads to social exclusion. Standardised hospital admissions, for example, are over 20 per cent higher than expected in London’s most deprived areas, if Greater London rates were to apply (Edwards and Flatley, 1996). In comparison, the least deprived areas have admissions over 20 per cent lower than expected (ibid.). Furthermore, self-reported long-term illness, as taken from the 1991 Census, was higher in London boroughs of Hackney, Islington, Newham and Tower Hamlets (ibid.).

The polarisation of London is not only economic, but also spatial. Twelve of the twenty most deprived local authority districts in England are located in inner London (Flately and Bardsley 1998). The city has many deprived areas not only on its periphery, but especially in the inner city. Much of inner London is very deprived in terms of its degree, extent and intensity. Of 33 boroughs of London, the most deprived are Lambeth, Hackney, Haringey, Islington, Newham, Southwark and Tower Hamlets. In terms of
degree of deprivation, the most deprived borough of London is Newham (Edwards and Flatley, 1996).

This kind of spatial polarisation of London affects to a great extent ethnic minority groups and newly arrived immigrants. The traditional departure of the middle classes from the centre of London caused the inner city to be left to those less mobile, working class and marginal groups. It is not surprising thus that the most deprived boroughs of London are also those with high percentage of immigrants in general, and refugees in particular. According to some estimates the highest numbers of refugees in London, between 16,000 and 20,000, are living in Hackney, Haringey and Newham, which are among the most deprived boroughs of London (Audit Commission Briefing, 2000).

3.2 Refugees in London – numbers, categories and demographic characteristics

Refugees in London are estimated to number between 350,000 and 420,000, or around one in 20 of the city’s resident population (GLA, 2001). This is a proportion around 30 times greater than the British average (ibid.). This estimate relates to people who have arrived claiming asylum at any time in the past 15 years and could be expected to be still living in London. Importantly, the estimated number of refugees in London covers both principal applicants and their dependants.

It was estimated that 85 per cent of all refugees in Britain settle in London. Although the 1999 Act aimed to reduce the number of asylum seekers in London and the South East by introducing the dispersal system, a large proportion of asylum applicants still remain in the city. Within six months of the launch of the NASS regime and the policy of dispersal, it was estimated that up to 60 per cent of asylum seekers were choosing to take the voucher-only option (GLA, 2001). Of those, full 81 per cent are living in London and are technically homeless, lodging with friends or family members (ibid.). The distribution of these destitute people is not even across the city. In June 2001, for example, boroughs of Brent, Ealing, Haringey and Newham had the
highest numbers of voucher-only cases. These four boroughs were home to 4,905 such people or about 35 per cent of the London total (GLA, 2001).

Over 40 nationalities are known to live in London, and over 300 languages are spoken in the city (Audit Commission Briefing, 2000). Although the ethnic structure of London boroughs is diverse, there also tends to be a concentration of particular refugee communities in specific parts of London. For example, refugees from Cyprus, Turkey and Iran are concentrated in North London boroughs of Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Islington, Hackney and Haringey (ibid.). Those from Latin America and Vietnam are grouped in South London, particularly in Lambeth, although Tower Hamlets also has a sizeable Vietnamese community (Audit Commission Briefing, 2000).

In Newham, the largest refugee communities are thought to be from Somalia and Sri Lanka (Tamils). There is also a considerable number of refugees originating from many different African countries, such as Uganda, Zaire, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Angola, Liberia, Gambia, and Sierra Leone (Bloch, 1994). Furthermore, refugees from Turkey (Kurds), Vietnam, Iran, Iraq, former Yugoslavia, Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia are also residents in the borough (ibid.). According to interviews with representatives of the Social Regeneration Unit in Newham, it is estimated that the number of refugee coming from Eastern Europe has risen significantly over the last years. According to the same source, there are around 55 different languages spoken in the borough.

