

GREATER**LONDON**AUTHORITY

**Refugees and
asylum seekers
in London:
a GLA perspective**

DRAFT REPORT FOR CONSULTATION

GLA Policy Support Unit

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MAYOR'S CONSULTATION

The Mayor of London Ken Livingstone has decided to consult on this draft report about *Refugees and Asylum Seekers in London* with partner organisations and other stakeholders with an interest in the issue.

Your response would be welcome, on any aspect of the report. Please send it to us as soon as possible, and at the latest by **Friday 26 October 2001**.

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Thank you for taking the time to give the Mayor your views.

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Refugees and asylum seekers in London: a GLA perspective

Executive summary

Refugees are part of London's history, and their presence today offers London a valuable opportunity for the future. As one of its key strategic goals, the GLA must seek to ensure that - nationally as well as regionally - policies are adopted and practical measures are implemented which will enable London to take full advantage of this opportunity. The present report offers a factual and analytical basis on which the Mayor and GLA can begin to judge what those policies and practical measures should be. Recommendations at the end of each thematic chapter (numbered consecutively through the report) are also listed together at the end of this executive summary.

Refugees and asylum seekers in London are estimated to number now between 350,000 and 420,000, or about one in 20 of the city's resident population. This is a proportion around 30 times greater than the UK average. Reforms following the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act are unlikely to alter it dramatically, at least not in the short to medium term. National decisions on UK refugee and asylum policy are in effect decisions about the future development of London, and the Mayor should have a voice in them as of right.

Three proposals need to be put urgently to the Home Secretary:

- vouchers should be replaced with cash payments
- the present system of 'dispersal' should be replaced with a national system of reception and settlement of asylum seekers designed to meet their needs
- plans for large-scale forcible administrative removal of failed asylum applicants should be dropped, and discussions should instead be started on long-term alternatives that might ensure their departure without undermining community relations and safety in London.

Barriers and threats facing refugees and asylum seekers stem in part from racism, and hence coincide with those faced by non-refugee black and ethnic minority Londoners. But in part they are distinct, presenting this Authority with specific challenges in fulfilling many of its statutory tasks.

For the needs and potential contribution of refugees and asylum seekers link up with almost every one of the GLA's strategic concerns. Their accommodation needs, present and latent, are a crucial factor in planning London's future housing provision. Their contribution to London's economy is on the one hand impeded by particularly tough employment barriers - presenting a key challenge for London-wide labour market strategy - but on the other hand could, once they have access to the labour market on fair terms, play a vital part in London's future prosperity. Policing for a safer and more harmonious London has to address the particular threats and tensions that beset many refugee or asylum seeking

households and communities. Health strategy for Londoners has to tackle the health needs of refugees and asylum seekers, which have been relatively well researched but so far not met. Strategic backing for community development and the voluntary sector in London will nowhere yield bigger returns than in support for refugee community organisations.

Since 1996 London boroughs' concerns, and most debate on refugee issues, have properly focused on asylum seekers left destitute by the withdrawal of social security benefits. Boroughs' work in coping with this post-1996 crisis, backed by the ALG, has been a major achievement which has helped alleviate appalling distress. But this group of clients has only ever been a minority of London's refugee and asylum seeker population, now barely one-fifth of the total. Even for this group boroughs have often been obliged by political pressures to restrict their role to the statutory minimum, making (for example) few attempts to consult asylum seekers themselves. Moreover the day-to-day pressure of dealing with the immediate needs of destitute in-country applicants has inevitably imposed a short-term perspective on much discussion of refugee and asylum issues.

With the implementation of the 1999 Act this role of the boroughs will progressively diminish to a much smaller number of cases. These legitimate concerns of some London boroughs largely drove the whole discussion on dispersal which led to the proposals in the 1999 Act.

With the change in asylum regime marked by the 1999 Act, boroughs will eventually be relieved of responsibility for adult asylum seeker support and the need for a national system of support has been recognised. Hence the discussion on the role of London as a haven for asylum seekers and the issue of dispersal can be approached in a more overall and objective light.

London now needs a strategic longer-term perspective on its refugees and asylum seekers, on their needs and on the opportunity offered to all Londoners by their presence in this city of sanctuary.

Recommendations - checklist

This checklist gathers all the report's recommendations and shows which chapter each of them came from, where the analysis behind them can be found. Each recommendation keeps, elsewhere in the report, the number given to it in this checklist.

Impact of the asylum process

From Chapters 2 and 3: (i) the past five years (ii) the 1999 Act

1. Government should be asked to note that experience of the asylum process 1996-2000 suggests asylum-seeking behaviour is not significantly influenced by cutting off social security benefits.
2. Work to develop the GLA Children's Strategy should examine the needs of refugee children in London, and in particular the needs of unaccompanied asylum seeking minors.
3. Government should be asked to recognise that a backlog of unresolved asylum applications (including appeals) is likely to persist for some time, so any successful integration strategy has to address the needs of asylum seekers as well as those already accepted with refugee status or exceptional leave to remain.
4. In the light of evidence that it is based on a false behavioural premise (see recommendation 1), Government should be urged to abandon the voucher system which is likely to exacerbate poverty, social exclusion and community tensions.
5. The present dispersal regime should be replaced with a national reception and settlement system. Such a properly constructed reception and settlement system
 - a) would provide people who had arrived after traumatic experiences in a strange country with the basic language, legal, social and financial support they needed
 - b) should be constructed on the basis of help and support, not deterrence, providing for basic needs
 - c) would include, but not be based on, London
 - d) would realistically assess the cost to public agencies of meeting the full spectrum of refugees' and asylum seekers' needs wherever they are housed (including support to the voluntary sector), and ensuring that such costs are fully reimbursed by the Exchequer as an obligation that is strictly national not local.

6. Government should be asked to recognise that the capital's population of refugees and asylum seekers is likely to remain at or near to its current level, representing close to five per cent of resident population - with large potential future need for social housing and other public services - and should provide for London's services accordingly in its local government financial settlements for 2002/03 and beyond.

Accommodation

From Chapter 4

7. The GLA should explore with the ALG/London Asylum Seekers' Consortium (LASC) what mechanisms might be developed to help make sure the flow of information and analysis about refugees and asylum seekers is adequate for London boroughs and other agencies responsible for their accommodation to
 - (a) take full advantage of any underused temporary accommodation in London
 - (b) secure best value in procuring such accommodation
 - (c) avoid driving up the price of temporary accommodation for London's homeless in general
 - (d) plan more effectively for the full range of future housing need.
8. The GLA should ensure that the housing needs of asylum seekers and refugees are considered both by the Housing Commission and, as appropriate, elsewhere within the GLA strategy development process.
9. The GLA should encourage boroughs, in developing their local housing strategy, to review/estimate the future housing needs of refugees within their area.

Employment, training and the interface with schools

From Chapter 5

10. The government should extend eligibility for educational grants and loans to asylum seekers who have permission to work.
11. The GLA and LDA should consider developing a coordinated, pan-London approach to helping refugees and asylum seekers into the London labour market, with two main themes:
 - coordinated information: eg. advice on careers, information on childcare services
 - action on training: building closer links between employers, trainers and advice agencies; encouraging more and better work experience schemes - possibly linked with the Work Based Learning Scheme of the Department for Education and Skills (DES).

12. The GLA should discuss with the Refugee Council whether the task of maintaining the Skillsnet website, designed to help refugees and asylum seekers find training and employment, should be transferred to the GLA group.
13. The GLA and LDA should explore how the operation of Section 8 of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 is affecting refugees' and asylum seekers' access to the London labour market, and jointly with London employers' bodies consider how to pursue their ideas for making it work more efficiently and more fairly for employees.
14. The GLA should press
 - (a) the DES to draw up and circulate clear guidance to LEAs and schools on the education of asylum seekers who arrive between the ages of 14 and 19
 - (b) the DES and Department for Transport Local Government & the Regions (DTLR) to allow fully for the potential strategic role of local authorities in supporting the education of this vulnerable group, when the Government sets rules for dividing resources between LEAs and schools as part of its impending reform of local government finance.

Policing, equalities and community safety

From Chapter 6

15. The MPA should be asked to develop as a matter of urgency a strategy to meet the policing and protection needs of refugee and asylum seeker communities in London
 - (a) building on the ACPO guide on policing needs of these communities and the recent pan-London initiatives of the MPS Diversity Directorate, and
 - (b) working in liaison with relevant partners to include: refugee community organisations, the Refugee Council, the ALG/LASC (with borough specialist officers as appropriate), Home Office, and the Immigration Law Practitioners' Association or other appropriate representatives of asylum lawyers.
16. The Home Office should be asked as a matter of urgency to join the GLA and MPA - with observers agreed between these participants - to discuss the implications of its policy on asylum seeker removals for community relations in London; the intended enforcement role of the Immigration Service, especially in London; and the case for reviewing current policy on these issues.

17. The results of work on policing strategy and on the proposed review of administrative removal policy (recommendations 15 and 16 above) should be shared with reception areas for asylum seekers outside London by
 - conveying it to these areas via the Local Government Association (LGA)
 - seeking the agreement of NASS – or any future reception and settlement agency – to incorporate relevant proposals into its dispersal strategy
 - feeding it into ACPO work to promote best-practice policing for refugee communities.
18. London boroughs, through the ALG, should be encouraged to build the policing and protection needs of refugee and asylum seeker communities into their local crime and disorder plans, working with Metropolitan Police borough units.

Health

From Chapter 7

19. The GLA should examine how its own research and data analysis capacity might be deployed to help carry out studies of the demography of London's refugee and asylum seeker population, their health needs and how the NHS and other agencies could best respond to those needs, so far as possible engaging these communities themselves.
20. The GLA should consider with LASC, London boroughs, the LGA and NASS, how they can help improve the flow of information to the NHS about the size, make-up and needs of local refugee and asylum seeker communities, to assist the NHS in planning services for them
 - in London and in dispersal reception areas elsewhere
 - for those on 'voucher-only' support as well as other refugees and asylum seekers.
21. The GLA should explore with its London NHS partners what measures within the NHS could improve access to health services for refugees and asylum seekers, including
 - (a) producing more materials in translation about NHS services and entitlement to them
 - (b) appropriate training for NHS staff
 - (c) London-wide facilities for translation, interpreting and advocacy
 - (d) action to ensure refugees and asylum seekers can get primary care, whether from GPs or from specialist primary care teams for highly-mobile households
 - (e) possible adaptation of services to the needs of specific groups within the refugee and asylum seeker population
 - (f) creating channels to consult refugees and asylum seekers on these changes.

22. The GLA should explore with relevant partner agencies in front-line contact with refugees and asylum seekers, including NASS and London boroughs but also non-statutory providers, how they could help disseminate information about the NHS to refugee communities.

23. The GLA should work with refugee community organisations, the London NHS and other appropriate partners to ensure that refugees and asylum seekers can themselves participate in
 - (a) implementing these recommendations
 - (b) designing a health education programme for their communities
 - (c) planning health services for them
 - (d) helping (where appropriate) to deliver those services.

24. The GLA and LDA, in consultation with the Department of Health (DoH), Home Office, London NHS partners and refugee community organisation, should seek to establish a programme (possibly developing the present DoH/HO Refugee Doctors Scheme) to provide appropriate training or re-training for refugees and asylum seekers with previous healthcare experience, so that - subject to relevant NHS tests and standards of competence - they can work within the NHS as medical staff, community healthcare workers or in other roles.

Community development: role of refugee community organisations

From Chapter 8

25. In consultation with ALG and other partners, the GLA should – as proposed by the Audit Commission’s July 2000 report - explore ways of helping London refugee community organisations (RCOs) to build capacity by securing more funding, which could include:
 - (a) reviewing criteria for access to grant aid allocated via the GLA and boroughs, in particular SRB and London Borough Grants allocations
 - (b) helping London RCOs to bid for community development resources offered under the Home Office integration strategy
 - (c) pressing the Home Office to increase the £1.5 million available nationally under this programme, to a level more realistically reflecting the critical importance of refugee community development for its own dispersal policy
 - (d) helping London RCOs to investigate other domestic and EU funding sources.

26. The GLA should discuss with the Refugee Council, refugee community organisations themselves and other relevant agencies how existing databases of London RCOs could be coordinated, developed and maintained
- to enable the Authority and partners to consult them in a timely and effective way
 - to improve the two-way flow of views and information between the GLA group and these refugee organisations.

Policy debate and the role of the GLA

From Chapter 9

27. In discussion with the Home Office and in the wider UK political arena, the GLA should press for an approach to policy on refugees and asylum seekers that matches up to UK treaty obligations, respects their human rights and enables London to benefit from the opportunity offered by their arrival.
28. The GLA should seek an active role in the National Integration Forum convened by the Home Office to develop dialogue with Government and others on ways of promoting integration of refugees, including initial reception measures that would help with the integration of asylum seekers subsequently allowed to remain in the UK.
29. In discussion of the proposed new Common Asylum Policy within the European Union, the GLA should make the case for it to reflect best practice in EU member states, as identified through a GLA comparative review of asylum policies practised in London and selected other European capital cities.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Refugees: London's opportunity

1.1 London has been created by immigration: from across Britain and Ireland, from around Europe, from Asia, Africa and the rest of the world. Many of these immigrants have fled to London to seek sanctuary from persecution, that is, as refugees:

'... so long as there are tyrannical regimes and civil wars there will be those who have every understandable reason to try to escape to a safe country, often putting their lives and those of their families at real risk' (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee 2001).

1.2 Refugee numbers have grown especially in recent years as falling relative cost of international travel, and its rising speed, have coincided with a rise in systematic repression - overt or covert - by states in many parts of the world. Such repression, typically organised along ethnic lines, becomes increasingly effective as it exploits technical advances in transport, communications and military hardware. This combination of factors can be expected to persist for a long time. The rising efficiency of long-distance transport is not reversible. Fuelled by key features of the current world order - including commercial and political strategies pursued by some developed countries - systematic repression at national level is unlikely to fade away without far-reaching international initiatives to extend peace and human rights. Sizeable flows of refugees are thus likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

1.3 A large majority of those coming to the UK live in London. Around one in 20 of London's population today, as this report will show, arrived here seeking asylum. This is about 30 times higher than the UK average national proportion, and similarly far above the EU average. The future of refugees in the UK is, crucially, an issue for London.

1.4 To be driven by fear, even by violence, from your own country is always a tragedy. But to be the place where refugees seek sanctuary can be anything but tragic. All of London's history teaches us that potentially their presence is a boon and a huge opportunity for the city as a whole – socially, culturally and economically. As the then Home Office minister Barbara Roche said: *'Refugees bring with them enormous benefits to society'* (Home Office 2000 - Foreword).

1.5 Economic benefits are the most obvious. An injection of labour-power of the kind London is now receiving helped bring economic growth-rates to 19th-century America which older, more stagnant societies could only dream of. Asylum seekers with skill

levels above the host society's average, like most in London, are only part of this picture. Equally important, the host economy cannot - unless its response is badly mismanaged - fail to gain from the arrival of tens of thousands of potential workers, whether they have PhDs or just energy and the will to succeed.

- 1.6 Less tangibly but just as important, the capital's social and cultural life can be vastly enriched by refugees. Between them they bring a wealth of experience of organising community life, education, pressure groups, local campaigns, workers' and cultural movements, together with a huge range of cultural traditions and languages, carefully cherished, and an enormous variety of literature, music and art. Often indeed it is their command of these things that has prompted a repressive home state to persecute refugees in the first place. What they thus offer to London is, potentially, a social and cultural treasure trove which the city neglects or dissipates at incalculable long-term cost to itself and its own prosperity.
- 1.7 But London could be denied these benefits if acts of policy continue to push many refugees into exceptionally severe social exclusion. The city and the UK face a choice. Pursuing policies that impoverish refugees and asylum seekers, deny them dignity and equality, we can squander the opportunity these newcomers offer to us and watch as a series of individual tragedies build into a major social crisis. Or we can take the opportunity they present, investing the quite modest extra amounts of time and money that will allow refugees and asylum seekers to realise their potential, to the net benefit of London and the country.

Purpose of the report

- 1.8 What steps can the Mayor, the GLA group and the GLA's partners take to make sure the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers becomes – and is understood as - an opportunity for London? The present report analyses what is currently known about refugees and asylum seekers in London, to arrive at recommendations about the elements of a GLA strategy that would help the capital move towards this goal.
- 1.9 No analysis of this area could claim to give the last word on it. Most key issues are not only poorly documented, but also in constant flux. This includes official policy. For example, the Home Office had indicated policy shifts on three issues - vouchers, dispersal system, and coercive removals - within four weeks of the Mayor's Advisory Cabinet receiving a preliminary draft of the present report which identified these (see Executive Summary, above) as key issues for reform. The present draft has been so far as possible updated to reflect such developments. But with key features of the policy environment changing so fast, the report has to be seen essentially as work in progress.

Use of terms: refugee and asylum seeker

- 1.10 In international law, *a refugee is someone who, because of a 'well-founded fear' of persecution, has fled their own country; cannot or dare not return to it; and therefore seeks asylum in another country.* For the purposes of this legal definition, the persecution that drives them to flee can be related to their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.¹ Some receiving countries insist that only the fear of persecution by state authorities can be seen as good grounds for being recognised as a refugee, while others (including Britain) will sometimes also take into account persecution by non-state agents.
- 1.11 In Britain as elsewhere, the Government will decide whether to accept a person's claim to be a refugee only after testing it through a formal assessment procedure. *An asylum seeker is someone who has applied to be recognised as a refugee but still awaits the Government's decision on their application.*
- 1.12 This report uses 'refugee' generally to mean someone for whom the Government has decided to recognise their refugee status, or to give them the half-way status of Exceptional Leave to Remain². For brevity, on some topics where the distinction between them is not significant, the report also uses 'refugee' to cover *both* people who have had their status officially recognised, *and* those who are still asylum seekers. This is done for example in our discussion of education and health - where both asylum seekers and recognised refugees have the same entitlement to services - and also with reference to refugee community organisations which typically will cater for people before as well as after the official decision on their case. 'Asylum seeker' is however used only as above, to refer to someone whose case is not yet settled.

Scope of this report

- 1.13 After this Introduction the report is made up of the following chapters looking at major areas of GLA strategic concern that connect with refugees in London, closing with a brief discussion of the policy environment and the GLA's possible place in it:
- 2: Impact of the asylum process: the past five years
 - 3: Impact of the asylum process: the 1999 Act and the new system
 - 4: Accommodation
 - 5: Employment, training and the interface with schools
 - 6: Policing, equalities and community safety
 - 7: Health
 - 8: Community development: refugee community organisations
 - 9: Policy debate and the role of the GLA.

1.14 In view of the urgent need to develop a more effective and positive strategic approach to the question of refugees and asylum seekers in London, research for this report has been done as quickly as possible, relying mostly on a review of published material rather than new fieldwork. In particular it has not been possible to draw on discussion with refugees themselves, whose input should play a central part in any fuller study of the area.

1.15 But the present initial report, as indicated above, anyway could not possibly offer a definitive account of all issues arising from refugees' presence in London. It is meant rather as a framework for GLA policy development which can be elaborated over time - not just by updating its factual content but also by adding more detailed analysis of specific issues. Examples of such additional issues range from refugees' potential role in London's cultural life and in GLA cultural strategy, to contingency planning for large-scale arrivals of asylum seekers. Above all the present analysis could clearly be deepened, as the GLA's strategy in this area develops, by looking at particular groups among London's refugees with specific circumstances and needs which here have to be subsumed in the aggregate refugee population:

- different ethnic and national communities
- women
- children: including unaccompanied minors, refugee children's education
- other vulnerable groups.

