

[impact]

asylum is a human right

Refugee Council's impact report 2007/2008

BRITAIN HAS ★ TALENT

SO WHY CAN'T
WE **USE** IT?

**FIGHTING DESTITUTION AND WINNING
BACK THE PERMISSION TO WORK ...**

+ A day in the life – what do our Children's Panel get up to! + **Working with
refugee community groups – a new beginning** + A busy year in the life
of the media officer + **Plus 'This much I know'**



contents



1] Editorial

2] The big interview

Interviewing...

Donna Covey

We ask the Refugee Council's Chief Executive to reflect on her first year leading the charity.



to the crisis and how the Refugee Council led calls for greater action.

Plus: 'A year in letters'

16] Relationships

How do we know each other?

The Basis project is a flagship Refugee Council initiative to help refugee community organisations grow and thrive. A Basis officer and an RCO chair discuss their working relationship.



Plus: Event review: Refugee Council co-hosts older refugees' conference.

22] Living

A life in a day

Ever wondered what it is like being a case worker at the Refugee Council? Caroline Watson from our Children's Panel gives us a personal glimpse into her world.



Features

5] The big story

Britain has talent, so why can't we use it

Zimbabwean journalist Innocent Sithole looks at the hardships facing people claiming asylum and asks why we are letting great talents go to waste.

9] This much I know

Jonathan Cox, Parliamentary Officer at the Refugee Council, gives an insight into the work he does at Westminster.

Plus: So what happened on the Campaign trail?

A chronology of campaigning activities over 2007/2008.

11] Photo feature

Refugee Week 2007 – a celebration

A glimpse of some of the great events that took place during Refugee Week in 2007.



18] Wellbeing

The best of times and the worst of times

A Specialist Team Support Worker reflects on his work supporting a particularly distressed Ugandan refugee, who is finding life easier now that he is involved in political activism again.

Innovative ways of working with the most vulnerable refugees Refugee Council hosts a conference of experts.

Plus: Express yourself

Young refugees are given a voice through innovative new projects.

26] Food

Cheap and Tasty!

The West London cookery project shows how even those on the tightest budgets can enjoy healthy eating.

20] Review

Experiencing exile in old age

We review an excellent DVD which explores the problems older refugees face living in the UK.

28] Finance

The Refugee Council is a human rights charity, independent of government, working to ensure that refugees are given the protection they need, that they are treated with respect and understanding and that they have the same rights, opportunities and responsibilities as other members of our society.

13] Iraq: refugees from conflict

Since allied action in Iraq started five years ago, millions of Iraqis have been displaced. We examine the UK's response



© Refugee Council 2008

editorial

What a difference you – our staff and volunteers, our funders and partners, our member organisations, and above all refugees themselves – made this year. This report shows how.

It demonstrates the contributions of time and money, skill and commitment, speaking and listening, practical help and insightful research. It highlights where we are challenging government when we think they have got things wrong, and how we are challenging ourselves to raise our game. By weaving together all these parts we not only make a big difference in the world, but we honour the fact that refugees are whole people – often exemplary and inspirational people – who contribute to all aspects of UK life.

[realising potential]

This year's magazine format allows us to show these diverse contributions coming together around a central theme of 'realising potential'. As the features show, at the heart of our work is our relationship with refugees. An issue I feel strongly about is the future of refugee community organisations (RCOs), some more than 20 years old, who during this year have seen a funding crisis tear up their basis for survival. This is a loss for the refugee sector, but also for Britain as a whole. The article on the new Basis project, (see page 16) shows how we will be helping RCOs to become more sustainable and dynamic as part of our renewed commitment to refugee led groups.

In other features (see Specialist Team, Children's Section, West London Cookery Project) you will be able to read about how we work directly with refugees to ensure that the problems they face



do not stop them achieving their full potential as human beings.

We do not do these things on our own. Almost all our work is done in partnership, as the main feature in this report shows (see page 5). In campaigning to end destitution we have worked through the broad-based "Still Human, Still Here" coalition and we have forged particularly close links with Zimbabwean groups. We also have joined forces with the TUC and 22 trade unions, representing more than 5 million workers, on the "Let them Work" campaign. This latter campaign has shown that British workers reject slogans like "British jobs for British workers", they want to see British decency and common sense.

These impacts are powerful, but they need to increase. In the last year, food prices have risen sharply. This means that people seeking asylum, some of whom barely survive on £35 weekly supermarket vouchers, have seen a cut of more than £3.50 in the voucher's value *over and above* the belt-tightening which all Britons face.