No estimate is possible of the demographic make-up of the London’s cumulative population of refugees and asylum seekers. However, there are no grounds for assuming that the city’s refugee population diverges greatly from the overall demographic structure of refugees in Britain. As mentioned in Section 2, asylum applicants in the country are mostly male and young. The following figures* show the percentage of principal applicants by gender and age from 1996 to 1999 inclusive:**
- Males under 35: 61 per cent
- Males 35 and over: 11 per cent
- Females under 35: 18 per cent
- Females 35 and over: 10 per cent

*Source: GLA, 2001
** These figures relate to ‘principal applicants’ only – that is excluding dependants but including children if unaccompanied.

Generally the average age of male asylum seekers has been around 27 over the recent years (GLA, 2001). Women asylum seekers have tended to include a higher proportion in the older age bracket. Among the 28 per cent of all applicants over this period who were female, more than a third were 35 or over (ibid.).

Barriers leading to social exclusion of this large group of London residents, who are mostly of working age, are in part similar to those faced by ethnic minority Londoners, as outlined earlier in this Section. However, the situation and problems faced by refugees, and asylum seekers in particular, are also distinct. They stem from their very limited economic and social rights, as discussed in Section 2, leading to their inability to secure social and occupational participation and thus a certain basic standard of living.

The lack of right to work for asylum seekers who are appealing against a refusal and the lack of benefit entitlement for those who made an in-country application, have created a large group of people in London destitute. According to GLA estimates (2001), around 126,000 London-based asylum seekers and their dependants had lodged their applications in-country. The number of those awaiting appeal decisions, who are thus not eligible to work or to access social benefits is not known. Additionally, the GLA estimates that there are 145,000 London-based applicants who are formally refused refugee or ELR status (GLA, 2001). It is not possible to estimate how many of those have been officially ‘removed’ or left of their own accord, or how many may have appeals still in progress. Whatever the number of the latter category may be, it has to be added to the number of destitute and socially excluded
Londoners. According to the same source, over 90,000 London-based asylum seekers applied at port of entry and, consequently, have social security benefits.

3.3 Housing

The erosion of social rights introduced by a succession of Asylum and Immigration Acts in the past decade represents the establishment of persecutory regime of social exclusion within Britain for people who managed to gain entry (Zetter and Pearl 1999). Zetter and Pearl (1999: 235) argue that “housing policy is the principal means by which social exclusion has been implemented” in Britain. As research has indicated housing, together with associated support mechanisms, plays a crucial role in the capacity of refugees to settle effectively. It provides foundation for access to other key resources such as education, training and employment (Majke 1991; Robinson 1993; Carey-Wood et al., 1995; Refugee Council 1997).

Traditionally, local authority housing departments have been the first point of access to housing for refugees and asylum seekers. Before the policy changes in the 1990s were introduced, housing authorities were under the obligation to provide accommodation for those who were a priority. Asylum seekers and refugees were clearly in that category. In addition, local authorities nominated tenants from this group to housing associations, which have been established as an alternative provision of social housing to help overcome shortages caused by the reduction of the stock of council housing. The latter was significantly reduced, that is lost to the private sector, after the implementation of a ‘right to buy’ policy for council housing introduced in the early 1980s. The housing policy before the 1990s, therefore, was based on reasonable standards of humanitarian response, although it did not mean that refugees were readily provided with accommodation (Zetter and Pearl 1999). The changes of legislation in the 1990s replaced this previous scheme with complex categories of eligibility and exclusion. Moreover, the changes introduced cuts in housing benefits for young single people, who constitute
the majority of asylum seekers in Britain and London. According to interviews with representatives of the local authorities in Newham, for example, the housing problems for this group constitute a crisis of large proportions. These policy shifts created a distinction between refugees, those with ELR and asylum seekers concerning access to social housing and housing benefits.

According to the new policy measures, those granted refugee status and those with ELR, who constitute 30 per cent of all asylum applicants in Britain in 2000, are eligible for assistance under homelessness legislation. They qualify for the housing register for access to local authority housing. Consequently, they are eligible to apply for permanent social housing but data on how many refugees are currently living in such housing in London are not available. Given the current housing demand in the city, it is likely that only families with children, pregnant women and single vulnerable people were in position to secure permanent social housing (GLA, 2001). The majority thus is likely to be privately renting, although no figures are available (ibid.).