1.16 The report has been prepared by the GLA's Policy Support Unit with the help of many organisations and individuals who have kindly shared data and their understanding of the issues. They include: Health of Londoners Project (based at East London & City Health Authority); Metropolitan Police; London Asylum Seekers Consortium; National Asylum Seekers Service (NASS); and the Refugee Council. Colleagues in GLA Data Management and Analysis gave invaluable demographic help while Linda Sheridan, working on health strategy for the GLA, made particularly full and helpful comments. Responsibility for the content of the report nevertheless remains with officers of GLA Policy Support Unit who drafted it.

1.17 Responses to this consultation draft – including queries about it - are welcome and may be addressed to the project's lead officer, at the address given at the front of the report.

Chapter 2

Impact of the asylum process: the past five years

2.1 GLA initiatives in particular service areas or facilities could help London to realise the opportunity presented by its growing refugee population. But to make the right choices about these initiatives, the Authority needs a clear understanding of the general - and quite complex - issues raised for London by the evolution of central government policy towards refugees and asylum seekers through the 1990s, whose impact is still powerful today. The present chapter recaps on this background: how the asylum system developed over the five years from its reform by the last Government in 1996, through to the launch in 2000 of the new regime shaped by the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.

UK system: the national picture

2.2 A person asking for sanctuary in the UK under the terms of the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees and 1967 Protocol on the Status of Refugees is claiming they cannot return to their own country because of 'a well-founded fear of being persecuted'. The 1951 Convention remains the basis for the typical claim, though people seeking asylum have also had recourse to the European Convention on Human Rights since October 2000 when it was introduced to UK law by the implementation of the Human Rights Act³. Whichever international convention is cited, the initial decision on such claims rests with officers of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) of the Home Office.

2.3 Where refugee status is not granted, the IND may give exceptional leave to remain (ELR). This may be on compassionate grounds, or because risks facing the applicant in their country of origin are significant but not, in the IND's view, grave enough to merit refugee status. Such leave has to be renewed after a set lapse of time⁴.

2.4 Rejection of an asylum claim at this initial stage does not necessarily mean it is ill-founded, in the terms of the 1951 UN Convention. Firstly applicants can appeal via the Home Office to the Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA), while some may then take their case to a higher Tribunal, seek judicial review or have their claim determined separately by the Home Secretary. Official data provide only partial coverage of appeal decisions, only those by the IAA being fully counted. The present report will therefore refer mainly to the outcome of initial decisions. But it should be noted that during the five years 1996-2000 the IAA allowed some 12,700 appeals, adding an extra 19 per cent to the 65,800 cases (see Table 2.2 below) in which refugee status or ELR was granted in initial decisions. Taking into account the positive decisions made each year at higher stages of appeal - not systematically reported but understood to be few in number - it seems reasonable to suggest that standard figures for applicants allowed to

remain through initial IND decisions should be increased by about one-fifth to represent the tranche of applications succeeding in some form of appeal.

- 2.5 Secondly the official figure for failed applications includes many that are rejected without full consideration of their merits, either because they do not comply with technical Home Office requirements about '*provid(ing) evidence ... within a reasonable period*' or because the IND thinks the person concerned could safely return to a country through which they travelled to reach the UK. For most of the 1990s, cases dismissed on these 'non-compliance' or 'safe third country' grounds amounted altogether to a few thousand annually. But in 2000 those disposed of on non-compliance grounds suddenly soared (see para.3.8). Over the period 1996-2000, cases rejected without full consideration – on either safe third-country or non-compliance grounds – thus averaged more than a quarter of all refusals.
- 2.6 Rejection of an asylum seeker's application by the IND, in short, tells us nothing about its validity. A 'failed' claim may or may not be a 'bogus' claim. Given the way figures about asylum refusals have been used in recent political debate, this is - as Amnesty International has pointed out – an important point to underline in any discussion of UK asylum decision-making.⁵ But for purposes of this report, concerned with the practical consequences of Home Office decision rather than their legal or moral merit, the focus remains simply on numbers of applicants who claims are respectively accepted, rejected or left undecided.
- 2.7 The Asylum & Immigration Act 1996 was aimed particularly at reforming the entitlements of people awaiting the outcome of this assessment process. It debarred anyone whose application had not been lodged at the port of entry from social security benefits, including housing benefit so that they could not be considered for temporary accommodation as homeless persons. Those promoting the 1996 legislation were quite explicit that these *in-country* applicants were being punished for allegedly 'changing their story' between stepping off the plane and lodging their asylum application. On the other hand *port applicants* retained an entitlement to benefits – and so might get Housing Act temporary accommodation if they could also show priority need, usually because they had dependants.
- 2.8 Loss of social security support for in-country asylum seekers, together with court rulings during 1996, left local authorities for areas where they lived - almost all London boroughs - responsible for the survival of these destitute people. Since 1996, with London's housing shortage continuing to deepen, many boroughs have found actual outlay in meeting their new duty to destitute asylum seekers was not matched by the special grants introduced by central government (Audit Commission 2001). Alongside this new duty, moreover, the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking minors they cared for under the Children Act grew steadily - irrespective of the 1996 Act – through

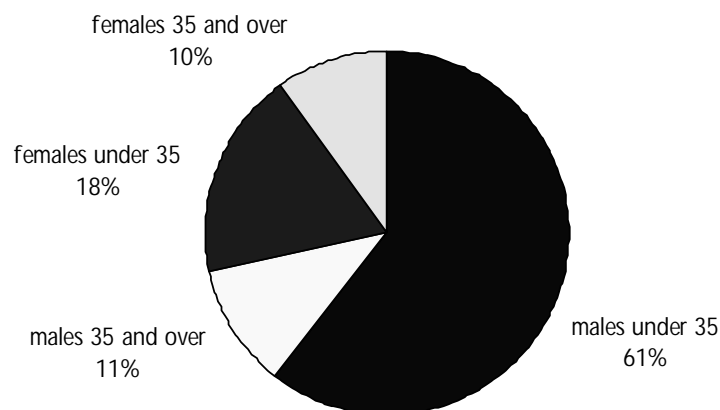
the 1990s. Here too the grant available to most authorities failed to match actual outlay.

Asylum seekers: demographic structure

2.9 Annual data on the make-up of UK asylum applications by gender and age are summarised in Figure 2.1, for the four years to 1999 (latest available year at the time of writing). They relate to ‘principal applicants’ only – that is, excluding dependants but including children if unaccompanied. No estimate is possible of the corresponding structure of arrivals in London, still less of the demographic make-up of the city’s cumulative population of refugees and asylum seekers. But there are no grounds for expecting that London’s refugee population will have diverged greatly from the pattern of this annual UK inflow.

Fig. 2.1 Asylum applications, UK 1996-1999 inclusive: principal applicants by gender and age

Source: Home Office, Asylum Statistics (various years)



2.10 Asylum applicants are mostly male and young. Figure 2.1 shows that the male share in UK applications over these four years was 72 per cent, with those under 35 outnumbering men of 35 or older by nearly six to one. Generally over recent years the average age for male asylum seekers has been around 27. 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.

2.11 Though the broad preponderance of younger males is a long-established feature of UK asylum flows, the gender ratio shifted significantly both ways during the 1990s. While in 1991 men made up 80 per cent of the total, their share dropped to around

two-thirds in following years before climbing again to the average 72 per cent seen in Figure 2.1. But 1999 brought a further switch: while the female proportion of all UK principal applicants rose to 33 per cent, the absolute number of women applicants who were aged 35 or over increased almost fourfold from the previous year so that it came close to the number of female asylum seekers under 35, and actually outnumbered their older male counterparts by more than two to one.

Status and entitlement 1996-2000: the main categories

2.12 From 1996 to 2000 - as indicated earlier in this chapter - refugees and asylum seekers can be classified into the following four main categories. Though much policy debate has focused on just one of these categories, the destitute asylum seekers, it will be seen that they represent in fact a minority of London's refugee and asylum seeker population:

- recognised refugees - with status granted - or those with ELR
- asylum seekers awaiting IND decision: benefit entitlement - applied at port of entry
- asylum seekers awaiting IND decision: no benefit entitlement - applied in-country
- unaccompanied asylum seeking minors (under 18).

2.13 Data are not readily available on all four categories, but Home Office statistics on asylum applications give some idea of their relative importance. Table 2.1 analyses these statistics for each of the five calendar years to 2000. Again, data here relate to principal applicants only. Around the mid-1990s dependants added about one quarter to 'principal' asylum seeker numbers; thereafter this proportion, though dipping to 17 per cent in 1998, rose in both 1997 and 1999 to 28 per cent.

2.14 From Table 2.1 these key trends emerge for the UK over the five years to 2000:

- Quite apart from the leap associated with the Kosovo conflict of 1999, total UK applications increased greatly over the period reaching a peak of 76,000 in 2000.
- In-country applications fell substantially as a proportion of the total lodged immediately after the 1996 legislation which left such applicants destitute by withdrawing social security benefit from them - but by 1999 such cases far outnumbered port applicants, suggesting that asylum seeking behaviour is little influenced by cutting off social security benefits.
- After slipping in the latter 1990s, the IND's rate of decisions on outstanding asylum applications accelerated dramatically during 2000 to give a monthly average of 9172, over three times the monthly rate for 1999. Cases decided in the year outstripped applications by well over 40%, helping to cut the huge backlog built up in the latter 1990s.

Table 2.1 Asylum applications and decisions – whole UK: 1996 to 2000 (principal applicants only - excluding dependants)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
	000	000	000	000	000
Total applications lodged	29.6	32.5	46.0	71.2	76.0
-at port	12.4	16.6	23.3	29.5	24.8
-in country (no benefits)	17.2	15.9	22.7	41.7	51.2
Decisions made	39.0	36.0	31.6	33.7	110.1
Excess (applications less decisions)	-9.3	-3.5	14.4	37.4	-34.0
Granted refugee status	2.2	4.0	5.3	7.8	10.2
Granted ELR ^(a)	5.1	3.1	3.9	13.6	21.7
Total allowed to remain (000) ^(b)	7.3	7.1	9.3	21.4	31.9
Allowed to remain/total decisions (%)	19%	20%	29%	64%	29%
Refused	31.7	28.9	22.3	12.4	76.9

Source: Home Office, *Asylum Statistics - United Kingdom 1999* (Oct 2000); *Control of immigration: statistics United Kingdom - first half 2000* (Nov. 2000); *Asylum Statistics May 2001 - United Kingdom*

Note: (a) Exceptional Leave to Remain - whether on general grounds or on 'backlog' criteria (re applications lodged before 1996). 'Backlog' cases accounted for 10,335 of all applicants receiving ELR in 2000.
(b) Sum of those granted refugee status and ELR cases.

- In absolute terms the number of decisions to grant refugee status has risen steeply, though separate Home Office figures show this is partly because of events in the Balkans, with five out of six such decisions in 1999 relating to applicants 'from Europe' (Home Office 2000a).
- The years 1996 to 1998 saw in effect a switch from ELR towards granting full refugee status, and the numbers given exceptional leave from 1999 onwards would have been much lower had it not been for the 'backlog' exercise allowing such leave to large numbers of applicants waiting since 1995 or earlier.

Five-year totals: national picture and London

2.15 Cumulative totals of applications and initial decisions over the five year period from 1996 to 2000 are shown in Table 2.2 below. Over this period, fewer than one-third of applications resulted in some form of permission to stay and 69% in refusal, at the stage of this initial decision. Adding claims allowed on appeal would, as noted above (para.2.4), have raised the number with positive decisions by about one-fifth.

2.16 Estimates of how these trends impinge on London are attempted in the final column of Table 2.2, using the standard Home Office assumption - originally based on analysis by the London Research Centre - that about 85 per cent of all UK asylum applicants live in the capital. As before, this table refers only to principal applicants, so

Table 2.2 Asylum applications and decisions, UK and London: five-year totals to 2000 (principal applicants only - excluding dependants) ^(a)

	Total UK 1996-2000	Implied totals for London ^(b)
	000	000
Total applications lodged	255.3	217.0
-at port	106.6	90.6
-in country (no benefits)	148.7	126.4
Decisions made	250.4	212.8
Excess (applications less decisions)	5.1	4.3
Granted refugee status	29.6	25.1
Granted ELR	36.2	30.8
Total allowed to remain (000)	65.8	56.0
Allowed to remain/total decisions (%)	26%	26%
Refused (initial decision)	170.8	145.2

Source: as for Table 2.1

Notes: (a) see notes to Table 2.1

(b) London estimates assume 85 per cent of UK applicants live in the capital (see text).

NB no allowance for possible effect of dispersal through Interim Scheme and (from July 2000) by NASS.

allowing for dependants would probably mean increasing its figures by at least one-quarter. It is stressed that for simplicity these figures ignore the effect of dispersal, but offer a notional benchmark against which to measure its impact. Overall the following points emerge from Table 2.2, for the five years 1996 to 2000:

- With some 0.25 million applications nationally over the five years, about 217,000 new principal applicants would on these assumptions have opted to live in London.
- The estimated 126,000 London-based applicants who lodged their request for asylum in-country will probably, since they had no benefit entitlement, almost all at some time have depended on boroughs for support - together with their dependants, who are not counted in this table.
- Over 90,000 applicants applying at port of entry would, at some point in this period, have secured social security benefits and hence (for example) the right to homeless status in London under the Housing Act, which for some of them could still be effective in 2000.
- People who applied during these five years, living in London and still awaiting an initial IND decision, would on these assumptions have numbered only about 4,000 by 2000 - but how many more awaited appeal decisions is not known.
- Of the 145,000 estimated to have been formally refused refugee status or ELR by the Home Office over this period while based in London, some will have been officially 'removed' or left of their own accord, whilst others may have appeals still in progress – but many, quite possibly a majority, would have remained in the capital illegally.

Recommendations

2.17 Though intended mainly to set the scene for analysis of the current situation in following pages, this chapter does suggest a recommendation about lessons of experience since the 1996 reforms which policy-makers need to register:

Recommendation 1: Government should be asked to note that experience of the asylum process 1996-2000 suggests asylum-seeking behaviour is not significantly influenced by cutting off social security benefits.

Chapter 3 Impact of the asylum process: the 1999 Act

Introduction

- 3.1 This chapter outlines the impact of the asylum regime created by the Immigration & Asylum Act 1999, including the various categories of refugee and asylum seeker it has created, and then summarises available information on numbers in each category who now live in London. Despite the large margin of error applying to most figures in this area, the chapter confirms that the new regime - and in particular the response of asylum seekers to the present, seriously deficient dispersal process - can be expected to create a large group of London residents facing profound social exclusion, shut off from any system of social support.
- 3.2 The 1999 Act reformed the asylum decision-making process in several ways that could affect London's refugee population, for instance by
- setting the target of processing all asylum claims within six months, which gives the government its rationale for imposing on applicants a regime even more austere than its predecessor
 - putting more resources into assessment, to try and meet this target
 - streamlining the process for appealing against initial Home Office rejection of an asylum application - with a fast-track mechanism for cases which the Home Office deems to be inherently weak and a tightly- constrained 'one stop' procedure for most other appeals
 - abolishing the four-year wait for 'permanent settlement', which applicants previously faced even after getting refugee status
 - allowing settlement (generally in the form of ELR – see para.2.3) to most people who lodged an asylum application before 1996, to try and clear the huge backlog built up under the preceding system.
- 3.3 But apart from these changes to the decision-making process, the Act also created with effect from April 2000 a new system for the provision of public services to people awaiting asylum decisions. Built around the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), it has the following key features:
- all *new* asylum applicants who need support by public agencies - because they lack financial means of their own - in general become the responsibility of NASS until

their claim is determined, though local authorities already catering for people with outstanding applications remain responsible for them

- local authorities are relieved of their former responsibility for such applicants' accommodation and subsistence (though they still have education and community care duties towards them for example, as well as duties under Children Act)
- unaccompanied asylum seeking children are the major exception to this rule, since local authorities retain their Children Act duties towards such youngsters
- NASS may provide the asylum seeker *either* with accommodation plus means of subsistence, *or* with subsistence only (if they say they can find their own accommodation).

Unaccompanied minors

3.4 Unaccompanied asylum seeking children, it should be emphasised, remain a social services responsibility of local authorities and hence are outside the NASS regime. The number of youngsters in this category grew steadily during the 1990s. Like single adults and families, the great majority of under-18 asylum seekers settle in London, making up one of the city's most vulnerable groups.

3.5 In June 2001 LASC reported that London boroughs were caring for just under 4,000 such children, with about three-quarters aged 16 or 17 years old. Concerns about the underfunding of this demanding task by central government were noted earlier (para. 2.5). More concretely, reports from practitioners, researchers and these young people themselves suggest provision for many of them may need to be improved urgently on several fronts – for example housing, education, and training - if they are to have a fair chance of moving on from local authority care to lead fulfilling and independent lives. The GLA's Children's Strategy could help focus partners' attention on possible London-wide initiatives to address these needs.

Application numbers since April 2000

3.6 The NASS-based system for newly arrived asylum seekers was phased in across the country from its April launch, applying to London from 24 July 2000. The Government clearly expected the combination of vouchers and dispersal to curb asylum claims. Shortly after publication of the White Paper *Fairer Faster and Firmer* in 1998 the Home Office - in order to model cost implications of the proposed new regime - projected its possible effect on numbers of asylum applicants. Guided by the drop in asylum claims seen fleetingly after the 1996 withdrawal of social security benefits, the Home Office forecast that by 2000/01 the annual number of applications would (on its central or 'main' projection) have fallen to 42,000 ⁶.

3.7 How have these numbers actually turned out? Right through 2000, before and after the launch of the new regime, they continued at an exceptionally high monthly rate. For the year to March 2001, the total was just under 75,000 or almost 80% above the 'main' forecast by the Home Office some two years before. Early indications are that the pace of applications is slowing in 2001, but only a little. For January-June 2001 inclusive, the provisional average monthly number lodged is 5600 which could imply at least 60,000 new claims in total for calendar year 2001, again far above the original Home Office forecast. National experience of the new system, pointing to a possible long-term secular rise in numbers seeking asylum, thus casts doubt on the assumption that people's wish to seek asylum in the UK will vary according to the level of material hardship they face on arrival.

Appeals: the new backlog

3.8 The backlog of people with unresolved asylum applications is a critically important policy issue, above all for London, because this is the stage when they are most vulnerable and least able to contribute fully to their host economy and society. So far as first decisions are concerned the IND succeeded, after the new system's launch in April 2000, in raising dramatically the pace at which it processes asylum claims. One factor in this remarkable acceleration was a 25-fold rise from 1999 to 2000 in the number of cases dismissed by the IND on non-compliance or technical grounds (see para.2.5), accounting for 26,600 cases or almost a quarter of all its decisions in 2000. The queue of cases awaiting a first decision has been slashed accordingly from over 100,000 in January 2000 to around 27,000 at end-May 2001.

3.9 But at the same time the number of appeals against these initial decisions has soared, creating a huge new backlog. By end-May 2001 the number of asylum appeals lodged with the Home Office but not yet resolved stood at 52,000.⁷ Added to the figure for people awaiting a first decision (above), this meant almost 80,000 asylum seekers had not yet had their asylum applications determined by that date. The appeals backlog was exactly twice the corresponding figure three years earlier, at end-May 1997.

3.10 One element of this swelling backlog has been the emergence of a large gap between appeals lodged with the Home Office, and number of cases it then passes on to the Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA) which is responsible for resolving them. Up to calendar year 1999, the number of appeals the Home Office sent on to the IAA each year roughly matched the number it received (though these would of course not necessarily be identical sets of cases). The past 18 months have seen not just rapid growth in appeals lodged, but a fall in the proportion passed to the IAA. Thus in the five months January to May 2001 the Home Office received 46,000 appeals but sent just 19,000 on to the IAA.⁸ While the IAA's outstanding asylum appeal cases totalled 18,000 at end-May 2001, many more were evidently still 'in the pipeline' within the

Home Office. Unless and until they proceed to the IAA, the Home Office gives no information on the outcome of such delayed cases.