Facing these challenges, we need clear purpose and focus. We worked during this year on a comprehensive new Strategic Directions for 2009-2012 in which we listened harder to aim higher. The Refugee Council – and the whole sector – need to realise our own potential, but in ways which always put the interests of refugees first. With your help, we shall.

 Douglas Board



the big interview

[Donna Covey] Donna Covey became Chief Executive of the Refugee Council in May 2007. We catch up with her to find out what the year was like for her.

Reflecting on your first year as Chief Executive, what issues stand out for you?

Can I just start by saying how much I have enjoyed my first year at the Refugee Council? Before I came here, I knew the charity did great work, but it is such a joy for me to spend my working life with such amazing people - whether they are staff, volunteers, clients or supporters. But a lot of what I have seen since I came here also makes me really angry. When I meet an amazing dignified woman like Chipo, and hear how she has suffered – not at the hands of Mugabe – but at the hands of a government that acts in my name – it's outrageous. The great thing about a job like mine, though, is that you get to do something about it. It's been a privilege for me over the past year, to stand alongside people like Chipo, Ellen, Luka and many more, to expose this invidious policy. We have continued to work to end this policy through our "Just.Fair campaign" – joining forces with the TUC to win back the entitlement to work.

I never fail to be humbled by the incredible work our staff and volunteers in front line jobs do. Many of the people who come to us are desperate, having left their homes and families and fled to the UK in fear of their lives. Yet they are treated so badly when they get to the UK – placed in detention, treated with disbelief and, as I mentioned earlier, in many cases left destitute because their claim has been refused. Our staff and volunteers are a lifeline for refugees – helping them to find

accommodation, ensuring they don't go hungry, and providing them with kindness and support. And in the case of separated children – the time they spend at the Refugee Council is often the only part of their lives where they can have fun and be children rather than refugees.

The real strength of the Refugee Council as a charity is our ability to do both these things. We help individuals to rebuild their lives in the UK, but we also influence government policy so that all refugees receive better treatment and have the opportunity to contribute.

What is a typical day like for you?

One of the best things about this job is that there is no typical day! Some of my time is spent doing the things that the chief executive does in any organisation, like chairing meetings that can cover anything from agreeing next year's budget to developing a policy in response to a government announcement. The Refugee Council has offices all over the country, and I try to visit those regularly, although not as often as I would like. When I visit offices, and when I am in the Brixton office, I try to carve out some time to shadow our staff working directly with clients. It's really easy as a chief executive to lose touch with the front line, and I never fail to be moved by people's personal stories, and angered by the way they have been treated both in their home country and the UK. But above all, I am full of admiration for the way our staff support refugees, mixing passion and

professionalism in a way that means people get the practical advice and support they need, but are also treated with respect and compassion – something they have experienced all too rarely in their time in Britain.

Being the public face and voice of the Refugee Council is also important. Earlier this year I took part in the Jeremy Vine programme on Radio 2. I was there to talk about the findings of the Independent Asylum Commission report. Also in the studio was Yeukai, a fantastic young woman from Zimbabwe who volunteers for the Refugee Council, who was there to talk about her personal story. We both did our piece and answered some questions from the presenter, but then the e-mails started coming in - almost all of them from listeners who were opposed to asylum seekers coming to the UK. Yeukai and I between us managed to put them right - but I was so pleased she was there to remind the listeners that asylum seekers are real people who it is a privilege to know.

Setting new strategic directions for the Refugee Council has been a key part of your leadership role during the year, how did that go?

The strategic planning process was really good fun. Staff and volunteers brought such tremendous energy and passion to the process; it was almost a shame when it ended. We still have posters of the outcomes on our office walls, saying things like "championing human rights for those seeking

sanctuary” and “embracing diversity and equal treatment”. Reading those on my way up to my office in the morning really reminds me of why I work here. Our new strategic directions give clear directions for the charity going forward, while allowing us to build on the best of what has gone before. A really valuable part of the process was seeking views from refugee community organisations, other refugee agencies, and funders about what they thought we should be doing going forward. It was heartening that all those we consulted – internal and external – agreed on so much because in the new directions there is a lot of emphasis on the Refugee Council working more effectively with partners in the refugee community and beyond. This builds upon a lot of the work that we have done this year. Douglas (our chair) and I have met with many refugee community organisations, to hear their views about how the Refugee Council can best work with them to improve the lot of refugees in the UK. And we have also done some really important work in the year with partners outside of the refugee world - including working with Age Concern on a report and conference to highlight the position of older refugees. In February we also played host to over 100 therapeutic health care professionals to talk about developing models of casework that meet the needs of particularly vulnerable refugees. Partnerships like these are really valuable, because they increase understanding of the needs of

refugees amongst professionals who can have a real impact on their lives.