The latter group is likely to share many concerns of other Londoners looking for accommodation, such as availability, quality and affordability. They face, however, additional problems and barriers to finding adequate housing. Refugees have little knowledge about the sector, especially more recently arrived, and they may be at greater risk of living in poor quality and badly managed accommodation. Furthermore, most of the refugees can only afford to rent privately by claiming housing benefits. Regulations governing housing benefits in the private rented sector are complex and may present a barrier for refugees who are unfamiliar with the system or the language. This puts refugees in a particularly vulnerable position, because any failure to claim housing benefits correctly may eventually lead to loss of the tenancy, because of the build-up of significant arrears. Finally, refugees may also encounter prejudice and discrimination from private landlords.

Unlike refugees and those with ELR, under the 1999 Act asylum seekers are not eligible for permanent housing until their immigration status is resolved. The pressure on existing housing stock in London has forced many
boroughs to house asylum seekers in unsuitable accommodation, as reviled in interviews in Newham. At the end of September 1999, for example, over one-quarter of asylum seeker households in London were in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, hotels or hotel annexes (Audit Commission Briefing, 2000). This general trend in the type of accommodation for households requiring temporary housing reflects the pressure on service providers caused by the general problem of homelessness in London.

Additionally, other benefit entitlements, such as homeless person’s assistance, housing benefit, income support, were also restricted only to those with refugee status, ELR, and asylum seekers who lodge their claim at port of entry. In 1999, for example, asylum seekers represented almost one-quarter of homeless households in London supported by boroughs under homelessness legislation (Audit Commission Briefing, 2000). In several boroughs the figure was, however, as high as 60 per cent (ibid.).

All asylum applicants who request asylum in-country are disqualified from this type of assistance. Support for this category is only available as a priority under the 1989 Children Act (CA), which covers those with children and unaccompanied minors. For those who are single, that is the majority, support is only available under the 1948 National Assistance Act (NAA), which was designed to prevent absolute destitution and impoverishment. This assistance provides for a very limited assistance in kind. In 1999, London boroughs were supporting 23,507 asylum seeker households under either the 1989 CA or 1948 NAA (Audit Commission Briefing, 2000).

The main consequence of the introduction of diverse categories and of making the rules of access to housing more complex, was to intensify the pressures on the client group and their experience of social exclusion (Zetter and Pearl, 1999). Additionally, refugees and asylum seekers are usually housed in locations where accommodation is available without any consideration of a broad range of factors important for choosing suitable housing for this group. The availability of school places, access to primary health care, the nature of community relations in the neighbourhood, are
important factors that affect social exclusion. Pressures on the already scarce housing stock in London make it impossible for local authorities to take into account these factors when deciding where to house refugees.

The character and quality of practice in the housing sector further intensifies the complexity of the problem with housing refugees and asylum seekers. Zetter and Pearl’s research (1999) documents considerable variation in the quality of practice in this sector, much of which, if not overtly bad, is certainly mediocre. The authors emphasise that part of the explanation of poor practice concerning housing asylum seekers and refugees in London as well as other cities in Britain, is embedded in the structural constraints. Government policies and legislation, such as reductions in public expenditure in this sector, make it extremely difficult for service providers to meet the growing needs of this particular group of clients. However, they point that the mediocre situation also arises from organisational inefficiency, limited institutional capacity, and/or ineffective policies and practices borne out of inadequate training, knowledge or resources (Zetter and Pearl 1999).

The forms of assistance mentioned above, and the minimal amount provided for single asylum seekers, the largest category, forced both refugees and asylum seekers into increased dependency on institutionalised provision. These legislative measures seriously undermine their potential for self-sufficiency not only in housing, but also in other basic needs. Legal and other barriers to work that prevent refugees and asylum seekers to provide, among other things, for their housing needs further intensify this process leading to social exclusion.