- 3.11 The appeals backlog has mushroomed, it should be noted, despite the streamlining of procedures by the 1999 Act and despite a big injection of resources for staff and premises into the IAA - allowing it for example to double the number of adjudicator sitting days. A possible inference would be that the steeply rising pace of initial IND decisions has, in the view of many asylum seekers and their legal advisers, been accompanied by a steep fall in their quality.
- 3.12 Though it is unlikely to return to the level of early 2000, the administrative backlog within the asylum process has thus to some extent been shifted by the new system from the stage of initial decision to the appeals stage. At whichever stage they are caught, asylum applicants remain severely marginalised and may in some cases need high levels of support from public services. The persistence of such asylum backlogs is therefore of urgent concern for the GLA in developing a strategic view of refugees and asylum seekers' needs in London.
- 3.13 Apart from the mechanisms it offers to process asylum claims, how does the NASS-based system go about addressing these people's needs? Three key elements will now be outlined: accommodation, subsistence and dispersal.

Accommodation ⁹

- 3.14 Dispersal is the object of the NASS accommodation exercise. Though technically the Service, acting with the Home Secretary, has discretion as to where it will put asylum seekers, its stated policy goal at least in early years of the new system is to 'relieve the pressure' on London and Kent. It expects to place new asylum seekers within Greater London only if they have exceptional reasons for such placement, for example a need for specific medical treatment or for counselling by the London-based Medical Foundation for the Care of Survivors of Torture.
- 3.15 If an asylum seeker (or asylum seeking household) leaves the accommodation where they have been placed for longer than seven nights in a row, without notifying NASS, they forfeit their right to it and fall out of the NASS system. Thus anyone who decides to move to London after NASS has accommodated them elsewhere, and before they have a positive decision on their asylum claim, cannot now expect to be supported in London at all by any public agency.
- 3.16 NASS secures bed-spaces for asylum seekers in its dispersed locations through contracts either with private or with public sector providers, the latter taking the form of ten cross-sectoral regional consortia. It states: *'Prices are agreed through commercial negotiations using a standard NASS service specification.'* Asked what basis

it uses for pricing its accommodation, the Service says only that this rent element of the contract charge is '*benchmarked against published data*'.

- 3.17 Public and private accommodation providers alike undertake to offer the range of basic services including (in some cases) subsistence necessary to satisfy NASS's statutory obligation '*to protect the asylum seeker from destitution by meeting their essential living needs*'. Regional consortia have typically brought together a variety of public and voluntary agencies in an effort to ensure that incoming asylum seekers also have access to a wider range of support services, based on explicit professional guidance about their likely needs. They may for example be able to guide them towards health provision, legal and other advice services, or language courses.
- 3.18 NASS was soon reporting that the private sector had generally been quicker to conclude contracts with it than the regional consortia. This would not be surprising, given that the latter typically sought to put in place a wider range of support services. While data on the split between the two sectors are not available, there are signs that most NASS placements have been with private sector landlords - ranging from local guest-house owners to quite big corporate operations offering large numbers of bedspaces. Serious concerns have been expressed about the quality of some of these private providers. By July 2001, former Home Office minister Mike O'Brien was conceding that 'some of the private suppliers ... have not been very good at all'¹⁰.
- 3.19 Meanwhile the shortfall in demand for NASS placements (see below) has left several public consortia in limbo at some points since April 2000. Late in that year NASS decided it would not even try to reach accommodation contracts with three of them, seriously undermining these complex structures in which much officer time, finance and political capital had been invested. In turn, as NASS explicitly acknowledged in autumn 2000, this meant that asylum applicants could be sent to private sector bedspaces in some regions with no consortium functioning there to oversee the coordinated support services which might encourage their longer term settlement in that locality.

Subsistence and the voucher system

- 3.20 NASS provision for asylum seekers, whether or not they are also asking for accommodation, will consist of £10 cash per week plus vouchers exchangeable at a specified list of participating shops. Fewer vouchers will be available where board is provided by landlords together with accommodation. The total weekly value of the subsistence package, cash plus vouchers, is limited for adults to 70 per cent of the value of income support for the type and size of household receiving it (though for children the package is at income support level).

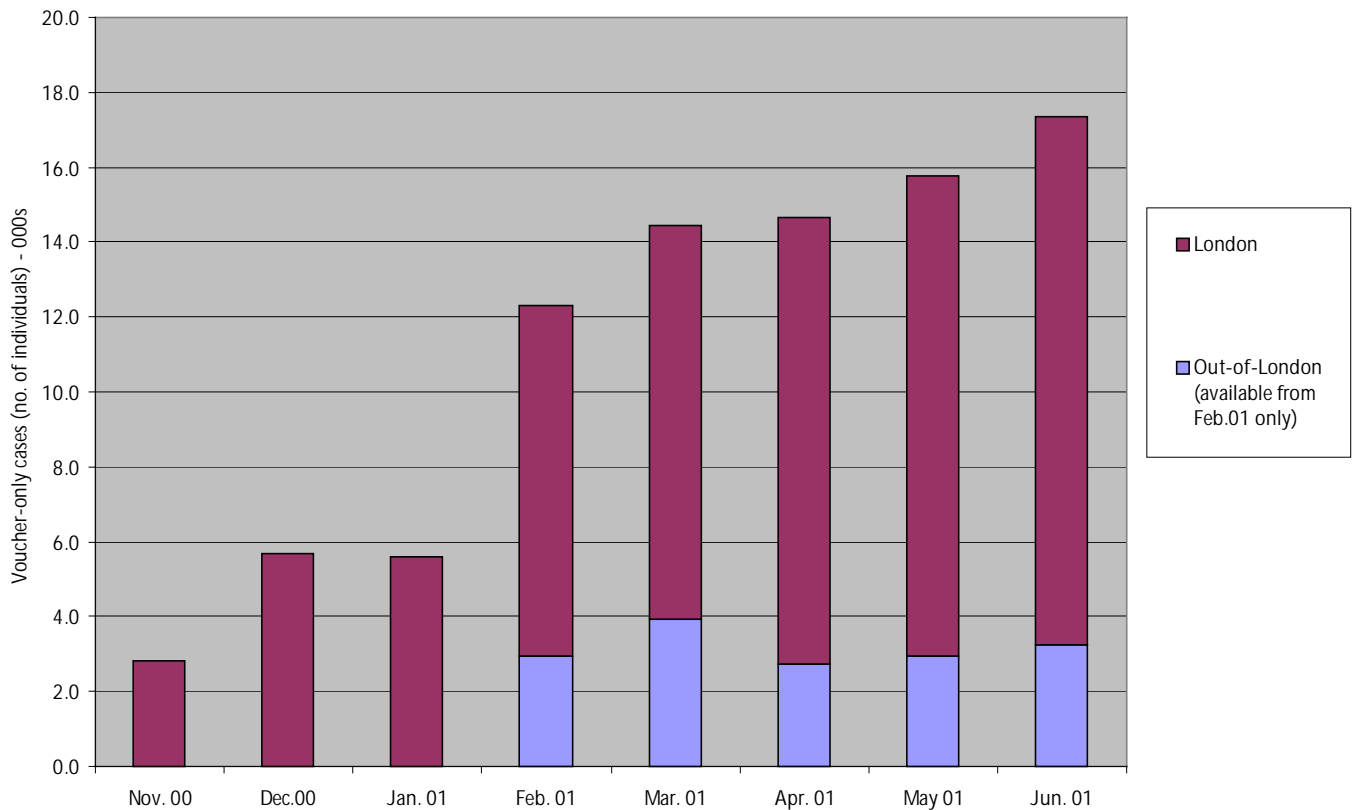
- 3.21 The use of vouchers is justified by the Government on the grounds that cash payments tend to attract economic migrants, spuriously claiming asylum. Analysis of applications in recent years casts grave doubt, as shown above, on the argument that asylum claim numbers will respond to the level of cash benefits available in the UK.
- 3.22 Use of vouchers has anyway prompted a range of criticisms including the following:
- costly to administer, highly bureaucratic and logistically complex both for the company distributing vouchers and for claimants, with asylum seekers at present able to collect them only from Crown Post Offices
 - financially wasteful for users, already one of the poorest groups in UK society – both because they are denied change for vouchers, and because vouchers may prevent them from shopping around for cheap buys
 - discriminatory, tending to prompt humiliating treatment in shops
 - inevitably fostering illicit trade in vouchers, with the likelihood of further losses to asylum seekers who are already extremely hard-up.
- 3.23 The present UK voucher system might also be open to challenge at EU level should the Union decide to adopt the European Council Directive on reception of asylum seekers which its Commission published in draft during 2001, as part of the EU move towards a common asylum policy (see Chapter 9 below). Article 17 of the draft Directive would require member states
- ‘... to ensure that the total amount of the allowances or vouchers to cover material reception conditions is sufficient to avoid applicants and their accompanying family members falling into poverty.’* (European Commission 2001a)
- 3.24 Work at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) has illustrated concretely the harm that could be done to children by restricting their families’ income as the UK voucher regime is designed to do - imposing on it not just a low total value but also severe constraints on how it can be used. A pilot study in East London by LSHTM researchers looked at a structured group of 30 refugee mothers with children under school age, to see how well they were able to feed their children and what factors could undermine these children’s nutritional well-being (LSHTM 2000). It found refugee mothers were - with difficulty – managing to feed their children better than other families on equivalent incomes in the local area. But the *‘coping mechanisms’* used to maintain this standard of nutrition relied on
- ‘access to local shops and markets where a wide range of foods may be purchased at affordable prices
 - ‘ability to use cooking knowledge and skills by accessing reasonable kitchen facilities
 - ‘cash income
 - ‘family and support networks
 - ‘breastfeeding’.

- 3.25 Access to the first of these factors is seriously curtailed by vouchers, while the third is of course ruled out entirely. Mothers in the LSHTM study, conducted in London in 2000, were not themselves subject to the NASS system. But its findings suggest that (taking into account also the other factors just cited) the combination of vouchers and dispersal as operated by NASS to date will *'impact directly on refugee diets'*. The question arises whether, under the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child to which the UK is a signatory, the Government could defend measures adopted as an act of policy that may be expected to jeopardise children's nutrition and hence their longer-term development.
- 3.26 Criticism at the Labour Party Conference in autumn 2000 brought a commitment from the Government to review the voucher regime. Submissions for this review were required by end-2000. Asked about its conclusions in July 2001, the Home Secretary told the Commons that the review remained *'on going'* with no date set to complete *'consideration of the evidence from the review'*.¹¹ Meanwhile the regime continues as described above.
- 3.27 For London a key issue is that since April 2000 a large proportion of new asylum seekers have declined the accommodation offer and opted instead to accept from NASS only the subsistence package - contrary to the Government's assumption that it could control their location by controlling their accommodation. Within six months of the launch of the NASS regime, some London practitioners estimated that up to 60% of asylum seekers were choosing to take the voucher-only route.¹² As NASS data on dispersals are available only as cumulative flow, and its data on subsistence-only cases only as a monthly 'stock' figure, it is not possible to give a more precise current estimate of this percentage. But with NASS reporting at end-May 2001 that it had accommodated some 27,000 people since beginning operations (ie. 14-month throughput), the 15,785 people receiving its subsistence-only vouchers nationally at that date may well have been a majority of all asylum seekers then supported by NASS.¹³
- 3.28 Referred to loosely as 'voucher-only' cases (they should also be eligible for the £10 cash payment), such asylum seekers are likely to be living mainly in London. Latest available NASS figures show 14,120 of them living in London at end-June 2001. This London figure was
- almost two-and-a-half times greater than it had been at end-December 2000
 - 81% of the UK total of voucher-only cases.
- 3.29 Figure 3.1 below shows the dramatic rise in voucher or subsistence-only claimants in London since November 2000, as reported by NASS, with such cases outside London shown from February 2001 (the first month for which data are available). Figure 3.2

adds a breakdown of these cases by London borough over the six months to June 2001. It demonstrates both the dramatic percentage increase in most parts of the city, but also the great disparity between boroughs in absolute numbers of voucher-only cases, presumably reflecting the areas where these destitute asylum seekers expected to be able to find shelter. In June 2001 four boroughs – Brent, Ealing, Haringey and Newham – were home to 4905 such people, about 35% of the London total.

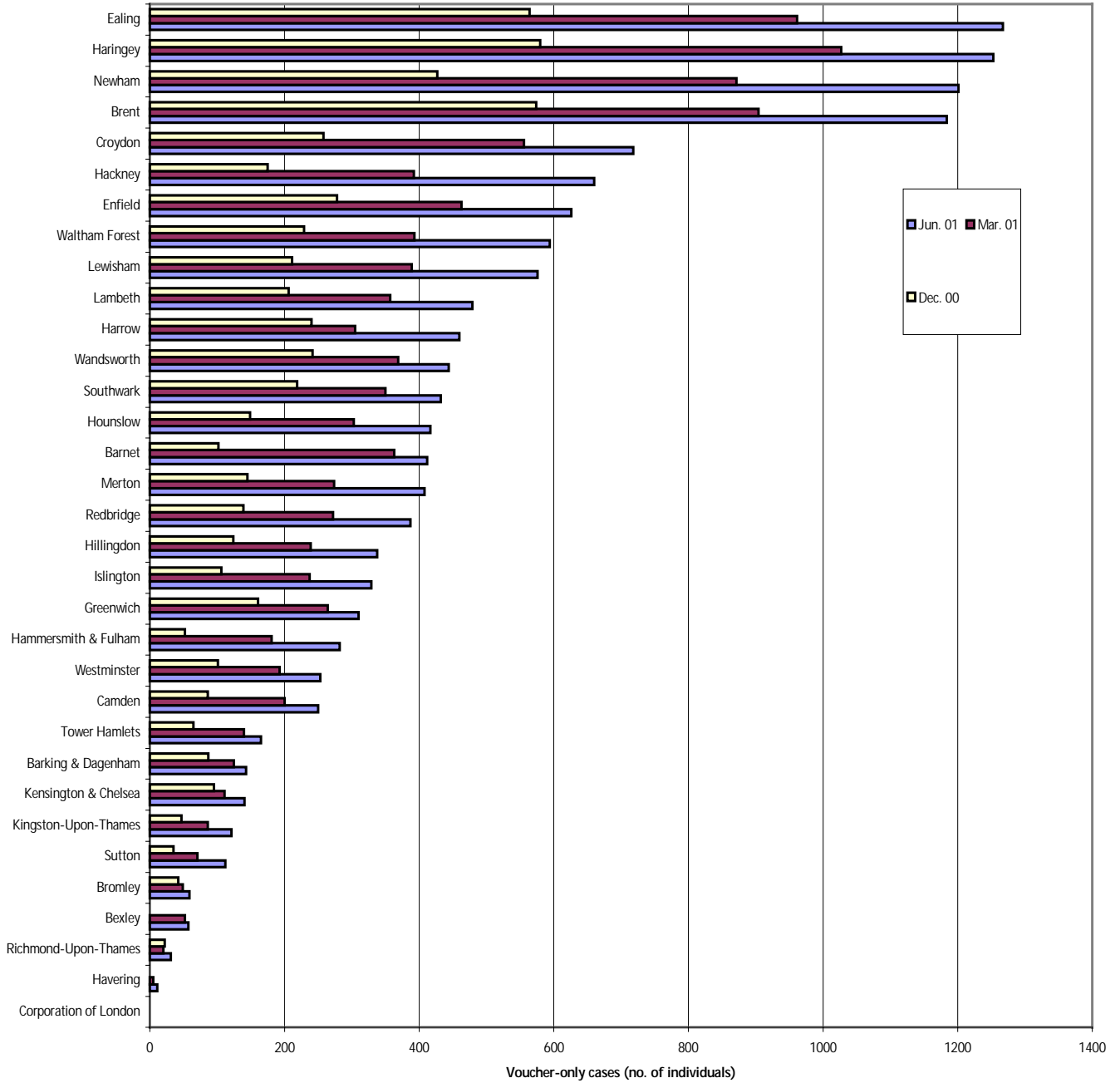
3.30 It seems safe to assume almost all the people concerned are technically homeless – lodging with friends or family members. Given all the drawbacks of trying to live on vouchers, asylum seekers’ widespread preference for the subsistence-only option testifies graphically to their anxiety about what dispersal out of London may mean.

Fig.3.1 Asylum seekers receiving subsistence (vouchers) only from NASS, November 2000 to May 2001: London and UK



Source: GLA- from data supplied by National Asylum Support Service/London Asylum Seekers Consortium

Fig.3.2 Asylum seekers receiving subsistence (vouchers) only from NASS, December 2000, March and June 2001: by London borough



Data source: GLA - from data supplied by National Asylum Support Service/London Asylum Seekers Consortium

- 3.31 If and when they get refugee status or ELR these voucher-only asylum seekers can be expected to emerge explicitly as part of the capital's homeless population, though they are unlikely to be allocated permanent social housing by their local borough unless in priority need as defined by the 1996 Housing Act (for example for health reasons or because they have dependent children).
- 3.32 Meanwhile, pending an IND decision on their claim, they will form an especially impoverished and insecure part of London's hidden homeless. Borough housing departments could in some cases face difficult dilemmas, where such voucher-only asylum seekers are being put up by family or friends who may then be breaching their tenancy agreements. It seems inevitable that some of them will have to take to the streets, making it harder to resolve their asylum application promptly and fairly.

Dispersal

- 3.33 A key calculation behind the 1999 Act, as noted, was that the Government through NASS could control where people went by controlling where they would be housed. The asylum seeker asking for NASS accommodation is therefore given only one offer, that is the offer is 'no-choice'. The places where people are being sent, by this method, are spread widely across England and parts of Scotland.
- 3.34 A detailed study of the implications and pitfalls of a dispersal strategy was made in 1999 under the auspices of the Asylum Rights Campaign, a consortium of non-statutory bodies. This extensive and careful study found some evidence suggesting that dispersal could be made to work. Interviewing asylum seekers dispersed by London boroughs during 1999, for instance, it found most were willing to stay where they had been put and possibly to settle there, or had no preference on the issue, rather than being set on returning to London - though it also noted that port applicants, since they 'tend to have fewer UK connections', may be more likely to respond to dispersal in this way (Asylum Rights Campaign 1999: 17).
- 3.35 But the NASS dispersal system has clearly fallen far short of the model – as advocated by the Asylum Rights Campaign – that might prove viable in the long term. In July 2001, after the Royal Institute of International Affairs published a particularly disturbing critique of the NASS dispersal process, its author pointed out¹⁴ that
- dispersing asylum seekers on the basis of the price of accommodation, arranged through private contractors, '*... has led to many asylum seekers being sent to inappropriate accommodation in areas of high social tension without sufficient consultation of local authorities*'

- asylum seekers' dispersal *'had not been matched by an effective decentralisation of social support services and legal assistance'* for them
- the Government, through NASS, had failed genuinely to implement the concept of 'cluster areas' which was supposed to be fundamental to the dispersal strategy.