How can we bring about change going forward?

We’re sitting here today in the midst of an economic downturn, and one of the things I really worry about is how rising unemployment and repossessions will affect attitudes in the UK towards refugees. There is so much hostility towards them and most of it is based on myths and misunderstanding. People who have actually met refugees rebuilding their lives in the UK have nothing but respect and admiration for them. So one of our challenges is to make sure that more people understand who refugees are and why they are in the UK. If we can change public attitudes, then it is easier to get politicians to enact the sort of positive change that refugees need. This is where events like Refugee Week are so important, because they give people a chance to meet refugees face to face. I also think our vulnerable women podcast was a really good example of using innovative methods to get people’s voices heard.

The Refugee Council has a particular role to play in changing things for the better. Although we have a brilliant cause, that’s not enough when you are trying to change things. You also need to be able to marshal your arguments, and present decision makers with hard facts. And that’s where we come into our own. We are able to pull together evidence

from clients, the experiences of refugee community organisations and other members, and the expertise of our specialist policy and campaigns staff to make the best case possible. The work of our staff and my predecessors means that the Refugee Council is respected, and people will listen to what we say.

The challenges going forward, for me, fall into three key areas. Firstly, we need to change hearts and minds in this country, and help people to understand who refugees are and why they are here. Secondly, we need to see a real change in attitude by government. Policy on asylum issues has become much too tied up with the political imperative to tighten our borders - and as a result people in real need are being turned away, and even those who do get here can be badly treated. We have seen some improvements in the asylum system over the past year but there are many things about asylum policy in the UK that are wrong – including the use of detention when people have committed no crime, the use of destitution to force people back at the end of the process and the lack of access to good and timely legal advice. The third challenge, which is essential if we are to achieve the other two, is to have a vibrant, united and sustainable refugee sector. That’s why we have a much stronger emphasis on partnership working in our new strategic directions.]



the big story

[Britain has talent, so why can't we use it]

Those who work with refugees are often appalled at the poverty and hardships they experience while going through the asylum process. Writer Innocent Sithole, a journalist from Zimbabwe now working as an editor at the Refugee Council, investigates the issues and asks: why force people into poverty when they want to work?

And in 'This much I know,' Jonathan Cox, the Refugee Council's Parliamentary Officer, gives his insight into a year at Westminster.



[I had expected more from Britain]

Finding a way out of the destitution trap

By Innocent Sithole

"It is humiliating to have to ask for a pound to buy sanitary towels or food to eat," Chipo says, her wistful expression aptly capturing the depressing reality of poverty and destitution at the hands of the UK asylum system.

Trained and employed as an accountant in her native Zimbabwe, Chipo has spent the last five years awaiting the conclusion of her asylum application. In all that time, she has never known how it feels like to wake up to a new day without the anxiety and apprehension imposed by her uncertain future in the country.

"I had expected life would be less harsh in Britain," she says, "But it's been the opposite. Here you're denied some of the most basic necessities of life." Chipo is one of thousands of people seeking asylum in the UK caught up in the destitution trap, neither allowed to work nor given access to state benefits.

A staunch critic of Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF government, Chipo was subjected to beatings and death threats by ruling party thugs. Painfully for the young mother, she was forced to leave her two small children behind as she took flight to the UK.

But why do people such as Chipo, who have ►

June 2007 During Refugee Week, Refugee Council staff and volunteers were part of the first of the "Still Human Still Here" summer sleep-outs across the country against destitution among asylum seekers.

Organised 'refugees encounter with MPs' at Westminster in conjunction with All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees. Temba Moyo, chair of Refugee Voice Wales, met his local MP and former Cabinet Minister

Alun Michael. "It was great – I got the opportunity to talk to him face to face about the issues that asylum seekers and refugees are facing, and he is going to take some of the issues up on my behalf." ▷

[... people think asylum seekers are sponging off government money ...]



Chipo at Refugee Week

► escaped from some of the world's most egregious regimes to seek sanctuary in the UK, find themselves hungry and homeless in one of the world's richest countries?