3.4 Education, training and employment

Employment is arguably the key factor in securing the successful social inclusion of refugees in the wider community. It provides economic independence, it helps to restore self-esteem, and it provides the opportunity to establish closer ties with the receiving society. People with refugee status and those with ELR, as indicated in Section 2, have the right to work in
Britain. Asylum seekers can apply for permission to work from the Home Office if their asylum claim has been outstanding for six months. The latter group, however, often faces difficulties in securing this right, because of long delays in processing their work permits. The process often takes several months living many in limbo, prolonging the period in which they are not permitted to work (Bloch 2000; Pile 1997).

By restricting the right to social benefits to refugees and those with ELR, asylum seekers are experiencing considerably more problems and barriers to finding work. While the pressure to find work is particularly acute for the latter category after they gain the right to work, the state-induced destitution makes their search for job an almost impossible task, because of many knock-on consequences of benefit denial. Pile’s research (1997) points to this problem and to the consequences of such policy restrictions, which become additional barriers to social inclusion. These are:

- Lack of financial means to go to interviews and employment agencies
- Problems of gaining access and support from JobCentres because this group is not receiving income benefit
- Limitations on access to further education courses such as English for speakers of other languages, because eligibility to state benefits is the usual requirement to qualify for concessionary course fees
- Free school meals for children are usually dependent on income support eligibility, although local authorities can exercise discretion.

Furthermore, asylum seekers experience further barriers to enter the labour market, because of the constraints on their personal finances imposed by the law. They do not qualify for educational grants and loans thus high fees they would have to pay to train for work and increase their chances of employment represent an insuperable barrier for most asylum seekers.

As research indicates, barriers to employment are not only legal. They include many other structural, institutional and social mechanisms that prevent the labour market participation of refugees (Bloch 2000, 1996; Peabody Trust/London Research Centre 1999; Pile 1997; Refugee Council
1999; Shiferaw and Hagos 2001). The unemployment rates among refugees in Britain attest to the scope and strength of these barriers. Estimated unemployment rates vary depending on methodology and geographical area. According to some estimates, they range from 75 per cent to 90 per cent (Refugee Council 1999). A study of 236 qualified and skilled refugees and asylum seekers in London found that 42 per cent of the refugees and 68 per cent of the asylum seekers were unemployed (Peabody Trust/London Research Centre 1999). Regardless of the inconsistency of these estimates, the figures are much higher than the national average of 5 per cent and the ethnic minorities’ average of 24 per cent (Shiferaw and Hagos 2001).

The refugee employment problem is linked to multi-faceted barriers. These high unemployment rates reflect, among other things, the high levels of deprivation in the localities where the majority of refugees live in London. In Newham, for example, the average levels of unemployment were 12.3 per cent while in Greater London they stood at 6.7 per cent (Bloch 2000). This structural barrier to employment is compounded by many other factors and mechanisms of exclusion identified in research and reports. The most commonly identified barriers include structural, institutional, and those associated with problems of being refugee, that is a newcomer with often limited language skills etc. The barriers to employment include:

- skills that do not match the labour market needs
- problems with recognition of qualifications obtained outside Britain
- lack of work experience gained in Britain
- lack of knowledge about job search and the labour market
- lack of information about employment and training services
- employers’ lack of understanding of immigration status and rights
- racial discrimination by employers
- lack of child care provision
- uncertainty of immigration status
- lack of adequate spoken and written English
- cultural barriers to effective job seeking
Refugee women, as research and reports show, are even further excluded from the labour market (Sargent, Damachi and Long, 1999). Some of the multiple barriers they face are common to all refugees. However, barriers such as cultural differences as well as their primary responsibility for family and childcare, tend to magnify the problems of their employment (ibid.). Research into the needs of refugee women suggest that women do not have equal access to facilities set up for refugees in Britain, such as English classes, education and training (Shawcross et al., 1987). The main reasons for this inequality, as indicated in the research, are:

- caring responsibilities which are often especially demanding because of the lack of social and extended family support at home
- family and household responsibilities tend to create isolation of many refugee women what affects their ability to connect with service providers
- often low level of education and literacy in own language make it hard to progress in English
- opposition from husbands/boyfriends to their partners learning English and/or finding employment
- cultural barriers to attendance at English and other training classes (for example, men teaching women is considered unacceptable in some cultures).