3.36 A growing body of evidence suggests the dispersal system could put at risk the human rights of people passing through it. Research into nutritional well-being of pre-school refugee children in East London (LSHTM 2000 – see paras.3.24-3.25 above), albeit on a small sample, pointed to the possibility that dispersal as currently operated could threaten the nutrition of young children in asylum seeker households by leaving their parents without support networks, adequate access to shops and markets, and proper kitchen facilities. The murder of Kurdish asylum seeker Firsat Yildiz on a Glasgow housing estate, in August 2001, finally turned the national political spotlight on the harassment and violence that have met many asylum seekers at the end of a compulsory dispersal process run without adequate preparation, support services or complementary resources in the receiving areas.¹⁵

3.37 But conversely, if the present NASS dispersal regime continues to threaten the rights of its 'clients', this must also gravely weaken the dispersal regime itself. Even before NASS began work, experience of agencies involved in organising dispersal from London had indicated that many asylum seekers would simply evade any attempt at forcible dispersal. The London Asylum Seekers Consortium (LASC), set up primarily to organise asylum seekers' dispersal by boroughs under the Interim Scheme, reported in Autumn 2000 of its own experience: *'It is estimated that 28 to 30 per cent have refused to get on coaches or disappear.'* As defects in the NASS regime emerged more starkly though 2000/01, such resistance has become stronger. One sign of it is the high take-up of the 'voucher-only' option (para. 3.27). Another is that asylum seekers fled to London in fear of the persecution they faced in localities to which they had been dispersed elsewhere in the UK - for example in Glasgow – with these dangers being cited by August 2001 as grounds for judicial review of a NASS placement.¹⁶

3.38 The number of new asylum seekers actually dispersed by NASS is difficult to determine. The Service's initial target of 65,000 dispersals for 2000/01 was later cut to 44,000, and it is likely that only about half this number had in fact been placed by March 2001. NASS states that at end-July 2001, 28,800 asylum seekers *'were expected to have arrived in NASS allocated accommodation This figure does not include those cases where support has been terminated'*.¹⁷ The 28,800 thus apparently represents a net total of people in NASS accommodation at that date. Given the pace at which claims were being resolved in 2000 and 2001, it is not clear how such a net 'stock' figure relates to reports in August 2001 that NASS had completed *'just under 30,000'* dispersals over the sixteen months since its launch.¹⁸ But in any case the rate of dispersal remains far below original Home Office projections.

3.39 Growing evidence that dispersal in its present form will not work has brought some adjustment in Home Office policy, albeit gradual and limited. In July 2001 the Home Office was still trying to enforce the existing system by announcing a 'one-strike' rule, whereby new asylum applicants asking to be housed by NASS had to travel to the no-choice accommodation designated for them within 48 hours (five days in the case of families with children) or lose all further entitlement to state support.¹⁹ Soon afterwards however, in the aftermath of the murder of Firsat Yildiz in Glasgow, the Home Secretary announced a review of the NASS dispersal system to look *at 'improving the integration of asylum seekers with local communities'* as well as *'the operation of housing arrangements.'*²⁰

3.40 Two years before this review, through the report of the Asylum Rights Campaign (1999), front-line practitioners had spelt out conditions that must be met if a dispersal process was to work over the long term with the large numbers due to pass through it once the 1999 Act took effect. Several key recommendations in the Asylum Rights Campaign report are of interest to the GLA since they bear directly on the long term viability of the dispersal strategy, and hence on London's future social development. They call for

- properly designed cluster areas for receiving asylum seekers, developed together with local authorities and other agencies, in locations offering some scope for contact with relevant existing ethnic minority communities
- strategic development of legal services for asylum seekers in receiving areas
- increasing investment in both statutory and voluntary sectors in receiving areas, to help them develop support services to asylum seekers such as assistance with employment and training, and English as second language
- increasing investment in voluntary sectors in these areas so they can strengthen 'support infrastructure', such as refugee community groups and specialist services for torture survivors
- some scope in the NASS regime for asylum seekers to choose where they are dispersed to.

Refugees and asylum seekers, London 2001: categories and numbers

3.41 To sum up the analysis so far, the main categories of refugees and asylum seekers in London or cared for by London boroughs - as they appear for policy purposes - are listed below together with the estimated number in each category at the end of 2000. These estimates

- relate to people who have arrived claiming asylum at any time in the past 15 years and (on assumptions below) could be expected to be still in London
- cover both principal applicants and dependants (in contrast to Tables 2.1 and 2.2 which covered principals only)

- are very tentative, especially the breakdown between categories of asylum seeker within the aggregate figure
- split port and in-country applicants (para.2.4 above) in the ratio of 0.81:1, as reported for the period from 1996 to April 2000 when the new NASS-based regime took effect.
- allow for possible alternative proportions of asylum applicants leaving the UK (voluntarily or otherwise) at some point after refusal of their application, as indicated – but ...
- do not attempt to allow for net movement from London to other parts of the UK after initial settlement in the city, as there are no plausible grounds on which to make this estimate.

3.42 This analysis hinges on the GLA's estimate of aggregate numbers of refugees and asylum seekers – the cumulative total or 'stock' of people who came to the UK claiming asylum and may now be living in London. A cumulative figure requires a cut-off point: this estimate is based on the view (above) that a person can be deemed a refugee until they have spent 15 years in the UK, whenever they may have got a positive decision on their claim. The assumed total remaining on a clandestine basis after rejection of their asylum claim has been arrived at just by working back from this GLA estimate of the aggregate number. The estimate of those whose claim is allowed comprises actual number granted refugee status or ELR at the initial decision, over the 15 years 1986-2000, plus an assumed 20% of applicants whose claim was allowed on appeal (see para.2.4 above).

3.43 It has been necessary here, as indicated, to assume zero net migration of refugees and asylum seekers from London to the rest of the UK over this 15-year period. If instead it is thought there has been net movement of such people out of London, a corresponding cut would be needed in the assumed figure for people remaining on a clandestine basis, since this is a residual from the estimated aggregate population rather than from actual data.

3.44 This analysis uses the LASC figure of 55,000 destitute in-country asylum seekers, excluding unaccompanied children, catered for by London boroughs under the Interim Scheme in June 2001. No reliable data are available on how many were accommodated by boroughs outside London. If however the proportion of such placements was the same as in a March 2000 GLA survey of such asylum seekers in temporary accommodation, around 12 per cent of them or 6,600 might have been housed outside London in June 2001. If so, expected figures for other elements of London's total estimated population of refugees and asylum seekers – for example those staying illegally – would be greater by that amount than shown below.

Main categories of refugees and asylum seekers: tentative estimates

- Refugees granted status, and applicants granted ELR: actual data (cumulative) 1986-2000, for cases granted on initial decision, plus assumed 20% allowed on appeal (see text above) **126,000**
- Former applicants remaining after rejection of their application: net cumulative number since (say) mid-1980s (cf. para. 2.11, fifth bullet point)
 - no direct estimate available but, by inference > **108,000**
- Pre-July 2000 *in-country* asylum applicants awaiting decision, excluding unaccompanied children: no social security benefits or NASS support, hence destitute and cared for by London boroughs under Interim Scheme (but including people placed outside London - see para. 3.44)
 - June 2001 (source: LASC) **55,000**
- Pre-April 2000 *port* applicants, awaiting decision: entitled to benefits
 - June 2001 (assume 81 per cent of in-country number) > **45,000**
- *Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children* under 18: responsibility of London borough social services departments, entitled to benefits on leaving care
 - June 2001 (source: LASC) **4,000**
- Asylum seekers applying since 3 April (at port) or 24 July 2000 (in-country): no social security benefits, hence NASS support but *voucher (subsistence) only*
 - last available NASS figure, end-June 2001 > **14,000**
- TOTAL estimated London population of refugees and asylum seekers:
 - GLA estimate to mid-year 1997 (variance depending on assumed rate at which failed applicants leave the UK) = 240,000 to 280,000 (see Health of Londoners Project 1999)
 - *add* GLA estimate of refugees and asylum seekers coming to London 1998-2000, net, based on analysis of ONS 'visitors and switchers' data
 - approximate total, estimated, by end-2000 **352-422,000**

Recommendations

3.45 From this chapter's review of early experience of the way the 1999 Act is operating, the following key recommendations emerge:

Recommendation 2: Work to develop the GLA Children's Strategy should examine the needs of refugee children in London, and in particular the needs of unaccompanied asylum seeking minors.

Recommendation 3: Government should be asked to recognise that a backlog of unresolved asylum applications (including appeals) is likely to persist for some time, so any successful integration strategy has to address the needs of asylum seekers as well as those already accepted with refugee status or exceptional leave to remain.

Recommendation 4: In the light of evidence that it is based on a false behavioural premise (see recommendation 1), Government should be urged to abandon the voucher system which is likely to exacerbate poverty, social exclusion and community tensions.

Recommendation 5: The present dispersal regime should be replaced with a national reception and settlement system. Such a properly constructed reception and settlement system

- (a) would provide people who had arrived after traumatic experiences in a strange country with the basic language, legal, social and financial support they needed*
- (b) should be constructed on the basis of help and support, not deterrence, providing for basic needs*
- (c) would include, but not be based on, London*
- (d) would realistically assess the cost to public agencies of meeting the full spectrum of refugees' and asylum seekers' needs wherever they are housed (including support to the voluntary sector), and ensuring that such costs are fully reimbursed by the Exchequer as an obligation that is strictly national not local.*

Recommendation 6: Government should be asked to recognise that the capital's population of refugees and asylum seekers is likely to remain at or near to its current level, representing close to five per cent of resident population - with large potential future need for social housing and other public services - and should provide for London's services accordingly in its local government financial settlements for 2002/03 and beyond.

Chapter 4 Accommodation

Introduction

4.1 On 24 July 2000 responsibility for accommodating new asylum seekers passed from London boroughs to NASS. But, contrary to what some suggested when this change was heralded by the 1998 White Paper and subsequent legislation, it has not meant that refugees and asylum seekers are now fading from London's housing needs equation. Despite the advent of NASS, accommodation needs of this large and very vulnerable element of London's population remains an important factor in planning for the capital's housing in both the short and the longer term. This chapter seeks to explain why.

Temporary accommodation

- 4.2 London local authorities retain, since July 2000, duties to offer temporary accommodation to a wide variety of people (and often their dependants) who came to the UK seeking asylum. It is too early to tell what impact dispersal has had on their numbers. But it seems clear that most will have the right to look to the boroughs for such support for many months, possibly years to come. This adds uncertainty to housing departments' planning, since - as they point out - asylum seekers have no access to permanent social rented housing until they get a positive immigration decision, which is outside boroughs' control.
- 4.3 One obvious response to the shortage of temporary accommodation for refugees and asylum seekers in London, worth considering briefly here, might be to set up formally a central mechanism for allocating them to different parts of the capital according to the availability of spare accommodation (or relative severity of the shortage) in each such area. A mechanism of this kind - recalling the 'rota' for assigning newly-arrived asylum seekers to boroughs in turn, attempted in the early 1990s - would of course assume that, while London as a whole suffers from housing shortage, some boroughs still are more likely than others to have spare temporary accommodation of some sort.
- 4.4 On closer examination, however, there may not be much to be gained from redistributing refugees and asylum seekers in this way. Those catered for under homelessness provisions of the Housing Act 1996 - a substantial proportion of refugees and asylum seekers needing temporary accommodation, as the following paragraphs show - could not be shifted compulsorily from one area to another without change in that legislation, and possibly also the risk of challenge under the Human Rights Act. Destitute asylum seeking families catered for under the Interim Scheme (or under their preceding statutory duties) whom then become 'disbenefited' - because

their claim is rejected but they appeal - are anyway to be left in existing accommodation at the specific request of NASS based on legal advice.

- 4.5 This leaves only destitute adults without children, outside the Housing Act framework, as possible cases for a central mechanism to handle. But boroughs have the necessary mechanism to hand in their collective commissioning organisation, the London Asylum Seekers' Consortium (LASC), whose job precisely is to identify adequate temporary accommodation for them in London as well as outside, while securing value for money. Whilst certain boroughs are understood to have placed single adult applicants since July 2000 on a 'freelance' basis, outside LASC, it offers all boroughs the means if required to procure places in London in a coordinated way .
- 4.6 The four categories of asylum seeker with a claim on temporary accommodation in London, just mentioned, are examined more fully in following paragraphs. This account draws where possible on data gathered during 2000/01 by the GLA.

Transitional cases: refugees awaiting permanent housing

- 4.7 Asylum seekers who have in the past been housed by boroughs as homeless persons under the Housing Act 1996 should be able to move on to some form of permanent housing once refugee status is recognised or Exceptional Leave to Remain is granted. But since it is a decision whose timing and outcome neither they nor the council can influence, there may clearly be a lag between the recognition of this status and finding a permanent home, whether elsewhere in the social housing sector or in the private rented sector. So at any given time a council may continue to house temporarily some households which are in transition to a permanent alternative.

'Backlog' cases: Housing Act homeless

- 4.8 Asylum seekers who applied at their port of entry for refugee status, before April 2000, will be entitled to benefits (Chapter 2 above). They may therefore have been assessed as eligible for assistance under the homelessness provisions of the Housing Act 1996, if homeless and in priority need – for instance because they include a pregnant woman or are single and vulnerable. Such households would then be placed in temporary accommodation by local authority housing departments, awaiting an IND decision on their asylum claim.
- 4.9 There were just under 10,000 of these households living in temporary accommodation in London at the end of March 2000 under the Housing Act (GLA survey). No more recent estimate is available. Besides some single adults many, as just noted, were likely to be families that were in some way vulnerable. The total of individuals so accommodated will therefore have been considerably higher. Even by June 2001 they may well have made up a sizeable proportion of people in London's asylum seeking

households with benefit entitlement, estimated above (para. 3.43 re port applicants) to number at least 45,000.

- 4.10 A clue to the persistence of boroughs' responsibilities for this Housing Act 'backlog' can be gleaned from P1E homelessness forms collected each quarter from local authorities by the DLTR (ex-DETR). The GLA collects and analyses P1E return forms. The provision of this information is not mandatory and some London boroughs fail to make a return. Returns for the first quarter of 2001 show however that asylum seekers were still being accepted as Housing Act homeless in substantial numbers in some areas, reflecting an entitlement gained under the pre-NASS regime. The 328 such households reported across London, for this quarter, were concentrated in ten authorities asylum seeker households made up more than five per cent of homeless acceptances.

'Backlog' cases: destitute asylum seekers

- 4.11 Asylum seekers who applied in-country for refugee status before July 2000 (when NASS took over new applicants in London) will not be entitled to benefits, and cannot be accepted as homeless persons under the Housing Act 1996. But as explained earlier, they were until 24 July entitled instead to support from London boroughs as *destitute cases* under the Interim Scheme (formerly under National Assistance Act 1948 and Children Act 1989). This support crucially meant temporary accommodation.
- 4.12 Accommodation for these applicants often had to be found at very short notice and at a price far above the norm established by homeless persons units for non-asylum seeker cases, jeopardising the system they had developed for managing the cost of homelessness in the capital. Such duties to destitute asylum seekers subjected many London boroughs to severe institutional and financial strain from 1996 onwards, notwithstanding the grant aid which they eventually won from central government (London Research Centre 1998).
- 4.13 The pressure on them should have been eased by increasing dispersal from London since winter 1999, coordinated by the London Asylum Seekers Consortium (LASC), and then by the shift of responsibility for 'new' cases to NASS in July 2000. Nonetheless many destitute households living in London for whom asylum applications were lodged before July 2000, still awaiting an IND decision, are likely to remain in temporary accommodation managed by London boroughs. LASC reports that in June 2001 London boroughs were supporting just over 28,000 asylum seeking households in temporary accommodation, excluding unaccompanied children - only about 10 per cent fewer than a year before. Families made up 42 per cent of these households, comprising in all 39,000 adults and children. Single adults thus made up more than 16,000, giving LASC's total count of 55,000 people catered for by boroughs as destitute asylum seekers in that month (para.3.44 above).

4.14 Through the ALG, boroughs were pressing ministers during summer 2001 to transfer to the NASS their duties towards this group of asylum seekers.²¹ But whichever agency has responsibility for them, the more fundamental question for these destitute people, for the GLA and for London will be how long tens of thousands of the city's households remain in this institutional limbo, as they have since spring 2000. While faster initial decision-making by the IND on asylum claims - together with dispersal for new arrivals - ought to bring a steady fall in their total number, this trend could be offset by the increasing number of appeals against negative asylum decisions discussed elsewhere in this report. The 'backlog' of destitute cases from the pre-1999 Act system may thus remain, for the short and possibly medium term, a substantial factor in estimating London's need for temporary accommodation.

Disbenefited households

4.15 Under the 1999 Act it had been envisaged that any asylum seeker hitherto receiving social security benefits under the pre-April regime, and accommodated accordingly by a local authority under the Housing Act 1996 (paras. 4.8-11), would lose that entitlement as soon as the IND rejected their claim. This 'disbenefited' claimant could of course submit to the IND decision and leave the country; but if instead they appealed, NASS was to assume responsibility for their case and send them to dispersed accommodation pending the outcome of their appeal.

4.16 In late September 2000 however, recognising that the courts could find it unreasonable to disperse compulsorily families in London that had established local links (for example) with schools and doctors, the IND asked London housing departments to continue to accommodate 'disbenefited' households where they were, if they had school-age children. Nominally responsible for each such case, NASS pays the borough in question a sum which is meant to reimburse its actual costs in full (thus treating it on the same contractual basis as other NASS accommodation providers). This is likely to exceed the grant payable to boroughs catering for equivalent cases under the Interim Scheme. But with the rate of appeals against negative IND decisions running at over 50 percent, boroughs have voiced concern at the quantity of London's temporary accommodation that could thus be tied up in a commitment over which they have no control.

Permanent accommodation – social housing

4.17 Once asylum seekers are granted refugee status or leave to remain, they will be able to apply for more permanent social housing. Many of London's refugees already fall within this category, often for example where boroughs have found them permanent social housing under their Housing Act duties to homeless persons. But there is far wider latent demand for such housing, among people still waiting for a decision on their claim. Analysis in this chapter indicates that a large number of asylum

applicants, in the following three categories, will be entitled to seek permanent social housing in London if and when they get a positive decision from the Home Office:

- asylum seekers currently living in temporary accommodation in London, supported either by housing or social service departments ('backlog' cases in temporary accommodation, discussed above), wishing to remain in London
- asylum seekers, formerly dispersed by NASS, who choose to come to London after being granted refugee status or ELR
- voucher-only applicants, staying temporarily with family and friends in London (para. 4.21), who wish to remain in London.

4.18 Refugees will share many of the concerns of other households looking for accommodation in London (e.g. availability, access, quality, affordability). However, particular difficulties for more recently arrived refugees may arise from language difficulties, lack of familiarity with procedures to access social housing, insufficient knowledge about housing benefit etc. Refugees may also encounter prejudice and discrimination from private landlords.

4.19 Data on how many refugees are currently living in permanent social housing are not available. Given the current housing demand in London, social housing is only likely to be a realistic option for refugees who are statutorily homeless (this mainly applies to families with children, pregnant women and single vulnerable people) or are in other acute housing need.

Other options: voucher-only cases and the private rented sector

4.20 Many asylum seekers going through NASS have, as indicated earlier, clearly made their own accommodation arrangements rather than face dispersal. At end-June 2001, as noted earlier, 14,120 households in London were receiving vouchers but not accommodation from NASS. It is likely that most were staying with friends or relatives. Existing refugee and asylum seeking households in London may thus get increasingly overcrowded as they take in family and friends not wishing to be dispersed. At the same time, the Refugee Council has some evidence that rough sleeping among asylum seekers is on the increase.

4.21 Many refugees are likely to be privately renting, although no figures are available. With little knowledge of the sector, more recently arrived refugees may be at greater risk of ending up in poor quality and poorly managed accommodation. Many low income households can only afford the level of rents in the private rented sector by claiming housing benefit. Regulations governing housing benefit in the private rented sector are particularly complex and will appear even more so, for people unfamiliar with

the system or the language. With high rent levels, any failure to claim housing benefit correctly can lead to the build-up of significant arrears which may entail loss of the tenancy.

- 4.22 These risks are compounded by the severe problems at present affecting the housing benefit service in a number of London boroughs. Restoring prompt and accurate distribution of housing benefit would increase the number of private landlords willing to let homes to asylum seekers.

Conclusion and recommendations

- 4.23 The needs of refugees and asylum seekers are a critically important factor in developing a housing strategy for London. Partly this is because of the large scale of their *current need* for both temporary and permanent accommodation - especially though not only in social and private rented sectors - which to date seems to have been only marginally reduced by the advent of NASS. But their importance for London-wide housing policy lies also in the scale of *latent demand* within this community, suppressed so far either by slow IND decision-making or by widespread and probably unsustainable overoccupation of London housing, for example by voucher-only asylum seekers.