Through its "Just.Fair" campaign, the Refugee Council has tackled this contradiction head-on. As the charity's Head of Campaigns and Public Affairs, Bob Deffee, explains, "Just. Fair is premised on the belief that the British public, when they understand the issues, will support fair and just treatment of people going through the asylum process."

The campaign focuses on how aspects of that process leave asylum seekers impoverished, homeless and without access to services, such as healthcare and English language classes.

Routinely attacked by the media, legislated against by politicians, and often facing racism and hostility in their local communities, people seeking asylum are among the most vulnerable groups in the UK. "Because of media stereotyping, people think asylum seekers are sponging off government money, but we're not doing that; we're constantly struggling," Chipo says in exasperation.

Though Chipo's fresh claim is still pending, she has not been housed and she receives no financial support from the state. "I live with friends, family and well-wishers, but it's very difficult to rely on other people as an adult," she says.

Through the Just.Fair campaign, the Refugee Council has sought to build a critical mass of support around the issue of destitution. ►

Key impacts in 2007-2008

Our campaign and policy influencing work alongside other organisations has contributed to:

- Government policies on access to health for refused asylum seekers being challenged and outlawed by a High Court judge
- A Review of policies about provision of English classes for refugees
- Lord Goldsmith review of Citizenship proposing the government look at allowing asylum seekers to work
- Successful lobbying against destitution at Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat party conferences with high profile members from each party speaking out against the policy
- Refugee Council lobbying campaign alongside Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International results in the status of Iraqi nationals who had supported UK troops being reviewed by the Government and support packages announced including awarding some refugee status
- Briefing of MPs and Peers to support amendments to the UK Borders Bill which highlight the impact of destitution on refused asylum seekers, and sought to restore financial support
- Meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees launched a campaign DVD in Parliament
- Still Human Still Here campaign delegation to the Home Secretary led by the Archbishop of York created a dialogue channel to ministers on solutions to destitution
- Submitted evidence on destitution to the Independent Asylum Commission, Centre for Social Justice destitution working group and Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust destitution inquiry
- BIA and the Legal Services Commission finally using the definition of an unaccompanied child that we had been calling for in recent years.]

► **July 2007** Refugee Council takes the Just.Fair Campaign to the Rise festival, London's anti-racism festival in Finsbury Park.

Sept 2007 Refugee Council holds a fringe meeting at the TUC Conference in Brighton to introduce what will become the "Let them Work" campaign.

Refugee Council works with partners to take anti-destitution "Still Human Still Here" campaign to all three party conferences

Dec 2007 Parliamentary launch of 'Still Human Still Here' DVD by Amnesty International, Donna Covey speaks at launch ceremony.]



Case study Aisha's address at the TUC conference in Brighton 2007

I came from Ethiopia and I am here because of the ethnic persecution and human rights abuses that I suffered there. After living in hiding for several months I managed to escape to Britain. I have been in the UK for more than five years now.

When I arrived in the UK I was fast-tracked by the Home Office and received a negative decision after only eight weeks. I had not had time to gather evidence for my case. I appealed against this decision three times, but without success. However, now I have a fresh claim and I'm waiting for a decision.

In Ethiopia I qualified from a teacher training institute with a Diploma and taught English and Social Studies in primary schools for eight years. I also carried out a lot of voluntary work, helping to educate orphaned children.

Since I arrived in the UK I have not been allowed to do paid work, so I have done a lot of voluntary work and training. The voluntary work has included administration work at the British Institute of Human Rights, Amnesty International UK, and on a national employment survey for the Refugee Council.

At present I enjoy membership of many key groups, including the Mayor of London's working group on refugees and asylum seekers. I am also studying travel and tourism and have taken many other courses.

If I had the right to work I would be in paid employment working with refugees and asylum seekers because they face such huge problems. For example, they experience mental health ▸

► In 2007, the charity teamed up with a number of organisations, both inside and outside the refugee sector, to launch the "Still Human Still Here" coalition.

As part of that coalition, the Refugee Council was instrumental in briefing MPs and Peers to support amendments to the UK Borders Bill which highlighted the impact of destitution on people whose asylum claims have been refused, and sought to restore financial support. Campaigners buttressed the lobbying efforts in Westminster by holding public sleep outs across the country during Refugee Week in June, which the Refugee Council helped to coordinate.