Similarly, gender proved to be an important variable in gaining language skills, education and training, as well as employment in Newham (Bloch 2000, 1996). Refugee women in Newham were less likely than men were to have time to attend English classes, because of their parenting responsibilities. This was particularly significant among the Somali women (Bloch 1996). Likewise, men were more likely than women were to undertake additional training and/or education (ibid.). The propensity to participate in the labour market was also affected by gender. This research revealed that men were more often employed than were women, 20 per cent and 7 per cent respectively (Bloch 2000). Moreover, in the households with children, none of the women worked (ibid.).
Research also indicates that the lack of adequate English language skills is among the most frequently self-identified barrier to employment of refugees. The Skillsnet study (Peabody Trust/London Research Centre 1999) on skilled refugees in London shows, however, that commend in English eased the problem of unemployment of the studied group but did not resolve it. This study found that while 75 per cent of people with poor English were unemployed, so to were 48 per cent of those who spoke English well (ibid.).

The high unemployment rates among refugees are just one of indicators of their social exclusion. Refugees also suffer from underemployment. In other words, the majority of those employed are overqualified for the jobs they have or they work on casual, insecure, part-time basis (Bloch 2000, 1996; Pile, 1997, Refugee Council 1999). Pile’s research (1997), for example, shows that the type of employment refugees usually have is not only low paying, but very often paid below the Council of Europe’s decency threshold (Pile, 1997). Such a low income does not only mean that refugees are not able to climb out of poverty. It can also jeopardise future social security entitlements for those who earn below the level which makes them liable to pay national insurance contributions in Britain (Pile 1997).

Underemployment among refugees is associated with barriers concerning problems with recognition of skills and education obtained outside Britain, the lack of work experience in the country, the lack of information about employment services, and uncertainty of immigration status. With respect to the latter, research and reports show that because those with ELR and asylum seekers lack the security of settlement in Britain, there is little incentive within this group to spend time and money gaining qualifications (Bloch, 2000). Furthermore, for asylum seekers and those on ELR retraining can be prohibitive as they are not immediately entitled to student grants and would have to pay overseas fees (Bloch 2000). Additionally, many refugees are reluctant to retrain because they are already too far advanced in their career paths (ibid.).
Service providers in some London boroughs have taken steps to improve their training and employment services. In Newham, for example, the Newham Training Network supports voluntary organisations involved in provision of this type of service for unemployed residents. An integral part of training they offer is also the provision of work placement, in order to help refugees gain work experience in Britain. Data on the numbers of those who found employment after completing such training was not available. Nonetheless, there is an indication that those who had a work placement were more likely to find employment than were those who were left without such opportunity.

An earlier research about the situation of refugees in Newham, found that although some people attended training courses, there was not enough evidence of a link between training and employment outcomes (Bloch 1996). Training in clerical, office or business administration skills were the most popular. Data, however, suggest that getting involved in training seems to lead to labour market participation in an unrelated area (Bloch, 1996). These findings seem to indicate that service provision in this area needs to reflect more the labour market needs, but also to suite better the specific needs of refugees.

Problems concerning unemployment and underemployment of refugees, outlined above, are centrally related to the job search process. Research and reports indicate that the majority of refugee use friends and community organisations as a source of information and advice (Bloch 1996; Shiferaw and Hagos 2001). This raises the question whether these sources have the capacity to offer the quality of information and advice about the labour market (Shiferaw and Hagos 2001). More general information about where to find job vacancies and methods of job seeking are essential. There is a need for more information centres for refugees because, as research indicates, the voluntary sector, i.e., refugee community organisations, is not sufficient and can be limiting for some refugee groups (Bloch 1996).
Although reliable data are not available, there is a strong indication that many refugees in London and Britain are well-educated and skilled (Bloch 2000, 1996, Carey-Wood et al. 1995, Pile 1997). They face the highest barriers to finding suitable employment (Shiferaw and Hagos 2001). Research indicates that, the statutory sector schemes designed to help people find work, provide poor services for people with qualifications (Pile, 1997).