- 4.24 There is no quick fix. Simply redistributing asylum seekers around London seems unlikely to help them or the boroughs significantly (see para. 4.4). Whilst pressure on the available stock of temporary accommodation may conceivably be less in some parts of Greater London than others, boroughs already have the proper mechanism - in the London Asylum Seekers Consortium - to match destitute asylum seekers for whom they are responsible to any underused stock. Basic solutions lie in the longer term: steps to make dispersal work, and measures to improve permanently London's supply of affordable homes as developed by the Mayor's Housing Commission.

- 4.25 Meanwhile however, a better flow of information and analysis could help London's housing agencies - boroughs and RSLs - to respond both to the present critical situation and then to extra demand as it emerges in future. More data on overcrowding for instance would be a useful indicator of latent demand for accommodation. But it can be very costly in time and money to gather new data, for example by household surveys, on a subject as hard to research as the population of refugees and asylum seekers. It is therefore vital to exploit fully the sources already available, including the following:

- the ALG's LASC unit collects data on destitute (in-country) asylum seekers and unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors still within London boroughs' remit
- the GLA monitors the use of temporary accommodation and trends in homelessness in London, publishing the results monthly, whilst its Bed and Breakfast Information

Exchange (BABIE) helps London boroughs co-ordinate efforts to house homeless people and to monitor standards, use and prices of bed and breakfast hotels

- the GLA already gathers boroughs' quarterly P1E homelessness returns, a useful source of information on asylum seeking households accepted as homeless and those living in temporary accommodation, and could develop this role – for example encouraging complete returns from boroughs that currently send forms back incomplete (often lacking data on asylum seekers) or fail altogether to make a return
- the NASS could be pressed to share detailed information about location of non-dispersed asylum seekers within London, in particular about voucher-only cases, which could help guide further development of policy.

4.26 These recommendations follow:

Recommendation 7: The GLA should explore with the ALG/London Asylum Seekers' Consortium (LASC) what mechanisms might be developed to help make sure the flow of information and analysis about refugees and asylum seekers is adequate for London boroughs and other agencies responsible for their accommodation to

(e) take full advantage of any underused temporary accommodation in London

(f) secure best value in procuring such accommodation

(g) avoid driving up the price of temporary accommodation for London's homeless in general

(h) plan more effectively for the full range of future housing need.

Recommendation 8: The GLA should ensure that the housing needs of asylum seekers and refugees are considered both by the Housing Commission and, as appropriate, elsewhere within the GLA strategy development process.

Recommendation 9: The GLA should encourage boroughs, in developing their local housing strategy, to review/estimate the future housing needs of refugees within their area.

Chapter 5 Employment, training and the interface with schools

Introduction

- 5.1 Employment is a key factor in the long-term integration of refugees into the life of the country, as current Government strategy recognises (Home Office 2000). It is crucial for asylum seekers awaiting decisions on their claims, because for many that wait is so long. And it is a central issue for the GLA, working to ensure that London can make the most of the economic opportunity offered by the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers. This chapter reviews evidence on what has to be done to realise this opportunity. Since younger refugees' chances of success in finding a job depend critically on progress at school, the chapter closes with a brief look at the interface between school-level education and the labour market.
- 5.2 Policy on refugees' and asylum seekers' access to the labour market, and to economic activity in general, must be influenced by the way policy-makers see the wider issue of immigration and its relationship with the host economy. Reflecting a similar change of attitude among their counterparts across much of the EU, Government ministers have begun exploring the idea that immigration could help the UK cope both with current skills shortages in some sectors and with longer-term change in its demographic structure. Home Office minister Barbara Roche trailed this shift in autumn 2000 with a speech calling for debate on *'the benefits and challenges of managed migration'*, suggesting the UK might gain more from globalisation if it eased controls on some categories of immigrant. The people she had in mind clearly were those delivering immediate economic benefits to the UK: *'business innovators'*, fee-paying students, and workers who had job offers *'at a sufficiently high level'*.²²
- 5.3 The shift tentatively proposed by Mrs Roche got analytical backing in January 2001 when the Home Office (2001) published a substantial study of the economic and social implications of migration. *'Overall'*, this research found, *'migration has the potential to deliver significant economic benefits'*. After the change of administration in June 2000, the incoming Home Secretary took on responsibility for work permits alongside his immigration and asylum roles. He immediately declared he would relax the work permit system to allow in more economic migrants, skilled and unskilled, so providing *'a controlled but legal route for people who seek work to fill Britain's skill shortages'*.²³
- 5.4 Acknowledgement of the economic benefits of immigration may make the Government more likely to recognise potential gains from using the skills of people who came seeking asylum. To this extent, the Government's limited re-think of policy on economic migration during 2000 and 2001 could herald a stronger commitment to opening up routes into the labour market for refugees and asylum seekers and fits well

with the view, informing the present report, that their arrival is above all an opportunity for the host society. But it should be noted that

- recent official statements about migration stress the case for discriminating between would-be entrants according to their current skills, capacity or resources;
- the right to asylum would be radically undermined if it was made conditional on the applicant's ability to meet current needs of the UK economy as defined by ministers; and
- it is not yet known when, if at all, the Government might want to put into practice the changes in perspective discussed above.

5.5 Pending such change in the wider immigration regime, asylum seekers and refugees continue to encounter severe obstacles to full participation in the labour market. The following paragraphs describe key aspects of the situation they currently face.

Refugees and asylum seekers: right to work

5.2 People with refugee status or exceptional leave to remain have the right to work.

Asylum seekers may not take paid work within the six month target period for determining their claim. If their application is still outstanding after that period they may seek Home Office permission to work, but only if they are 'principal applicants'. In asylum seeker households the principal applicant will usually be male. This rule therefore not only shows indirect gender bias but also may limit these families' chance of finding earned income at all, since many of the jobs open to asylum seekers in London will be in traditionally 'female' occupations.

Table 5.1: Asylum seekers in London, 1998 survey: length of stay in Britain

	%
Less than 2 years	30
2-5 years	40
5-8 years	24
More than 8 years	6
TOTAL	100

Source: 83 asylum seekers from Refugee Skillsnet survey (London Research Centre 1999).

Note: The study excluded new arrivals.

5.3 The experience of people interviewed for the Refugee Skillsnet survey in 1998, set out in Table 5.1, confirmed how long it could take then for applications to be determined. It is not clear when the Home Office will achieve the aim of processing all asylum applications within six months, set for it when the Immigration & Asylum Act 1999 came into force. Meanwhile, though the backlog of applications awaiting initial decision has been reduced, the overall backlog including appeals remains substantial as

shown in Chapter 3 above. Government intentions about the right to work for people in these asylum queues are again uncertain.

Financial constraints

5.4 For asylum seekers in particular, efforts to enter the labour market are severely hampered by constraints on their personal finances. Firstly, asylum seekers are ineligible for educational grants and loans. Secondly, unless and until they get refugee status or exceptional leave to remain, many must pay overseas student fees. For almost all asylum seekers these higher fees will prove an insuperable barrier. The concessionary 'home fee' rate may be made available to them if they can claim social security benefits, or have been accepted for support by local social services or by NASS – but this is at the discretion of the relevant Learning & Skills Council. The effect is, therefore, that asylum seekers may after six months get permission to work, but not permission to train for work.

5.5 Travel problems again illustrate the way access to employment, especially for asylum seekers, may be blocked by poverty. Even under the pre-2000 regime based on local authority support, the LRC Skillsnet survey of higher-skilled refugees and asylum seekers in London (see below) identified for example an asylum seeker who had been offered a job conditional on taking a short training course, but could not afford the fare to travel to it - and could not get either to the refugee support agency elsewhere in London that was offering to subsidise fares. Under the subsequent Interim Scheme and NASS regime, use of vouchers and their meagre value leaves asylum seekers still facing similar obstacles in attending training courses on which their long-term integration may depend. Arguably vouchers make the problem even more acute than before, and worse than for other unemployed Londoners.

Skills

5.6 The most recent large-scale study of refugee employment was the Refugee Skillsnet survey based on interviews with 236 refugees and asylum seekers in London (London Research Centre 1999). This focused on people with high-level qualifications or skills from their home countries. They had trained for example in medicine, engineering, computing, teaching, business and journalism; there were also secretaries, auto mechanics, electricians and welders.

5.7 The great majority had worked in their countries of origin, usually for several years and often in positions of responsibility. 85 per cent spoke good English. Most people spoke three or more languages and some as many as seven or eight. The sample also had a wide range of leisure and home skills, such as dressmaking, songwriting, radio production, furniture design, theatre, counselling, fundraising and advocacy.

5.8 Several other studies show refugees and asylum seekers as highly qualified from their home countries, more so than the population of Britain in general (e.g. Home Office, 1995; Bloch, 1996; Islington Somali Community Survey, 1994). There is also however a substantial minority of refugees with no education at all (e.g. Refugee Skills Analysis, Brent and Harrow, 1996; Home Office study of Vietnamese). Skills levels vary according to national and social origin of the refugees and also gender, with men typically more educated than women.

5.9 Valuable as information from these surveys has been, it now urgently needs to be updated by systematic audits of skills within refugee and asylum seeker communities. This auditing process needs both to go wider, covering a broader range of people within those communities, and to go deeper by exploring the differentiation within them – for example between nationalities and between genders. The GLA is now considering plans for an audit of women refugees' skills and, building on this important first step, could together with the LDA help to launch a more general series of skills audits. To get the best results, these audits should so far as possible actively involve refugees and asylum seekers themselves.

Employment status

5.10 All studies of refugees show extremely high rates of unemployment. In the Skillsnet research (London Research Centre 1999), three quarters of the sample were economically active and of these, 51 per cent were unemployed. The current London Regional Development Plan contains an estimate (based on Skillsnet) that 169,000 refugees are economically active in London, of whom approximately 86,000 are unemployed. The real figure might be higher, because the Skillsnet sample was probably more qualified than most. The national Home Office study (1995), which excluded asylum seekers, found an unemployment rate of 57 per cent.

5.11 Unemployment rates for refugees and asylum seekers vary considerably between their national and ethnic groups. A survey of 949 of them in Haringey found, for instance, that the proportion unemployed ranged from 29 per cent among 'Other Africans' and 43 per cent among Bangladeshi and Pakistani respondents, to 84 and 93 per cent respectively for Kurdish and Somali respondents who were the two largest groups identified in the sample (LB Haringey 1997).²⁴ Such national differences clearly call for more detailed examination in further research. But no subgroup among refugees and asylum seekers escapes unemployment rates far above those recorded nationally or regionally, while in aggregate - as noted above - their unemployment rate is regularly found to be a multiple of the figure prevailing in the wider labour market. Across the total sample in the 1997 Haringey survey for example, four out of five refugees and asylum seekers were unemployed.

5.12 Both Home Office and Skillsnet surveys show that progress into the job market is extremely slow. Even after five to eight years, as table 5.2 shows, more than half the Skillsnet sample were still unemployed. To put this in perspective, the unemployment rate for London at the time of the survey, based on government claimant figures, was five per cent.

Table 5.2: Unemployment by length of stay in Britain

Less than 2 years	2 years, less than 5 years	5 years, less than 8 years	8 years or more	ALL GROUPS
%	%	%	%	%
85	70	51	22	51

Source: Refugee Skillsnet, 1999. The sample covers London.

5.13 The Skillsnet study also showed 68 per cent of asylum seekers were unemployed, compared to 42 per cent of people with refugee status. Command of English eased the problem but did not resolve it: while 75 per cent of people with poor English were unemployed, so too were 48 per cent of those who spoke English well.

5.14 Research shows that the main barriers to employment, according to refugees and asylum seekers themselves, are as follows:

- language
- lack of work experience in Britain
- for asylum seekers: uncertainty about immigration status
- discrimination against refugee and asylum seeker status *per se*
- racial discrimination
- lack of information about labour market and how to find jobs
- shortage of work (probably reflecting experience of earlier years)
- skills not usable in Britain without re-training
- lack of recognition of qualifications from abroad
- for asylum seekers: difficulty in obtaining National Insurance number and/or documents showing right to work

5.15 The top four items emerged as probably the most important. It is worth noting that the survey found discrimination against refugees or asylum seekers on grounds of this status was mentioned by respondents even more often as a problem than racial factors – though the latter were also significant. Research by the Home Office has shown that discrimination against refugees *per se* (as distinct from race) is more likely to be mentioned as a barrier by people who have stayed here longer. Unemployment is still very high, even among people who have been here a long time, speak good English and have refugee status.

- 5.16 Most research, with the exception of the Home Office survey, shows refugees and asylum seekers work in low-paid jobs well below their level of skill. The Home Office study found that no one in the survey had ever turned down a job. A study of qualified refugees (Low Pay Unit 1997) found those out of work were prepared to take low-paid jobs below the level of their skills and qualifications, provided they got a living wage. People who do not find employment often turn to voluntary work.
- 5.17 Refugees generally find jobs through friends and community groups and make less use than the general population of more formal channels. In the Skillsnet sample, quite a few had found a job by contacting an employer directly, and many people had looked for work in Britain that made use of their leisure and home skills. This shows that refugees use initiative and flexibility in the search for work.

Pursuit of career

- 5.18 In the Skillsnet survey, less than half of respondents had looked for work in their fields (although the majority had looked for some kind of work). The main reason for not seeking career jobs was that they needed to sort out the basics first, such as housing, legal status, English language and benefits. This process could take a remarkably long time: it was mentioned as an obstacle by half of those who had been here more than two years, and by nearly one in five of those here for more than five years.
- 5.19 Extra difficulties await those who wish to pursue a 'career job': that is, a job in the field they had chosen prior to fleeing as a refugee. The main obstacle they faced was lack of recognition of their qualifications.
- 5.20 The success rate of those who sought career jobs was still very low, even after several years. After five to eight years, three quarters of those who tried had still failed to find work in their fields, at any level. Only after eight years or more was there significant evidence of progress; by that time, nearly half of those who tried had found work in their fields, though often at a lower level than before.

The employers' perspective

- 5.21 Employers do not know how long asylum seekers will be allowed to stay. The bad image imposed on asylum seekers by the media is also likely to affect their employment chances. In addition, some advice agencies say many employers are unaware of refugees' and asylum seekers' right to apply for work after six months.
- 5.22 Section 8 of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 imposed criminal sanctions to deter employers from recruiting illegal workers. Research by the Commission for Racial Equality suggests that employers often misunderstand Section 8. The Refugee Council has found many employers have problems trying to check on an applicant's right to

work: documentation is confusing, photographs are lacking, and it is hard getting information from the Home Office (mbA, 1999). Whilst the 1999 Act requires that Section 8 is not operated in a racially discriminatory way, one major employer said in the mBA study that it had led the company to adopt a policy of not employing refugees.

Training: access to information and delivery of courses

5.23 Many refugees go on courses of a practical nature, other than language courses. However, neither the Home Office nor the Skillsnet research found evidence that such training helped them to get jobs. This shows how important it is for refugees to obtain good advice and information about courses and careers in Britain; if they do not, they can waste months or even years of their lives. Two other studies similarly found a need for better and more coordinated information on availability of courses, training regulations and funding (Africa Educational Trust, 1998; British Library, 1998). When the Skillsnet survey asked people about information needs, they said they particularly wanted to know about

- work experience schemes for the unemployed
- job-seeking methods in Britain
- Courses in Accreditation of Prior Learning or experience (APL)
- how to re-qualify professionally

5.24 The latter 1990s saw growth in initiatives specifically to meet refugee needs, such as

- RAGU (Refugee and Assessment Guidance Unit) based at the University of North London: arranges work placements for refugees in London
- Employability Forum: bringing together employers and qualified professionals from refugee communities.

5.25 In 1999, as a more comprehensive information service to help refugees and asylum seekers find work or training, the London Research Centre (now part of the GLA) designed and launched a website known as Skillsnet. This offers a range of facilities including links to advice agencies, guidance on searching for jobs and training courses in the UK, and suggestions about child care. Focused on London, it was developed with the support of the Peabody Trust as part of the output from the Skillsnet study described above. Though the Refugee Council assumed responsibility for the site shortly after its launch, both parties may feel that long-term capacity to maintain it is more likely to be found within the GLA group. The Authority may therefore wish to negotiate its transfer from the Refugee Council.

5.26 Delivery of training services for refugees and asylum seekers has been coordinated as from summer 2000 by the Training and Education Section (TES) of the Refugee Council. This major project was launched with £3 million support from the European

Structural Funds (ESF) but its contribution depends on matching finance from domestic UK sources. When a bid by the Refugee Council for matching grant in 2001/02 was rejected by the Employment Service, therefore, the whole TES project was put at risk.

5.27 The Refugee Council has approached both the LDA and the GLA for substitute funding to help it secure the vulnerable ESF grant. Subject to established procurement procedures the LDA has powers to provide some grant aid from its Skills Development Fund, which the GLA itself could possibly supplement from its own modest resources. Given the crucial role of training services in a London-wide strategy on refugees and asylum seekers, both authorities will wish to explore every avenue for rescuing the TES from its immediate financial crisis. In the longer term, however, the best means of securing its future would undoubtedly be stable support from central government, whose recent shift of thinking on the economics of migration is exactly complemented by this training project.

Interface between schools and London labour market

5.28 Refugees in the 16-25 age cohort who arrived in the UK during their last two years of compulsory education are particularly vulnerable in the labour market. Many of this group will have found it difficult to access school places. Sometimes this is because they or their parents/carers cannot get timely information about admission procedures, but often it is because schools are reluctant to admit students for whom they cannot offer meaningful education. A study conducted by Camden LEA in 1999 indicated that at least 50 per cent of 14-19 year old refugees in that local authority had no contact with any education provider.

5.29 Even where they do get a place at this point in the school system, approaching Key Stage 4, their chances of benefitting from it may be diminished by a range of factors that can for example include

- language barriers
- difficulty in catching up with GCSE coursework
- unfamiliarity with school procedures and culture, including UK teaching methods such as scientific learning through experimentation

5.30 For most children in the host community, parents are likely to offer some degree of advocacy, guidance and careers advice. Refugee parents are of course likely to play the same role, even if some may find advocacy difficult - for instance because of uncertainty about their rights, or language problems. But in London especially, one group of refugee pupils arriving between ages 14 and 16 cannot benefit at all from such parental support. This is the growing number who are unaccompanied children. They are disproportionately concentrated in London and are not subject to dispersal by NASS, as the 1999 asylum legislation preserved local authorities' Children Act duty to care for them.

- 5.31 Imaginative efforts have been made by some London LEAs and schools to redress the severe disadvantage that may threaten younger refugees entering the London labour market after they have arrived at this late stage of the school education process. One LEA for example has run a one year modular Access to GCSE course for students who arrived aged 15-plus with little or no English. Almost all students have progressed to further education from this course.
- 5.32 Again, a 1999 study of refugee education (GLA forthcoming 2001) noted that an inner London secondary school, in collaboration with both its own LEA and the neighbouring borough, had established a special unit for refugee and asylum seeker children aged 15-plus with very limited command of English (level 1 of the English as Additional Language or EAL classification). The unit offered intensive EAL teaching together with basic maths, IT and science and awarded a certificate of achievement on completion. Crucially it was conceived not as an alternative but as a supplement to mainstream schooling. Its students were thus encouraged to go back afterwards into the mainstream system, more confident and better equipped to learn. But it had places for just 22 students at a time. Such provision for the 14-16 year old age group appeared even more limited in other areas of the capital.
- 5.33 With minimal net cost, the Government could act on two fronts to address this issue and thereby enhance these young refugees' access to worthwhile jobs, which can be expected to offer real long-term benefits to London and the country - both economically and socially.
- 5.34 Firstly the DES should issue guidance for LEAs and schools on the provision of education to refugee/bilingual students arriving in the UK late in their school careers, which so far it has not done.
- 5.35 Its funding regime, secondly, has to allow for the possibility that effective responses to such need – intense but often uneven geographically and over time – may be best organised strategically at LEA-wide level, or jointly between authorities, rather than by individual schools. LEAs must therefore be left with enough funding to undertake initiatives of this kind if necessary. The DES should take this requirement into account when it sets ratios between LEA and devolved school funding, whether for specific grant like the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) or in defining the wider regime for education revenue funding due to emerge during 2001/02 as part of the Government's reform of local government finance.