Securing access to healthcare for people who have been refused asylum has been a major priority for the Refugee Council throughout the Just.Fair campaign. Since 2004, people refused asylum had been required to pay for NHS hospital services except for emergencies. Considering that they were also legally barred from working and received support only in the form of vouchers, if at all, the inhumanity of this government policy was all too evident.

As so often happens, a breakthrough in this area came in the courts in April 2008 when a High Court judge ruled that denying refused asylum seekers free NHS healthcare was unlawful. The Refugee Council's Chief Executive Donna Covey hailed the ruling as a very important and welcome judgement: "It is a matter of simple humanity to look after people who are unwell. We hope this ruling will put an end to the practice of preventing vulnerable, ill people from getting the treatment they need."

For many people going through the asylum system, being denied permission to work is its most disillusioning aspect, removing their ability to keep their family from destitution and to ensure that their skills are relevant for the future.

In September 2007, the Refugee Council and the TUC came together to start work on a new campaign initiative under the slogan "Let them Work".

"Allowing asylum seekers to work has been an important policy issue for the Refugee Council since the Government removed entitlement in 2002, and research has consistently shown that people claiming asylum in the UK want to work and have levels of skills above the national average," says James Lee, the Refugee Council's Policy Adviser on employment and training. "So it was great to work on this campaign and see it launched officially, at the TUC Black Workers Conference in April 2008."

At the launch, the TUC General Secretary, Brendan Barber gave strong personal backing to the campaign: "The right to work – to earn a living, to provide for yourself and your family – is a fundamental human right. Denying asylum seekers this right ►

[... it's dehumanising not being able to work properly ...]

Case study *continued*
Aisha's address at the TUC conference in Brighton 2007



Brendan Barber, General Secretary of the TUC signs the Let them work pledgeboard

▷ problems as a result of traumatic backgrounds and staying in limbo for so long. They are also often unsure of their entitlements and live in poor housing.

This is the experience of many people I know in my community and I have faced it myself. But in many ways I have coped largely because of my friends' support and my strong faith.

To be banned from work is very difficult in any society and it is mental torture, in my view. I dislike living on handouts when I have a lot to contribute and want to earn a wage. I feel I am also losing my professional skills. My meagre weekly allowance of £41 is insufficient for all my needs and at times makes me feel less than human.

After five years I do feel integrated here and feel the UK has become my home as I have nowhere else to go to. I believe the UK has a largely positive legacy of integrating foreigners; it upholds equal opportunity and multiculturalism. If I had permission to work, I, too, could contribute to that legacy.

Finally, I urge the TUC to try to persuade the government to allow asylum seekers the right to work so that they can share their skills and experiences for their own and the country's benefit.]

► condemns them and their families to poverty while they await the outcome of their asylum claims.”

Many asylum seekers are well qualified, with 57% educated up to A-level whilst 24% have higher level qualifications. Chipo, a trained accountant, is one example, but she has not been able to work and use her skills since fleeing Zimbabwe:

“I can't provide for myself and that's really damaging psychologically. I do voluntary work, but it's dehumanising not being able to work properly,” she says.

For Chipo, a concession by the government on allowing asylum seekers to work would be a welcome relief. But presently, the stark reality of asylum destitution holds firm, crushing its victims into despair and disillusionment. “We talk of poverty in Africa, but there's poverty here in Britain, too,” she says.]

Chipo is now an intern in the Refugee Council's Campaign and Public Affair team. Read more about our campaigns at www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/campaigns



this much I know

[Jonathan Cox Parliamentary Officer]

When we reflect on another year of parliamentary business it is easy to look at the latest raft of laws that restrict the rights of refugees and become, well, truly depressed.

But do the UK Borders Act and the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act really reflect what happened during the year? They certainly are important, but before we get too depressed about new measures to control the movements of young refugees or increased powers to prevent people seeking sanctuary from reaching the UK, it is worth remembering Winston Churchill's famous dictum: "History is written by the victors".

It is worth remembering because when those weighty Acts are written out in clause after clause of legal jargon for the Queen to give Royal Assent, and we pick over them to work out what effect they will have on our clients, there is no sense of the debates and discussions behind the scenes which, in many ways, are as important.