Research on progression routes to employment of refugees in London shows that different groups of refugees, such as the young, the professionals, those with managerial and administrative backgrounds and the unqualified but skilled adults, follow different routes to employment (Shiferaw and Hagos 2001). Systematic tailor-made information and advice services for these different categories of refugees are essential and currently very limited (ibid.).

As this discussion demonstrates, structural and institutional barriers to employment of refugees and asylum seekers in London are numerous. Although the Government acknowledged the economic benefits of immigration (White Paper, Home Office, 2002; Gott and Johnson 2002), the legal and policy framework regulating asylum in Britain does not indicate the intention to recognise potential gains from using the skills of this category of immigrants.

3.5 Health

A report on refugee health in London indicates that many of health problems associated with refugees are linked to problems of poverty and social exclusion (Aldous et al., 1999). Health problems of refugees and asylum seekers are caused by poverty, dependence, lack of cohesive social support, and racism they experience upon their arrival (Aldous et al., 1999; Burnett, A. and Peel, M., 2001). According to research, the majority of refugees in London and Britain are relatively young and has on average satisfactory physical health status on arrival (ibid.). The most distinctive health problems of refugees are psychological, but they do not necessarily signify mental illness (Burnett, A. and Peel, M., 2001). Psychological problems of
refugees are associated with pre-flight and flight conditions and trauma, but also significantly with their post-flight experiences relating to family separation, problems of adjustment including language problems and hostility from the host population (David and Paramjit, 1998). Furthermore, there is evidence that refugees who have not yet been granted the right to remain are under particular stress and thus early recognition is seen as the way to improve health of refugees (ibid.).

Pressures associated with adjustment, uncertainty of status and the situation in the host society appear to affect refugee health and coping mechanisms significantly (Gorst-Unsworth, C. and Goldenberg, E., 1998). Similarly, the study in Newham (Gammel et al., 1993) suggests that the perceived health of refugees appears to deteriorate over a period of time in Britain.

Eligibility for National Health Service (NHS) provided healthcare is the only area in which the law does not distinguish between refugees and asylum seekers. Moreover, their right to NHS provided healthcare is equal to the right of any other UK resident. However, getting access to and using health service, as research and reports demonstrate, is problematic (Aldous et al., 1999; Jobbins, 1997). Difficulties in integrating in NHS are numerous and complex thus posing problems for this particular group of clients, who may not access health services until their condition has become an emergency or chronic.

Registration with a GP is the first step in accessing primary health care services in Britain. Although the evidence based on the London studies suggests that levels of GP registration can be reasonably high for refugees and asylum seekers from established communities, there are still widespread reports of problems with first registration (Aldous et al., 1999). The high proportion of this category of clients experience difficulties with first registration and, consequently, the Health Authority has to allocate a GP (Enfield and Haringey Health Authority, 1999; Scott and Vallely, 1999). Moreover, GPs often offer only temporary registration to refugees and asylum
seekers (Hargreaves et al. 1999). Temporary registration requires no comprehensive health check and thus some health problems may pass unnoticed. Furthermore, this type of registration also means that medical records cannot be passed on and continuity of care may suffer (Aldous et al., 1999).

Barriers to access and use of health services stem from complex set of interrelated factors. Studies suggest that refugees have unequal access to healthcare and related social services primarily because of the lack of knowledge concerning NHS (Rutter, 1994). In Newham, for example, 90 per cent of survey respondents were registered with a GP, but full 93 per cent said that they have been given no information on how to register with a GP and 97 per cent said they had been given no information on how to use hospital services (Gammel et al., 1993).

Language barrier seems to be critical in both access and use of the NHS system. The Newham study shows, for example, that of the small number of survey respondents who received information concerning healthcare services, less than 50 per cent were given information written in their mother tongue (Gammel et al., 1993). Likewise, there is evidence that this group of clients also has difficulties in making appointments with GPs because of the language problems (ibid.). Additionally, the language barrier coupled with the lack of knowledge about sometimes highly bureaucratic procedure involved in gaining access to some services has been also pointed out in interviews with the Refugee Council representatives. For example, in-country asylum applicants who are not otherwise entitled to free prescriptions need to complete a form, claim for help with health costs, to seek help with health costs, including prescriptions. The form, however, is 16 pages long and is available only in English.