Recommendations: a strategic approach

- 5.36 For many refugees, the search for work is like an obstacle course with no finishing line. Even after eight years or more, nearly one quarter are still unemployed (London

Research Centre 1999). Yet these are people whose skills could be valuable in Britain. The average cost of re-training a qualified doctor from overseas is £3,500, compared to an estimated cost of £200,000 for a new medical student. It is thus encouraging to see that the integration strategy announced by the Government in late 2000 (Home Office 2000b:7) envisages NASS support for *'programmes to help appropriately qualified and trained refugees to return to their original or related careers'*.

5.37 But the Government integration strategy refers only to 'refugees', and addresses only some of the many barriers to employment found among London refugees and asylum seekers. It talks about training only as a route back to work for people with previously established careers, and in the context of two specific Government programmes – New Deal and Work Based Learning for Adults.

5.38 A sensible employment strategy will embrace asylum seekers as well as those with refugee status and ELR, acknowledging that the six-month target for asylum decisions is unlikely to be achieved for a long time. Fair, fast decisions must be combined with equal opportunities for those allowed to stay. Furthermore, a strategy reflecting the GLA's values and seeking real long-term integration will address the needs of the unskilled, as well as the highly qualified. It will open up training to London's refugee and asylum seeker community as a whole.

Recommendation 10: The government should extend eligibility for educational grants and loans to asylum seekers who have permission to work.

5.39 The Audit Commission points out that the GLA and family are well placed to encourage a coordinated, pan-London approach to the employment and training of refugees (Audit Commission 2000b). Its comments match key conclusions from the Refugee Skillsnet study (London Research Centre 1999). They also underline the case for approaching the Refugee Council to discuss whether the Skillsnet website, at present under its aegis, could more effectively be maintained within the GLA group. This suggests a two-pronged GLA strategy on refugee employment and training, supported by the Skillsnet website:

Recommendation 11: The GLA and LDA should consider developing a coordinated, pan-London approach to helping refugees and asylum seekers into the London labour market, with two main themes:

- *coordinated information: eg. advice on careers, information on childcare services*
- *action on training: building closer links between employers, trainers and advice agencies; encouraging more and better work experience schemes - possibly linked with the Work Based Learning Scheme of the Department for Education and Skills (DES).*

Recommendation 12: The GLA should discuss with the Refugee Council whether the task of maintaining the Skillsnet website, designed to help refugees and asylum seekers find training and employment, should be transferred to the GLA group.

- 5.40 Employers have suggested ways to improve the working of Section 8 of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996, such as standardising and simplifying paperwork and providing the employer with a helpline number (mbA, 1999). The GLA through the LDA could help take these ideas forward:

Recommendation 13: The GLA and LDA should explore how the operation of Section 8 of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 is affecting refugees' and asylum seekers' access to the London labour market, and jointly with London employers' bodies consider how to pursue their ideas for making it work more efficiently and more fairly for employees

- 5.41 Through its overall policy towards refugees and asylum seekers, and any associated media strategy, the GLA may be able to foster a more balanced and informed attitude towards them. This could help challenge the 'bogus asylum seeker' image which may have encouraged an attitude of suspicion among employers - as among the public generally - and hence the discrimination against refugees and asylum seekers which they find a major obstacle to employment (para. 5.14 above).

- 5.42 Particularly for children who arrive seeking asylum in the UK within the last two years of compulsory education, chances of access to the jobs market can easily be blighted by exclusion from meaningful school education for reasons that arise directly from the fact that they are refugees. The DES has a vital role to play in making sure that LEAs in London (as elsewhere) can learn from and develop the good practice in refugee education already pioneered by some authorities and schools.

Recommendation 14: The GLA should press

- (a) the DES to draw up and circulate clear guidance to LEAs and schools on the education of asylum seekers who arrive between the ages of 14 and 19*
- (b) the DES and Department for Transport Local Government & the Regions (DTLR) to allow fully for the potential strategic role of local authorities in supporting the education of this vulnerable group, when the Government sets rules for dividing resources between LEAs and schools as part of its impending reform of local government finance.*

Chapter 6 Policing, equalities and community safety

Refugees: Britain's current 'outsiders'

- 6.1 Refugees and asylum seekers are generally marked out from the host community by ethnic characteristics. They are always marked out by the fact that their right to citizenship is called into question by key institutions of state, or at some point has been. Given moreover the recent sustained barrage of political and other public comment on them, their rights and their motives, it is hardly surprising that they have become the paradigm of the 'outsider' in 21st century Britain – all the more so perhaps as net immigration of other kinds is now minimal.
- 6.2 If a city's refugee and asylum seeker community made up one in 200 of its population, policies adopted towards them would have a significant effect on its community relations. In London where they make up more like one in 20 - turning its role as city of sanctuary into one of its leading social characteristics - such policies have massive implications for equalities, community relations and public safety on its streets which are among the responsibilities laid on the GLA by its founding Act.
- 6.3 Other recent legislation highlights the linkage between public policy towards refugees and asylum seekers, their rights, and community relations. The Human Rights Act 2000 offers redress to individuals whose rights have been or might be abused. Already cited in support of some asylum applications, the Act could more generally offer a remedy to refugees and asylum seekers who can show their rights are infringed by the asylum regime. In August 2001 for instance, asylum applicants cited the Act in their bid for judicial review of a NASS decision to disperse them to accommodation remote from the rest of their family.²⁵
- 6.4 The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, making it illegal for any '*public authority ... to do any act which constitutes discrimination*', might seem to offer further protection against UK official abuse of refugees' and asylum seekers' rights. Its general ban on discrimination is moreover important for the GLA, its functional bodies and many of their leading partners in London since it marks out guidelines for the way they look at issues raised by the presence of refugees and asylum seekers. But the Act itself partly demolishes the protection it ostensibly offers to these people, when it goes on to declare explicitly that Government ministers or their agents are not prohibited from discriminating '*... against another person on grounds of nationality or ethnic or national origins in carrying out immigration and nationality functions*'.²⁶ In any case, the racism this Act is supposed to tackle may not be all the only kind of discrimination refugees and asylum seekers have to contend with.

Refugees and race

- 6.5 When the refugee is defined as 'outsider', race and racism explain only part of what is happening. As this report's analysis of barriers to employment has shown (para. 5.12), refugees with long experience of rejection in the labour market themselves tell us that - over and above any racial discrimination - what they encounter is prejudice against them on account of their citizenship status, or perceived lack of it.
- 6.6 Perception of refugees thus shows a distinct political and institutional dynamic not necessarily applying to any particular group defined by race. Crucially it is a dynamic driven at least in part by explicit state measures - legislative and administrative - that are promoted officially as a defence of public and national interests. This is one reason why using vouchers for NASS subsistence payments is so significant. Regardless of the user's race or skin colour, the voucher gives official expression to the alien quality or 'otherness' of that person when they are out shopping - that is, at one of the few collective, publicly visible moments still left in an increasingly individualised culture.
- 6.7 But if negative attitudes to refugees and asylum seekers cannot be reduced simply to racism and racial discrimination, they are certainly intertwined with the issue of race. Precisely because refugees have been made the paradigm of the 'outsider', policy towards them now plays a pivotal part in shaping public debate and popular views on racial discrimination and interracial relations generally. So if discrimination, hostility, and even violence towards refugees were to become established in London's culture and daily life, this would inevitably blight the GLA's chances of success in its basic goals of celebrating diversity and promoting racial equality across the capital.

Asylum policy and racist crime: is there a link?

- 6.8 Experience in recent years seems to confirm the link between policy specifically towards refugees and asylum seekers and race relations in general.²⁷ During the twelve months to April 2000 recorded race hate crimes in London doubled from the previous year's figure to reach more than 23,000, of which 63 per cent were violent offences. This 1999/2000 tally of reported race crimes in London exceeded the 1998/99 total for Britain as a whole. 'Racial incidents' as recorded for the Metropolitan Police District fell back in 2000/01 by 12 per cent, but the true change in offences per head may have been much smaller since boundary alterations cut its resident population by more than half that percentage. Across London in 2000/01, again, around 13,000 or 63 per cent of recorded race hate crimes were violent - implying an average of 36 violent racial attacks a day.
- 6.9 Racist offences on this scale may of course in part reflect better recording of these crimes, and in part a racist backlash against the Macpherson Report and the reforms it proposed. But leading black commentators argued that partly too, they reflected the

way national policy towards refugees and asylum seekers was being made in 1999 and 2000.

- 6.10 In April 2000 T&GWU general secretary Bill Morris argued that the current Government had used *'the language of confrontation regarding asylum seekers'* and had thus *'given life to the racists'*. Objecting in particular to its voucher scheme, Mr Morris went on: *'The mood music is playing a hostile theme for black Britons but it is the Home Office, and indeed the ministers, who are playing their part in the orchestra.'* He was backed by the National Assembly Against Racism, Society of Black Lawyers and the 1990 Trust, an equal rights campaign, asserting that by their approach to asylum seekers the major political parties had created *'a climate of racism and xenophobia'*. After the spring 2000 elections Trevor Phillips, Labour leader in the GLA, asserted that the Conservative leader's position on asylum seekers had made extremists *'feel respectable again'*.²⁸
- 6.11 Events in the West Midlands, for example, seemed to bear out such concerns. The police force here recorded a 50 per cent rise in racist incidents over the 12 months to April 2000. When in May 2000 the Birmingham Racial Attacks Monitoring Unit (BRAMU) reported that its caseload had doubled in nine months, its spokesperson Maxi Hayles attributed the rise partly to hostility stirred by the Macpherson report, but also to the way politicians had used the asylum seekers issue in recent local elections: *'People develop these nationalistic feelings and they think it's open season, that they have been given the green light ...'*²⁹
- 6.12 What motivates racist crime is by its nature hard to show empirically. Direct evidence to prove the link asserted in previous paragraphs could be gathered only by a major research effort, beyond the scope of the present report. There is however circumstantial evidence of this link in the level of violence levelled against one of the largest communities in London that combines refugee status with Black African origins.
- 6.13 London's Somali community has faced a particularly high level of violence. Over the 18 months to September 2000 more than one-fifth of 480 families suffering racial incidents of all kinds had been Somali, the Southall Monitoring Group reported, suggesting they had been particularly targeted. The Group's director Suresh Grover commented that Somalis *'suffer a lot of racial harassment ... Somalis are seen as easy targets because they don't have the support groups that other communities have. They are treated in the worst way where accommodation is concerned.'* The head of one organisation seeking to fill the gap mentioned by Mr Grover, the Islington Somali Community Centre, added: *'The Somali community is only starting to understand racism. They are very independent and strong but racism is now a fact of life.'*³⁰

- 6.14 The GLA election in May 2000 saw the British National Party (BNP) winning seven per cent in the City and East constituency. In July 2000 it went on to win 26 per cent of the vote in a council by-election in Bexley, pushing the Conservative party into third place.³¹ In the 2001 General Election it stood 14 candidates in London, coming fifth in votes per London candidate behind the three main parties and Greens. While the link between BNP political support and recent trends in public debate on asylum policy may be difficult to demonstrate objectively, its leader Nick Griffin is in no doubt about it: *'The asylum seeker issue has been great for us. This issue legitimises us'*.³²
- 6.15 Signs of the potent relationship between asylum policy and racism extend right across the UK, putting thousands of refugees and asylum applicants at risk – and seriously jeopardising the Government's dispersal strategy (see Chapter 3 above). It emerged for example during summer 2000 when seven families of destitute Roma refugees, who said they had suffered racial abuse and threats of violence, were moved by LB Hammersmith & Fulham out of Glasgow's Sighthill estate and returned to London.³³ While they had been placed there in accommodation arranged through the LASC, other large-scale placements on the same estate were made by NASS. A spate of harassment and violence against Sighthill's asylum seeker residents continued through the following year, with *'more than 100 incidents'* reported for the eight months to August 2001 when it culminated in the murder of Kurdish asylum seeker Firsat Yildiz.³⁴
- 6.16 The relationship between asylum policy and racism was identified clearly in a July 2001 report to the UN Human Rights Committee by a group of civil rights organisations including Liberty and Amnesty International. *'Negative presentation of asylum seekers'*, the report stated, *'has not only led to direct attacks on asylum seekers but also an underlying greater hostility towards all those from ethnic minority communities, and heightened racial tensions. In our view, the recent riots in Oldham and Bradford are to an extent directly linked to the above.'*³⁵

Police response

- 6.17 Policing is by no means society's sole remedy for the threat posed by hostility to refugees and asylum seekers. But clearly it is an important defence against such attitudes and the damage they can do. What view of the issue has the Metropolitan Police taken so far?
- 6.18 Prompted in particular by the Macpherson Report, the police service has made efforts both nationally and within London to rethink its approach to racial crime and 'hate crime' in general. In September 2000 the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) launched a guide on how police should deal with hate crime (ACPO 2000), to supersede its former *Good Practice Guide for Police Response to Racial Incidents*. The new guide was mostly drafted by the Metropolitan Police. Within the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), the Diversity Training Support Unit has produced a handbook for

officers on London's diverse ethnic and religious communities (MPS 2000a). More broadly – and again in explicit response to Macpherson – the MPS adopted recently a new 'diversity strategy' entitled *Protect and Respect* (MPS 2000b) through which, according to the then Commissioner Sir Paul Condon, the Met aimed '*to change the way we operate to better meet the needs of London's many different ethnic minority communities.*'³⁶

- 6.19 Until quite recently, the assumption within the Met was apparently that this new work on racially motivated crime could encompass any threat to public safety and community relations arising from attitudes to refugees and asylum seekers. For example a 1999 MPS survey of policing issues at borough level related to the presence of refugees and asylum seekers resulted in a low-key statement, implying that it called for relatively little police input.³⁷ But as analysis here has suggested, hostility and discrimination against these groups may generate threats that are not necessarily reducible to race crime as such.
- 6.20 That the presence of a refugee and asylum seeker community can give rise to specific policing needs has now been recognised by the MPS Diversity Directorate. One of its senior officers was on the ACPO working party which prepared a new national guide, published in February 2001, on policing issues arising from the presence of refugees and asylum seekers (ACPO 2001). The guide reflects a realistic sense of needs arising as they arrive in a locality, recognising – for instance - that police forces must begin working to ease local tensions from the time when asylum applicants first arrive, rather than waiting until they get a positive decision on their claim.
- 6.21 Apart from contributing to national guidance, the Met Police is trying to promote borough-level action to tackle hate crime against asylum seekers and refugee communities. Its borough units are encouraged to build these communities' policing and protection needs into local crime and disorder strategies. In late 2000 the MPS Diversity Directorate launched a London-wide standing forum of borough-based police officers to discuss such issues, on which the MPA, CRE, Refugee Council, and UN High Commissioner for Refugees are also represented. By summer 2001 this was gathering examples of imaginative moves by some borough police units to make direct links with local refugee communities.
- 6.22 Threats stemming from outside hostility to refugee and asylum seeker groups have been so far at the focus of discussion here because they are large-scale and immediate, posing a severe risk of undermining community relations and public safety generally in London. But it should of course be recognised that criminal behaviour occurs also within the refugee and asylum seeking population itself, giving rise to a further range of policing needs. An important example is the exposure of some women within that population to domestic violence, or to commercial sexual exploitation. Growing

concern about London's role as a centre for sexual trade involving refugee women prompted the Refugee Arrival Project during 2001 to organise a multi-agency seminar on 'Trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation'.³⁸

6.23 Whatever their policing needs at a given time, the presence of refugee and asylum seeking communities is now putting many forces outside London on the same learning curve as the MPS. A few are well advanced along it, for example Kent Police which - after disorder during 1999 in coastal towns where asylum seekers had been housed - made a thorough reappraisal of policing methods for dealing with such situations.³⁹ But if a country-wide system of reception and settlement is to work, as London's strategic interest requires, it is vital that good policing practice be disseminated from areas with greater experience to areas receiving asylum seekers where there is less experience. One opportunity to achieve this is planned discussion jointly between a number of police forces to keep the ACPO (2001) guide updated.

6.24 Moreover, while the MPS and its partners have made real progress towards identifying policing issues that arise from the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers, this work urgently needs to be taken further. Recent experiments by some borough police units in building contact with refugee and asylum seeker communities for example (see para.6.21), while often impressive, are inevitably also ad hoc, variable and patchy in their coverage. The Met Police, publishing in July 2001 a 'tool-kit' document for tackling hate crime, points out explicitly how to get guidance on supporting refugee and asylum seeker communities. But it is a brief reference, and the issue does not feature in a recent version of the more general MPS statement on policing and protecting diversity, *Protect and Respect*. (MPS 2001a, 2001b).

Administrative removal and relations with Immigration Service

6.25 Commenting on the Immigration and Asylum Bill when it went through Parliament, the Refugee Council drew attention in scathing terms to the draconian powers it conferred on the Immigration Service, acting for the Home Office to arrest and remove from the UK people whose asylum claim has failed (Refugee Council 2000). These are now law. The Refugee Council suggested that in some respects they exceeded police powers and, as the MPS notes, its Service Instructions give the Immigration Service primacy over the police in matters relating to immigration status, hence by implication to asylum status: '*Arrest of persons suspected of illegally entering the country (S24(1) Immigration Act 1971) is discretionary ... If arrested, Service Instructions state to contact the Immigration Service and act on their instructions.*'⁴⁰

6.26 What makes the powers and role of the Immigration Service a matter of urgent strategic significance for community relations in London, is that large-scale 'administrative removal' from the UK⁴¹ is a corner-stone of the asylum regime

introduced by the 1999 Act. In the new regime's first year to March 2001, the Home Office removed just over 8,000 failed asylum seekers compulsorily from the UK (two-thirds of the number it had planned).⁴² For 2001/02 however, the target for administrative removals has more than doubled to 30,000. It rises to 37,000 in 2002/03.

- 6.27 To meet these goals the Immigration Service is recruiting 500 enforcement officers nationally to take on a role hitherto played primarily by the police. The switch was piloted during 2000/01 by a project covering Newham and Barking & Dagenham, in which an Immigration Service team took on the task of detecting and removing failed asylum seekers. Both the Service and the MPS deemed the project successful.
- 6.28 Following up this pilot scheme, the first of the new Immigration Service teams started operating in June 2001 across eight London boroughs: Barnet, Brent, Ealing, Hackney, Hounslow, Richmond, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest. By October 2001 four teams, each 16 strong, will be arresting and removing failed asylum seekers across all London boroughs. Working under a 'service agreement' with the MPS, these Immigration Service staff have trained at the Met's Hendon Training School and are said to work within the 'spirit' of the Police & Criminal Evidence Act.⁴³
- 6.29 But the Home Office goal of large-scale coercive expulsions takes these enforcement teams into uncharted waters, which the Met Police may well have to navigate alongside them. The 'successful' pilot project in Newham and Barking & Dagenham in 2000/01 was in fact specifically targeted on *'low-risk cases ... where there is no need for a police officer to be present'*. Similarly the Immigration Service's full London-wide operation from summer 2001 is aimed at *'lower-tier'* failed asylum seekers, and an internal MPS account comments: *'A risk assessment will be made on each asylum seeker and police will still accompany immigration officers if an arrest is deemed to be dangerous'*.⁴⁴
- 6.30 Even if the dispersal process picks up momentum, Home Office targets for administrative removal from 2001/02 onwards exceed the likely numbers of failed asylum seekers outside London, given that many new applicants are avoiding dispersal (Chapter 3). Total enforcement operations required in London per annum may thus run into thousands. If present targets are seriously pursued, Immigration Service officers will almost certainly need to make regular forcible incursions into the heart of many of London's ethnic minority communities - backed up by Met officers effectively under their instructions - to remove failed applicants who in many cases will have formed local links. There must be a serious risk that this will at some stage threaten the harmonious community relations in London which the Mayor, boroughs, refugee organisations, MPS, and other GLA partners want to achieve.