There is no mention of the hours of parliamentary debate informed by the briefings provided by the Refugee Council. No mention of the dozens of amendments forcing the government to face up to issues - like destitution - that they would rather sweep under the carpet. No mention of the opprobrium heaped from all sides on a minister in the House of Lords because of the Home Office's treatment of the most vulnerable. No mention of hard-won government concessions on the treatment of children after ministers stared defeat in the face on an important vote, also in the Lords. And no mention of a peer's speech on asylum destitution that was so impassioned that it featured on *Yesterday in Parliament* on Radio 4 the next morning. The Refugee Council had a hand in all of these highlights.

And it is a mistake to equate politics with new laws or what happens in parliament. One of the Refugee Council's most successful events in the past year was not linked to a specific 'issue' - it merely created a space for positive encounters between refugees and their local MPs during Refugee Week. Meeting refugees and hearing their stories will often change a politician's mind more successfully than lobbying. So bringing some of our senior law-makers together with refugees who have made a positive contribution to British society - as football coaches, volunteers, musicians and community leaders - may do more than anything else to sow seeds for better asylum policies in the future.

People's stories are central to our Just.Fair campaign, which is closely linked to "Still Human Still Here", and a real highlight of the year was the premiere at the Labour party conference of a campaign DVD explaining the plight of destitute refused asylum seekers. The event was very well attended and many political activists were touched by the tragedy of the situation - but also the courage that three refused asylum seekers had shown to speak out about injustice.

Another man who is not afraid to speak out about injustice is Harris Nyatsanza. A refugee from Zimbabwe, Harris has been one of our leading campaigners for a few years now. Not only did he speak at the Labour Party Conference, but the Refugee Council also helped him secure a place on the panel at the Fabian Society's New Year Conference. Run by an influential Labour think-tank, this is one of the biggest opportunities to get up close and personal with some of the most powerful politicians in the land. So it was fantastic to see



From left: Jonathan Cox, Alun Michael MP and Refugee Voice Wales chair Temba Moyo at the 'refugees encounters with MPs' event organised by the Refugee Council.

encouraging, and a vindication of our time spent lobbying Conservatives.

And my final highlight of the year? Well, sometimes to make change you have to join with voices more powerful

Harris tell a packed meeting that destitution really exists in the UK – and get a hugely positive response.

Engaging with think-tanks is important because they often come up with the ideas that become government policy. And when a think-tank run by former Conservative leader Iain Duncan Smith MP, and with the ear of Conservative leader David Cameron, announced it was to run an enquiry into the destitution of refused asylum seekers we were delighted. We were even more delighted when Iain Duncan Smith launched it with these words:

“Society has a duty of care to the most vulnerable. It is estimated that there are about a quarter of a million destitute failed asylum seekers. The majority are not allowed to claim benefits and are also forbidden to work. The law effectively forces them into destitution, illegal activity and vulnerability. The result is a growing destitute underclass in society that is only being supported by voluntary organisations. A radical overhaul is needed.”

We await the outcome of that enquiry – but the very fact that a political party that so recently advocated withdrawal from the 1951 Refugee Convention is now focused on tackling the inhumanity of destitution is tremendously

than your own. The Refugee Council worked hard to make sure that the “Still Human Still Here” coalition included not just the ‘usual suspects’, but big organisations like the Red Cross and powerful faith institutions like the Anglican church. This tactic bore fruit when the Archbishop of York, John Sentamu, agreed to lead a delegation of the great and the good to bring the plight of destitute refused asylum seekers before the Home Secretary.

The campaign had tried for months to secure a meeting with a Home Office Minister about this issue, but had not succeeded. Within a few days of requesting a meeting, the Archbishop was offered a date. So began a laborious process of briefing and preparation for the big event.

On the day of the meeting, our expectations were not high, but Jacqui Smith listened to the delegation respectfully, and then sanctioned a process under the joint oversight of herself and the Archbishop to find solutions to destitution. That process will be a long and difficult one, but its existence in itself is a victory.

History is written by the victors. The ‘official’ history is written in Hansard, in legislation, and in books. Our victories may not make the history books – but the Refugee Council writes history whenever we influence a law-maker, question a minister or encourage a change in party policy. In fact, we write history whenever our actions make life that little bit better for those who seek sanctuary on our shores. You can keep your Hansard, your textbook and your Acts – I prefer our version of history.]

You can read more about Jonathan’s work and our lobbying and campaigning work on our ‘Poliblog’: refugeecouncil.typepad.com/poliblog

photo feature

[Refugee Week – a celebration]



Refugee Week has been celebrated in the UK since 1998 and is held every year in June. It was started as a way of challenging negative perceptions of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK and to date, remains the only UK-wide event that promotes the importance of sanctuary and the benefits it can bring to both refugees and host communities.