There are initiatives within local health authorities to help new entrants to the NHS system. Newham Community Health Service, for example, introduced a nurse led new entrants health screening service which provides initial contact, health screening and assessment and support to new arrivals in
the borough, including refugees and asylum seekers. The main aim of this service is to provide advice, information and support to those who are vulnerable and new to the system and other services in the borough. To equip them with adequate information and knowledge to access and use healthcare services appropriately and to act as a link to those unable to access primary health care (Department of Health, non-dated).

Language is also a major issue for providing health care to refugees. As research indicates, the lack of language skills often causes problems in communication and requires more time to assess health problems of refugees (David and Paramjit, 1998). The lack of knowledge on the part of health authorities about the languages spoken in their districts makes it difficult to assess the need for interpreter services. Moreover, the care for refugees generates an additional workload for GPs, and there is evidence that current deprivation payments are not sufficient (ibid.). Adequate healthcare provision for refugees also requires information about their rights and entitlements regarding primary care. There is evidence, however, that GPs are often confused about these rights and entitlements what may further complicate the issue of their access to primary care (David and Paramjit, 1998; Hargreaves et al. 1999).

Research and reports concerning a range of issues associated with refugee health emphasise the importance of work with refugee community groups as a way to enhance access and use of the NHS system. The ability to link new arrivals with appropriate existing social networks is felt to be beneficial to health.

3.6 Right to form voluntary associations - refugee community organisations

Refugee community organisations (RCOs) are local associations rooted within ethnic or national refugee communities they serve and represent. Although Britain has some relatively long established refugee community organisations, founded by post-war East European refugees,
RCOs are a more recent phenomenon, associated with the large waves of spontaneous refugees seeking asylum in the country. Many of these refugees arrive to Britain without any previous ties with the country.

Interviews with representatives of the Refugee Council reveal that there are around 500 RCOs in London, and the organisation is helping them to establish themselves. The overwhelming majority of these organisations are small with no or very little experience in self-organising and management of associations or knowledge in fund raising and managing of funds. Therefore, it is not surprising that RCOs appear and disappear rather rapidly.

Britain has a long history of community organisations, which have started to emerge more significantly after the first waves of immigrants arrived in the country. In line with the model of multi-culturalism developed in Britain, policies of community formation encouraged self-help organisations and community associations among labour migrants. The role of associations in the settlement of ethnic minorities is multi-faceted. They provide psychological and material support and foster groups’ own cultural identities (Rex et al., 1987).

As with other immigrant groups, RCOs have many important roles. They can help to rebuild a sense of belonging for people who have been forcible displaced and thus can empower their members, they can also fill in the gaps in existing service provision for refugees (Salinas, 1987). The latter role has become increasingly important factor influencing the formation of RCOs in Britain in the past decade. This period is characterised by a rapid increase in the number of refugees which has not been followed by an equally rapid increase in the availability of support services. Moreover, the policy context in the past ten years has become more and more restrictionist causing a rapid increase in demand for RCOs’ services.

These circumstances have created a situation in which RCOs are struggling to provide legal support and housing advice, as well as engage in social and cultural activities and advocacy. Rights-based advocacy, such as
welfare entitlements, immigration-status determination and appeals, has become particularly important as asylum seekers are increasingly experiencing state-induced destitution and exclusion.

The mediating role of RCOs between refugee and provider (local social services) can be invaluable and central to adequate service provision. Activities such as translation services or social and cultural mediation can help to improve management performance of the statutory agencies. It, however, should be noted that policy towards refugees based upon assumption of ‘community’ is problematic (Kelly, 2001). Refugee groups are often characterised with division based upon differences in class, religion, politics etc. (Salinas et al., 1987). The effectiveness of RCOs is thus dependant on the extent to which these communities can be said to exist and reflect the needs of their members (Kelly, 2001).
Section 4: Social exclusion of refugees in London - concluding remarks
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