Response – other service areas

6.31 Other services besides the Metropolitan Police have a part to play in London-wide strategic action to curb the risk of discrimination or hostility against refugees and asylum seekers, and so help resist the threat to community safety posed by antagonism of this kind. Some obvious examples are:

- *housing*: the risk of attacks and community tension may depend partly on where asylum seekers are accommodated, so authorities may be able to help by working with police to identify areas harbouring known racists with a history of violence which should therefore be avoided (cf. paras. 6.9, 6.11 above)
- *employment*: strategies of the kind discussed in Chapter 5 above can play an important part, for instance by
 - directly challenging employment discrimination and associated attitudes
 - publicising refugee workers' social and economic contribution
 - promoting neighbourhood projects that involve local refugees or asylum seekers working with other residents for common long-term benefit
- *community development*: support for refugee organisations that can help build confidence and exchange information, enabling refugees and asylum seekers to deal themselves with these threats to their rights and well-being.

Conclusion and recommendations

6.32 Given the core GLA aims of celebrating diversity, promoting equality, building good community relations and ensuring community safety, policy adopted by London partners and by national political leaders towards refugees and asylum seekers is of urgent concern to the Mayor. Policies or attitudes towards refugees, where they work against those core GLA goals, may do so partly because they link up with racism but also in ways that are specific to the refugee situation. More is needed, therefore, than a commitment to combat racism. Nevertheless commentators across a wide political spectrum – significantly including the BNP itself – share the perception that the huge volume of reported racist attacks, especially in London, has been partly inspired by the way politicians have treated the asylum issue.

6.33 The Metropolitan Police, moving beyond its recent work on tackling race crime, is beginning to explore what policing response may be needed specifically to make sure community safety is not put at risk by hostile and vindictive attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers. This discussion needs to address the potentially inflammatory role assigned to the Immigration Service by the Home Office and the 1999 Act. But other

service areas too, apart from policing, the GLA could help encourage service providers and other partners to consider how they could promote its core goals through their treatment of London's refugees and asylum seekers.

6.34 A number of recommendations follow:

Recommendation 15: The MPA should be asked to develop as a matter of urgency a strategy to meet the policing and protection needs of refugee and asylum seeker communities in London

- (a) building on the ACPO guide on policing needs of these communities and the recent pan-London initiatives of the MPS Diversity Directorate, and*
- (b) working in liaison with relevant partners to include: refugee community organisations, the Refugee Council, the ALG/LASC (with borough specialist officers as appropriate), Home Office, and the Immigration Law Practitioners' Association or other appropriate representatives of asylum lawyers.*

Recommendation 16: The Home Office should be asked as a matter of urgency to join the GLA and MPA - with observers agreed between these participants – to discuss the implications of its policy on asylum seeker removals for community relations in London; the intended enforcement role of the Immigration Service, especially in London; and the case for reviewing current policy on these issues.

Recommendation 17: The result of work on policing strategy and on the proposed review of administrative removal policy (recommendations 15 and 16 above) should be shared with reception areas for asylum seekers outside London by

- conveying it to these areas via the Local Government Association (LGA)*
- seeking the agreement of NASS – or any future reception and settlement agency – to incorporate relevant proposals into its dispersal strategy*
- feeding it into ACPO work to promote best-practice policing for refugee communities.*

Recommendation 18: London boroughs, through the ALG, should be encouraged to build the policing and protection needs of refugee and asylum seeker communities into their local crime and disorder plans, working with Metropolitan Police borough units.

Section 7 Health

Introduction: refugee health needs

7.1 More insecure, vulnerable and socially excluded, arguably, than any other category of London's population except the street homeless - and far more numerous than them - refugees and asylum seekers test critically the GLA's ability to fulfil its statutory duty to promote the health of Londoners. Whatever the GLA does to meet this duty, work to address refugee health needs will be a key part of it.

7.2 Key concerns about the health of people arriving to seek asylum in the UK may be summarised under the following headings.

- Access to health care: Though they have full entitlement to NHS care, getting equal access to health services is a basic and pervasive problem for refugees and asylum seekers. It has several aspects:
 - weakness of procedures for initial assessment of health status at port of entry
 - language: need for translation and interpreting support
 - cost: difficulty in taking up rights to free or subsidised treatment, for example because of cumbersome HC1/HC2 form-filling procedure
 - lack of familiarity with UK health services and insufficient information about them in relevant languages (covering for example entitlement to treatment and confidentiality)
 - primary care: in particular, difficulty in getting registered with GPs
 - lack of background understanding of refugee issues among some NHS staff
 - need for services adapted to specific needs of women, children, cultural communities, and other groups within refugee population
- Refugee experience: The experience of fleeing traumatic events in their home country; travelling under harsh or risky conditions to the UK; and then living in London as a highly marginalised exile, may leave refugees and asylum seekers exposed to health problems such as
 - physical injuries from war or torture
 - exposure to communicable diseases in transit, for example in refugee camps
 - mental health conditions arising from their experiences before arrival
 - mental or medical disorders arising from insecurity, anxiety and deprivation in this country, with some studies showing that incidence of such problems may be greater after a period of residence in the UK than on arrival.

- Health problems related to country of origin or ethnic group: Some people arriving as refugees have specific conditions reflecting their country of origin, its culture or their ethnic identity, rather than the refugee experience as such. Examples include:
 - inherited disorders such as sickle cell disease, beta thalassaemia
 - problems associated with poor countries eg. tuberculosis, HIV, lack of immunisation
 - culturally-based conditions such as female genital mutilation.

7.3 Apart from these health needs and risks immediately affecting refugees and asylum seekers - including barriers to access arising from deficiencies in existing NHS practices - there are two other areas where organisational change by the NHS itself or other public agencies could enhance their health prospects in the longer term:

- Recruitment of refugees with relevant professional skills into health care roles
- Information and planning: deficiencies in services to refugees may arise because health authorities lack information about them, their communities and their health needs, which ought to be reflected in NHS planning. Such information is particularly hard to gather, given refugees' mobility (often enforced) and the anxiety they may feel about enquiries from officialdom. The solution lies in a combination of
 - improved procedures within the NHS itself, eg. ensuring follow-up of initial assessments, reliable transfer of records
 - better cooperation between agencies holding relevant information
 - giving refugee communities a say in identifying needs and planning services
 - new primary research on these communities, with their involvement.

Research and monitoring: the way forward

7.4 How these concerns can best be resolved is an issue which - compared with other service areas covered in this report - has been quite extensively explored. This is not to say no more research is called for. On the contrary, a key recommendation from recent reviews of work on refugees' and asylum seekers' health is that further research be undertaken to gather more comprehensive data on the issue. But these reviews, carried out by large teams including health care professionals, have investigated shortcomings in refugee health care much more fully than would be possible in this short report and have put forward a wide range of proposals for tackling them.

7.5 The present section will therefore focus mainly on proposals they have already put 'on the agenda', asking which of them the Mayor could pursue - directly in a few cases because the measures in question lie within GLA spheres of responsibility, but most indirectly through partnership with the NHS and other agencies.

7.6 Where proposals for improving refugee health care are specifically for action by NHS agencies within their own sphere of operation, the Mayor may nevertheless want to ask

his Health Commission to consider how their implementation in London could periodically be monitored and – where necessary – any lack of progress on them could be raised with the NHS and Department of Health. Refugees themselves would have to play a central part in any such exercise. One possible mechanism might be a sub-group of the Health Commission, including representatives of refugee organisations, which would review NHS progress in this area and report (say) twice yearly to the Commission.

Preceding work and the agenda for action

7.7 Three recent reviews of evidence in this area have been particularly helpful:

- a study with national remit by an Expert Working Group supported by the Health Education Authority (HEA Expert Working Group 1998)
- the Health of Londoners Project enquiry specifically into refugee health in London (Health of Londoners Project 1999)
- short survey of health issues in an Audit Commission report on implications of the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act for public services (Audit Commission 2000a).

7.8 The Coalition for Health and Regeneration, a partnership since subsumed in the Mayor's London Health Commission, also looked at policy measures to promote the health of London's refugees and asylum seekers as part of its *London Health Strategy* issued in spring 2000 (Coalition for Health and Regeneration 2000). Reviewing key recommendations from the 1999 Health of Londoners study, just cited, it condensed them down to five areas of 'immediate priority'⁴⁵. One recommendation was that more research be undertaken on refugees' demography, their needs, and the effectiveness of health interventions. The other four are broadly to do with access to health care: encouraging a better two-way flow of information between refugees and health service; tackling under-registration of refugees and asylum seekers with GPs; London-wide collaboration on services for translation, interpreting and advocacy; and examining how NHS Direct could best be used by refugee communities.

7.9 Bringing together the ideas raised by these successive reviews of evidence, it is possible to identify areas where the GLA has the greatest potential to help promote the health of refugee and asylum seeker communities. The focus generally will be on London; but some GLA initiatives on refugee health could relate to other regions since it is in the interest of London and its refugee population to make dispersal work better (Chapter 3 above) by radically improving conditions for dispersed asylum seekers in out-of-London regions. Issues on which the GLA could most usefully concentrate, via its Health Commission, are as follows:

- (a) New primary research on the demography and health needs of refugee and asylum seeker communities, which can be most productive and timely if it directly involves them.

- (b) Promoting a better flow of information to the NHS about the size, make-up and needs of refugee and asylum seeker communities, from local and national public agencies responsible for services to refugees and asylum seekers in London including any available information on particularly marginalised groups such as 'voucher-only' asylum seekers. This may also call for improved information-sharing between these agencies.
- (c) Encouraging change internally by the NHS to improve access to its services for refugees and asylum seekers, such as
- preparing consistent materials in relevant languages about services offered, how to use them, costs and free service entitlement, and patients' rights (which possibly could be produced centrally with space for insertion of local NHS details)
 - appropriate training for NHS staff
 - setting up London-wide NHS facilities for translation, interpreting and advocacy, which could build on the pan-London language plan being developed by the London Regional Observatory of the NHS
 - taking steps to ensure refugees and asylum seekers can get primary care - for example by enhanced capitation fees for GPs under local development schemes, or by setting up a specialist team offering primary care to highly-mobile households (see Audit Commission 2000a)
 - considering how services may need to adapt to needs of specific groups within the refugee and asylum seeker population
 - creating channels to consult refugees and asylum seekers on these changes.
- (d) Encouraging GLA partners to help with disseminating information about the NHS to refugee and asylum seeker communities – in which for example borough front-line services, the voluntary sector, NASS and other Government agencies could all play a part.
- (e) Development of health education programmes for refugees and asylum seekers, designed in collaboration with those communities.
- (f) Enabling refugees (and asylum seekers, pending the asylum decision) themselves to move into health care roles where they already have the necessary professional skills, or can readily develop them.

Role of refugee community organisations (RCOs)

7.10 At several points in the foregoing list of key issues for GLA action, participation by refugees and asylum seekers themselves is crucial. Whilst it is important also to allow for those who are 'non-joiners', refugee community organisations (RCOs) provide in general the most effective way to achieve this participation. In its 1999 report for

instance the Health of Londoners Project emphasised RCOs' potential role in helping to plan and deliver NHS services, and in developing programmes to train refugees as community healthcare workers, in liaison with London's 'health authorities, professional bodies and education consortia'.

- 7.11 The Authority may feel it is particularly important to involve RCOs with its work on refugees' and asylum seekers' health, given their potential generally for helping the GLA to secure its goals (see Chapter 8) and in view of the specific Audit Commission recommendation that the GLA and ALG support their development by ensuring they have access to 'London-wide funding opportunities' (Audit Commission 2000b).
- 7.12 The study in 1998 backed by the Health Education Authority also pointed out the importance of supporting RCOs - calling on 'local health authorities and other voluntary agencies' (sic) to help them set up and find funding (HEA Expert Working Group 1998). This study envisaged RCOs getting involved directly in promoting mental health for members of their communities (through 'education, destigmatisation and peer support') and possibly in delivering health promotion services more broadly. Again the report urged that 'refugee health professionals' be given opportunities to train for advocacy and interpreting roles, or to re-enter the workplace as fully-fledged NHS staff after going through appropriate clinical placements and professional examinations.
- 7.13 Schemes to help refugees and asylum seekers with health skills to enter employment with the NHS, advocated by the HEA report, have already been pioneered on a limited scale within London for doctors and nursing staff. The GLA could encourage the NHS to expand such schemes, guided if possible by skills audits within refugee and asylum seeker communities to identify the professional capacity available (see Chapter 5). Besides the direct benefit of these schemes to patients and to the individual employees concerned, their effect in demonstrating potential gains from bringing refugees into the labour market could extend well beyond the health sector.

Recommendations

- 7.14 Recommended initiatives by the Mayor and GLA to promote the health of London's refugees and asylum seekers - presumably to be routed mostly through his Health Commission – are as follows:

Recommendation 19: The GLA should examine how its own research and data analysis capacity might be deployed to help carry out studies of the demography of London's refugee and asylum seeker population, their health needs and how the NHS and other agencies could best respond to those needs, so far as possible engaging these communities themselves.

Recommendation 20: The GLA should explore with LASC, London boroughs, the LGA and NASS, how they can help improve the flow of information to the NHS about the size, make-up and needs of local refugee and asylum seeker communities, to assist the NHS in planning services for them

- *in London and in reception areas elsewhere*
- *for those on 'voucher-only' support as well as other refugees and asylum seekers.*

Recommendation 21: The GLA should explore with its London NHS partners what measures within the NHS could improve access to health services for refugees and asylum seekers, including

- *producing more materials in translation about NHS services and entitlement to them*
- *appropriate training for NHS staff*
- *London-wide facilities for translation, interpreting and advocacy*
- *action to ensure refugees and asylum seekers can get primary care, whether from GPs or from specialist primary care teams for highly-mobile households*
- *possible adaptation of services to the needs of specific groups within the refugee and asylum seeker population*
- *creating channels to consult refugees and asylum seekers on these changes.*

Recommendation 22: The GLA should explore with relevant partner agencies in front-line contact with refugees and asylum seekers, including NASS and London boroughs but also non-statutory providers, how they could help disseminate information about the NHS to refugee communities.

Recommendation 23: The GLA should work with refugee community organisations, the London NHS and other appropriate partners to ensure that refugees and asylum seekers can themselves participate in

- *implementing these recommendations*
- *designing a health education programme for their communities*
- *planning health services for them*
- *helping (where appropriate) to deliver those services.*

Recommendation 24: The GLA and LDA, in consultation with the Department of Health (DoH), Home Office, London NHS partners and refugee community organisation, should seek to establish a programme (possibly developing the present DOH/HO Refugee Doctors Scheme) to provide appropriate training or re-training for refugees and asylum seekers with previous healthcare experience, so that - subject to relevant NHS tests and standards of competence - they can work within the NHS as medical staff, community healthcare workers or in other roles.

Chapter 8

Community development: the role of refugee community organisations

Introduction

- 8.1 Major recent enquiries into UK provision for asylum seekers and refugees agree that self-organisation by their own communities is a key factor in meeting their needs and enabling them eventually - given refugee status - to become independent members of UK society. If London is to realise the opportunity presented by its role as city of sanctuary, the GLA will need the help of a range of strong, adequately-resourced refugee community organisations (RCOs).
- 8.2 Though usually based on the work of people with recognised status, it is assumed here that the value of such organisations lies also in their contribution to meeting the needs of asylum seekers. If it is to pursue basic goals set out earlier, the GLA will wish to acknowledge and encourage RCOs' work with people awaiting a decision on their asylum claim, including work outside London with those dispersed by the NASS. This reflects the principle that effective policy for refugees' long-term integration has to start from their earliest (often very vulnerable) days in the UK, well before any decision on their case.

The role of RCOs

- 8.3 The potential role of refugee community organisations was recognised by the Refugee Council in its 1997 proposals for a UK settlement policy. Among seven 'basic principles' for such a policy, this statement included two that indicate the value of RCOs' contribution (Refugee Council 1997):
- *'Independence linked to a firm government commitment to promoting the development of a pluralistic and well-resourced refugee sector with strong refugee community participation.'*
 - *'Self-help within the context of a long British tradition of helping refugees to find their own place and pace of settlement with the support of their community groups or associations.'*
- 8.4 The point is then underlined by the Council when, among 'recommended ingredients' for successful settlement policy, it calls for *'Refugee involvement through the development of community-based refugee organisations with assets, organisational capacity and long-term viability.'* (loc.cit.)
- 8.5 Three years on - though focused more narrowly on people dispersed to cluster areas who then gain refugee status - the Home Office echoes the same point, when it states that *'Developing community support in these areas is the key to their successful*

integration'. Among statutory and non-statutory agencies with 'a role to play' in achieving such support, it identifies '*long-established refugee communities*'. This strategy statement then implies that RCOs could share the £1.5 million offered to fund community development (Home Office 2000).⁴⁶

- 8.6 Refugee community organisations cannot serve all national and ethnic groups equally well. Some of these groups have been less inclined than others to develop such structures, Nevertheless they have a key role to play for a large proportion of London's refugees and asylum seekers, offering a structure where generally they can get support and information free from the barriers of language, cultural distance or outright hostility and discrimination often facing them elsewhere in the host society. Even support of an intangible kind - psychological or cultural, for example, celebrating their community's identity - may be crucial in helping them to settle successfully and fulfil their potential. Without it they may be at greater risk of social exclusion and ultimately may put demands on services like the NHS or Benefits Agency.
- 8.7 RCOs also offer concrete, quite practical support and facilities to London's asylum seekers and refugees, across the whole range of service areas which this report has identified for possible GLA intervention. So filling demographic gaps in Chapters 2 and 3 above, for instance, and recommendation 20 on information needed to plan healthcare, will call for better data on the size and make-up of London's population of asylum seekers and refugees; and any serious attempt to get such data will almost certainly have to enlist the help of RCOs, as they are uniquely well placed to contact and monitor this mobile and marginalised part of the capital's population.
- 8.8 Again, housing advice to help asylum seekers and refugees cope with the severe accommodation problems discussed in Chapter 4, though primarily a borough task, could be supplemented by RCO staff with appropriate training. If the MPA and GLA take up recommendation 15 to prepare a new strategy to meet the policing and protection needs of London's refugee and asylum seeker communities, this will need to be fully informed by RCOs' experience. On health, they could help with key initiatives which the GLA may want to encourage, such as better dissemination of information on NHS services; monitoring refugees' access to primary care; and perhaps direct community provision of some mental health and health promotion services.
- 8.9 Similarly RCOs could be a key ally for the Mayor and LDA in addressing employment issues explored in Chapter 5. They are a common route into work for refugees and asylum seekers - whether into paid or voluntary jobs, within the organisation itself or (identified through the 'grapevine') in the mainstream labour market. As RCOs are thus often a first port of call for employment assistance, it is important that they are equipped to give good advice. Risks that may arise otherwise are suggested by the reference within one of the larger RCOs, during a recent Africa Educational Trust

survey, to *'untrained advisers giving misguided advice which can have a damaging effect on the careers of recipients'* (London Research Centre 1999).

- 8.10 But an EU-funded project shows how targeted injection of training resources could address this need. Surrey University trained refugees in advice, guidance and counselling work both to impart these transferable skills to them as individual students and to equip them to help other refugees within their community organisations. The project thus built up, in effect, these RCOs' knowledge and capacity (op.cit.)

Resources for RCOs: new Home Office strategy

- 8.11 Across the UK as a whole the estimated number of these organisations runs into hundreds, with a large majority based in London. Many GLA partners are already engaged in supporting them. In 1998/99, for example, two thirds of London boroughs provided some financial support to RCOs. The level of individual grants varied considerably, from £500 to £399,500. The London Borough Grants Committee also funds a range of refugee community groups, and its Refugees in Active Partnerships Initiative has brought a number of them together in partnerships to address people's needs (Audit Commission 2000b).

- 8.12 Another major potential source of funding for RCOs is controlled directly by the Mayor and the LDA: the Single Regeneration Budget. It is known for instance that at least one Round Six SRB bid considered by the LDA during 2000, submitted by an inner London partnership, was designed to promote research on the needs of local refugee and asylum seeking communities and to develop their own capacity for economic and social initiatives. It was initially queried in part because of the weakness of its baseline data on the communities in question, and eventually failed mainly because of a 'perceived lack of direct community participation'⁴⁷. This suggests a possible Catch-22 obstacle for those seeking SRB input to work with refugees and asylum seekers: without strong and well-organised groups mobilised within those communities, equipped with good data to back the bid, the SRB allocation process may not respond to appeals for funding precisely to build up such local capacity.

- 8.13 Whatever the facts of this individual case, the GLA and LDA may feel more generally that it would be worth reviewing existing SRB allocation criteria to see whether they have an unintended and particularly restrictive impact on access to this funding source for London's refugee community groups.

- 8.14 The Mayor will in any case want to consider his response to the July 2000 formal recommendation by the Audit Commission, as one of its series of proposals for 'action to improve services' to London's asylum seekers and refugees, that *'The GLA/ALG should ensure that London-wide funding opportunities particularly for SRB and London Borough Grants funding, are made available to RCOs'* (Audit Commission 2000b p.27).

8.15 As part of its November 2000 document on integrating refugees the Home Office announced a 'strategy for community development'. The terms of this strategy leave little doubt it is focused primarily on dispersal regions where people choose to settle having lived there 'prior to being granted status' (Home Office 2000). Nevertheless, London and its refugee community structures are not formally excluded and must be entitled to take part in the measures it proposes. They fall under three headings:

- implementation overseen by the proposed National Refugee Integration Forum, chaired by NASS (see below, Chapter 9).
- consortia and 'One Stop Services' in each dispersal region, guided by the national forum and NASS, to draw up their own integration policy by end-August 2001
- Home Office to offer resources totalling £1.5 million per annum to support community development that could enhance refugee integration, in three parts:
 - (a) funding to refugee organisations, including regional councils: £650,000
 - (b) funding for *'small community-based groups who wish to work with the refugee community'* (apparently meant to be available to a wider span of small organisations, whether or not based specifically within the refugee population): £350,000
 - (c) Refugee Integration Challenge Fund – to back *'projects addressing specific social needs, for example those of women or children or other special needs'* (sic): £500,000.

8.16 Whilst this funding package may be welcomed as a token of the Government's interest in developing over time an effective integration strategy, its tiny scale casts doubt on how much priority ministers give to this goal. If (in line with assumptions in Chapter 3 above) the UK's refugees and asylum seekers are estimated to total around 400,000, the £1.5 grant package to support community development is worth less than £4 annually for each of these people, many of them suffering exceptional disadvantage and social exclusion which better-funded RCOs could help directly to remedy.

Dispersal and RCOs

8.17 Dispersal of asylum seekers from London by NASS since July 2000 should have eased the rate of growth in demand for RCOs' support. But as shown earlier, dispersal is unlikely to cut dramatically the overall number of asylum seekers in London, while it may have added to hidden homelessness, enforced mobility and extreme poverty in the capital. Deepening social problems of this kind among asylum seekers - notably 'voucher-only' cases – would certainly intensify demand for RCO assistance.

- 8.18 There is also a real possibility, albeit not yet borne out by conclusive evidence, that the weaknesses of the present dispersal regime will prompt a sizeable number of 'dispersed' asylum seekers to drift back to London once they have a positive decision; simply cannot bear their NASS accommodation any longer; or seek services which they believe are only available in the capital. If so this will counteract any effect NASS may have had in alleviating the pressure on RCOs from year-on-year growth in London's refugee and asylum seeker population.
- 8.19 At the same time, dispersal is extending the geographical reach of some RCOs' work. Official proponents of current Government policy, and those who have voiced doubts about it, agree that it must anyway be accompanied by a strengthening of refugee community structures in the regions receiving dispersed people.
- 8.20 The Asylum Rights Campaign's detailed study of the implications of dispersal stressed for example that it must be matched by 'substantial' investment in building the strength of the voluntary sector in reception areas, in particular including 'the development of refugee community groups' (Asylum Rights Campaign 1999). On the other hand the Home Office integration strategy issued in November 2000 gives prominence to the case for community development in the regions, as the corollary to dispersal, and as mentioned offers some funding specifically to nurture out-of-London RCOs (para.8. 13 above).
- 8.21 As dispersal gathers momentum RCOs, mostly based within London, are thus likely to face growing demands either to deliver services themselves in many other geographical areas, or to support the development of sister bodies in those other regions. It seems inevitable, as the Refugee Council has suggested, that their new role will tend to involve RCOs in extra costs (e.g. training, travel costs, extra IT costs). The new Home Office 'integration' grants should of course cover part of this extra expense, but may not meet all of it.
- 8.22 Given the GLA's interest both in promoting a national system of reception and settlement, and in enhancing the contribution from RCOs in London, the Mayor may wish to give high priority to helping London RCOs to improve their funding as advocated by the Audit Commission. It would be a double tragedy if a dispersal strategy supported by insufficient central government funding were not only to exacerbate social conditions and tensions in London, but also to undermine the invaluable work done at present by the capital's refugee community organisations.

Recommendations

8.23 These recommendations follow:

Recommendation 25: In consultation with the ALG and other partners, the GLA should - taking up the Audit Commission's July 2000 recommendation - explore ways of helping London RCOs to build their capacity by securing more funding, which could include the following:

- *review criteria for access to grant aid allocated via the GLA and boroughs, in particular SRB and London Borough Grants allocations*
- *help London RCOs to bid for the new community development resources offered by the November 2000 Home Office integration strategy*
- *press the Home Office to increase the £1.5 million available nationally, under this programme, to a level more realistically reflecting the critical importance of refugee community development for its own dispersal policy*
- *help London RCOs to investigate other domestic and EU funding sources.*

Recommendation 26: The GLA should discuss with the Refugee Council, refugee community organisations themselves and other relevant agencies how existing databases of London RCOs could be coordinated, developed and maintained

- *to enable the Authority and partners to consult them in a timely and effective way*
- *to improve the two-way flow of views and information between the GLA group and these refugee organisations.*

Chapter 9 Policy debate and the role of the GLA

Introduction: GLA interest

- 9.1 The Mayor and GLA have a direct and urgent interest in the formation of public policy on the issue of refugees and asylum seekers. This interest arises in three ways.
- 9.2 Firstly, Parliament has charged the Mayor with designing and pursuing strategies to put London on the best possible development path for the future. Decisions on policy towards refugees and asylum seekers in the UK - mostly living in London and a sizeable minority of its population - are also decisions about London's future development. So they impinge directly on the Mayor's statutory responsibilities, and he should have a voice in them as of right.
- 9.3 Secondly policy towards refugees and asylum seekers intersects with several of the GLA's specific priority concerns: for example equalities, policing and community relations, economic development, health of Londoners, cultural development, and housing. Some are priorities laid down by the 1999 GLA Act.
- 9.4 Lastly, the action London needs to realise the opportunity offered by refugees and asylum seekers will span not just the whole city geographically, but also many different 'service' areas. It will recognise and build on the multiple links between refugees' and asylum seekers'
- level and form of income
 - housing
 - health
 - sense of community safety, personal security and fairness
 - cultural life
 - ability to gain from education and training
 - potential contribution to London's economy.
- It must, in other words, be based on a region-wide strategy which cuts across conventional service and policy areas. It is, as much as anything in London, a matter for the GLA.

Home Office approach

- 9.5 In November 2000 the Home Office published a strategy document that seemed, at first sight, to echo basic themes of the present report. Aims of the Government's 'integration strategy' set out in this document - *Full and equal citizens: a strategy for the integration of refugees into the United Kingdom* (November 2000, p.2) - are as follows:

'to include refugees as equal members of society

'to help refugees develop their potential and contribute to the cultural and economic life of the country

'to set out a clear framework to support the integration process across the United Kingdom

'to facilitate access to the support necessary for the integration of refugees nationally and regionally.'

- 9.6 In working up a strategy on refugees and asylum seekers, focussed on the idea that their arrival should be an opportunity for London, the GLA can draw encouragement from the Home Office policy aims just listed since these similarly recognise that refugees' presence offers a valuable long-term opportunity to the host society. Again, the Mayor's initiative in calling for this report to launch a dialogue with other key players is echoed by the Home Office view, introducing its new strategy document, that it represents *'a starting point ... the beginning of a process ... a vision for taking forward ideas for integrating refugees into the community and the economy...'* (ibid.)
- 9.7 Several specific measures proposed by the Home Office match or complement proposals that come out of the analysis in following pages. Establishment of a National Integration Forum by the Home Office as part of this process, chaired by Minister of State with responsibility for asylum and immigration⁴⁸, may for example provide the GLA with a useful channel for dialogue with the Government and others on how to promote integration.
- 9.8 The 2000 Home Office document is however seriously limited. Firstly, though asylum applicants awaiting a decision are mentioned at some points, its focus is (as the Introduction puts it) on *'those given the right to remain here'*. This cuts across the view underlying the present report that – whatever the eventual outcome of the asylum claim – an effective integration strategy must begin with the way the applicant is received and treated from their earliest days in the UK. Secondly, specific measures proposed by *Full and Equal Citizens* simply do not match up to the scale of the needs and opportunities which refugees have brought to London. The Home Office's attempt to construct an integration strategy could, arguably, be much enhanced by early implementation of recommendations set out in this GLA report.

Asylum policy: international context

- 9.9 The Mayor and GLA have a twofold interest in the way asylum policy and procedures are developing outside the UK. Firstly London might benefit from an exchange of ideas and experience with capital cities in other countries, most obviously within the European Union (EU) but possibly also further afield. Making due allowance for the way social and political frameworks differ between countries, international comparison could give London – and the British Government - valuable insights into strengths and

shortcomings of the various models established elsewhere for receiving and integrating refugees.

9.10 International exchange of experience about asylum issues is already well advanced in some areas. The voluntary or non-governmental sector is one example, where the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) brings together some 70 agencies for *'joint analysis, research and information exchange'*. It has collated basic information about practices adopted around Europe in areas like employment, health, and housing⁴⁹, and in June 2000 held a seminar on refugee integration with practical contributions from non-statutory bodies across the EU (ECRE 2000). Another example is public health. The Mégapoles Project, linking public health authorities in five European capital cities, has summarised information from each of these countries on their provision for asylum seekers and refugees (Mégapoles Project 2000).⁵⁰

9.11 The Mayor and the GLA have an interest in the issue's international dimension secondly because domestic policy in Britain may increasingly be influenced by emerging EU policy on asylum. At their European Council meeting at Tampere in October 1999, heads of government agreed to work towards a common policy on asylum and migration for the EU. The European Commission (EC) and EU ministers have followed up the Tampere decision with position papers and proposals⁵¹ on several aspects of the asylum issue including

- building relations with refugees' countries of origin and transit (for example by offering money) to try and pre-empt their movement towards Europe;
- rethinking the present Dublin Convention arrangement for allocating between EU member states the responsibility for dealing with asylum applications;
- minimum standards and criteria for procedures to determine asylum claims; and
- minimum standards for reception of asylum seekers, pending determination of their claim.

9.12 The last theme is especially relevant for the GLA, relating to issues like the level and form of subsistence support for asylum seekers; nature of accommodation; dispersal; and rights to other welfare services. Though minimum standards of course do not mean uniform provision in all countries, the EU stance on these issues could over time play an important part in UK domestic discussion of asylum policy.

9.13 EU leaders will assess progress towards the Union's common asylum policy (as well as parallel work on migration policy) at their European Council summit meeting at Laeken, Belgium in December 2001, and could shortly reach decisions on some

elements of it. But up to Laeken and possibly beyond, debate about its content remains open and vigorous. Both on broad questions of principle and legality, for example, and on practical issues related to reception of asylum applicants, the non-governmental network ECRE⁵² has strongly criticised some parts of the EU's preparatory work. So too did Amnesty International (2000) in December last year, while UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan told EU leaders in January 2001 that

*' ... Europe has adopted politically popular measures that contradict its relative prosperity and its prospect(ive) need for greater numbers of immigrants in the future... there are some indications that Europe is losing sight of its duty to protect refugees under international law, as set out in the 1951 Convention ...'*⁵³

- 9.14 There is thus still scope for a GLA contribution to EU debate on the shape of its common asylum policy. Arguably indeed the EU urgently needs an input from London, given that this city appears - on available estimates - to have more refugee and asylum seeking inhabitants than any other capital in the Union.⁵⁴ But London equally has much to gain from linking into the EU's post-Tampere discussion. If London's Mayor should have a voice in UK decisions on asylum policy, as this report argues, it would seem important also to feed his views into a European debate whose outcome could set the terms for UK policy-making on the issue over coming years.

Conclusion and recommendations

- 9.15 Mass movements of refugees can be expected to continue until the oppression and violent instability that drive them can be curbed by major reforms of the international system, including basic changes in commercial practices of many of the world's richer countries.⁵⁵ This implies that for some years to come intense debate is likely to continue within Britain and the EU about principles of international protection, the reception of asylum seekers and the integration of those recognised as refugees.

- 9.16 The Mayor is recommended to engage with this policy debate, as follows:

Recommendation 27: In discussion with the Home Office and in the wider UK political arena, the GLA should press for an approach to policy on refugees and asylum seekers that matches up to UK treaty obligations, respects their human rights and enables London to benefit from the opportunity offered by their arrival.

Recommendation 28: The GLA should seek an active role in the National Integration Forum convened by the Home Office to develop dialogue with Government and others on ways of promoting integration of refugees, including initial reception

measures that would help with the integration of asylum seekers subsequently allowed to remain in the UK.

Recommendation 29: In discussion of the proposed new Common Asylum Policy within the EU, the GLA should make the case for it to reflect best practice in the Union's member states, as identified through a GLA comparative review of asylum policies practised in London and selected other EU capital cities.

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Notes

- 1 Definition paraphrased from UN Convention on the Status of Refugees 1951.
- 2 See Chapter 2
- 3 Immigration Law Practitioners' Association/Resource Information Service, *Asylum Seekers: a Guide to Recent Legislation* (2001) p.7
- 4 Until 2000 this period was seven years, but the 1999 Immigration & Asylum Act shortened it to four years.
- 5 Amnesty International press statement 15 August 2001 – see also *Daily Express*, same date.
- 6 Home Office (1998), Appendix E.
- 7 Information in this paragraph from parliamentary replies by the Home Secretary as follows: House of Commons *Hansard*, 17 July 2001 (col.145) and 19 July 2001 (col. 338W).
- 8 Sources for this paragraph are Home Office, *Asylum Statistics: United Kingdom*, various years; and House of Commons *Hansard* Written Questions - 25 June 2001 to Home Secretary and to Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Dept. (cols. 38W and 51W), and 11 July 2001 to Home Secretary, (col.540W).
- 9 This account of NASS's approach to providing accommodation is based on responses to questions from the GLA, October 2000.
- 10 BBC News Online (Radio 4 Today programme) 3 July 2001.
- 11 House of Commons *Hansard* Written Answers - 19 July 2001 (col.339W).
- 12 Information from LASC, November 2000.

- 13 Data on voucher-only cases supplied by NASS and tabulated by London Asylum Seekers Consortium.
- 14 Dr Christina Boswell - BBC News Online (Radio 4 Today programme) 3 July 2001
- 15 *Guardian* 6 August 2001
- 16 'Fleeing asylum seekers ordered back to Glasgow', *Guardian* 10 August 2001 on the flight of 14 asylum seekers to London from Glasgow's Sighthill estate after the murder of Firsat Yildiz; and 'Refugees use law to fight dispersal' *Guardian* 16 August 2001.
- 17 Home Office, Immigration Research & Statistics Service – personal communication August 2001
- 18 *Guardian* 14 August 2001
- 19 *Guardian* 25 July 2001
- 20 *Observer* 12 August 2001
- 21 See for instance ALG Leaders' Committee 10 July 2001, Agenda Item 20.
- 22 Home Office News Release 279/2000 'Barbara Roche calls for fresh debate on immigration policy', 11 September 2000; *The Times* 12 September 2000.
- 23 *Guardian* 11 June 2001
- 24 The lower percentages cited here were for relatively small groups - 17 'Other Africans' and 14 in the Bangladeshi and Pakistani group.
- 25 *Guardian* 16 August 2001
- 26 References in this paragraph are to Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, Secs. 19B and 19D(1).

27 Data in this paragraph are from *Guardian* 17 May 2000, and from Metropolitan Police Service – record of racial incidents for Metropolitan Police District, 1999/00 and 2000/01.

28 *Independent* 15 April 2000, *Sunday Telegraph* 16 April 2000, *Times* 13 July 2000

29 *Guardian* 3 May 2000

30 *Sunday Independent* 3 September 2000

31 *Times* 13 July 2000

32 Speaking in 2000, quoted *Observer* 1 July 2001

33 *Evening Standard* 24 July 2000

34 *Guardian* 6 August 2001

35 Quoted *Guardian* 2 July 2001

36 *Protect and Respect* (MPS 2000b) - Foreword

37 MPS Briefing Note 1 October 1999 – ‘Asylum Seekers and Refugees’

38 Information from MPS Diversity Directorate, July 2001.

39 Statement by Supt. Chris Eyre, Kent Police, to conference *Whose Society? ...* (Capita – London 28 September 2000)

40 MPS Briefing Note October 1999 (loc.cit.)

41 Administrative removal is the procedure applied to almost all asylum seekers whose application has failed. Deportation is a more punitive measure, accompanied for instance by a permanent bar on re-entry to the UK.

42 Excludes some 700 ex-asylum seekers leaving under the Voluntary Assisted Returns Programme. Information from Immigration Service, July 2001 – personal communication.

43 From report on Immigration Service enforcement role, to MPS Diversity Directorate inter-borough forum on refugee and asylum issues, June 2001.

44 MPS Diversity Directorate, briefing note on 'Immigration Pilot Project', 2000 (on Newham removals project), and *The Job* 20 July 2001 (internal MPS newspaper).

45 Coalition for Health and Regeneration, loc.cit. Though the document refers to 'refugees' it seems, from the context, that this is intended to cover asylum seekers as well.

46 The Home Office document states that £650,000 of the £1.5 million available will be reserved specifically for 'funding to refugee organisations', but - with appropriate support and guidance – such organisations could be expected also to claim some of the 'Refugee Integration Challenge Fund' making up another £500,000 of the promised £1.5 million (see text, below).

47 Communication from LDA to GLA, August 2000.

48 Until June 2001 this was Barbara Roche, and subsequently Jeff Rooker.

49 See ECRE website at <http://www.ecre.org/>

50 This project, launched in 1997, is '*a public health network for capital cities and regions*' linking Dublin, Helsinki, London, Madrid and Stockholm.

51 For example European Commission (2000), (2001a), (2001b); and European Council (2000).

52 See ECRE notes (December 2000) on the Commission's initial paper on minimum standards on the reception of applicants for asylum in member states, and on its initial general position paper *Towards a common asylum procedure and a uniform status ...* (European Commission 2000).

53 Speech to Stockholm International Forum on Combating Intolerance, 29 January 2001.

54 Berlin, capital of the only other EU country with annual asylum applications comparable (in absolute number) to those for the UK, was reported in January 2001 to have roughly 100,000 refugee and asylum seeker residents (Director of Immigration Unit, City of Berlin, speaking at ALG European Seminar 12 January 2001). This is less than one-third of the number estimated to have settled in London since the mid-1980s – see Chapter 3 below.

55 Ruud Lubbers, UN High Commissioner for Refugees – BBC Radio 4, 2 September 2001