The Refugee Council is the lead agency in the Refugee Week partnership, hosting the coordinating team and overseeing its UK development. In 2007, the national launch was, for the first time, held outside London.

The celebration took place on Victoria and Chamberlain Squares in Birmingham City Centre.

Above Interactive performances and music workshops on Victoria Square included a dance workshop by Cameroon Advice and Support Services UK, which got a large group of people up and dancing together, and workshops and performances by several RCOs.

There were performances from musicians from the Balkans, Congo, Cameroon, Iran, Angola, Iraq, Kazakhstan and Zimbabwe.

photo feature



Above A circus skills workshop, children's entertainers and face painters added to the festival atmosphere.

This year's event attracted a diverse crowd: from the colourful, the fresh-faced, the comical, to the downright camera-shy.

Iraq: Refugees from conflict

March 2008 was the 5th anniversary of the allied action in Iraq. During the previous twelve months, the plight of Iraqi refugees was much in the news and high on the political agenda. The Refugee Council played a key role in highlighting the refugee crisis.

Plus: 'A year in letters' highlights some of the events in the Refugee Council Press Diary.

Keeping the spotlight on Iraq's refugee crisis

During 2007/2008 the fate of Iraqis forced from their homes by the conflict became a big story. According to the UN refugee agency, over 2.5 million people had been displaced within Iraq itself while another 2 million had sought refuge in neighbouring countries such as Syria and Jordan.

The majority of these refugees were in limbo – generally tolerated but without a legal basis for their presence in the neighbouring countries. The lack of an effective response by the international community meant that most Iraqi refugees had little hope of finding protection elsewhere.

Many of Iraq's neighbours started imposing visa restrictions and passport requirements in response to the overwhelming influx of Iraqi refugees. Denied the right under international law to seek asylum, many Iraqi refugees resorted to desperate measures.

This was one of the main issues which the Refugee Council's international policy and research team were investigating through the "Protection-sensitive borders project." Project Officer, Sile Reynolds, explains: "Smuggling is a massive industry now, and this has been a real by-product of increasing border controls. The tighter the border controls, the greater the demand; and the greater the demand, the higher the price. The greater the risk, the more the smugglers can charge." The project did field research in Turkey, one of the main countries of transit for Iraqi refugees.

[smuggling is a massive industry now and this has been a real by-product of increasing border controls]

While this research continued, the Refugee Council took a lead in calling for a greater response to the Iraqi crisis from the British government, joining forces with Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch to call for the UK to take an international lead.

The campaign was taken up by *The Times* in the summer of 2007 with the focus being on the fate of Iraqi interpreters with British forces who had been forced to flee after being targeted by

insurgents. The Refugee Council and its allies found themselves on the same side as retired army generals and right leaning newspapers, and after a barrage of criticism, the Prime Minister relented and announced a review of the government's refusal to treat the interpreters as special cases for asylum.

Writing in the *Independent*, Donna Covey welcomed the change of heart but suggested that it was vital that the government's review adopted a much wider focus than just the interpreters. "A resettlement programme should be put in place to offer a new life in the UK to some of the most vulnerable refugees," she wrote. She also urged the government to grant temporary status to Iraqis in the UK until it was safe and sustainable for them to return home.

Through its Voluntary Returns Project (VRP), the Refugee Council remained engaged with the main Iraqi refugee community organisations (RCOs) who were fighting to protect their members from deportation. "We provided them with reports on conditions in Iraq, changes to the assisted voluntary return schemes, and some key judicial decisions," says Gary Bell, VRP Information Officer.

By early 2008, the Refugee Council and other agencies involved in the government's Gateway resettlement process were deeply involved in planning for the arrival of the first resettled Iraqis. Numbers coming were not large however, a few hundred only, and the Refugee Council continued to press for a more wide ranging response.

This culminated in the Refugee Council teaming up with 24 refugee and human rights agencies from the US and the UK to call for more robust action by world leaders.

On the eve of the fifth anniversary of the Iraq conflict in March 2008, the agencies sent a letter to US President George Bush, Prime Minister Brown, and Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki expressing deep concern that so little had been done by their governments to address Iraq's refugee crisis.

"We urge your governments to take the lead in the international community in responding to this crisis," their letter concluded.]

Press Diary: A year of letters

April 2007

- The refugee crisis in the region surrounding Iraq is getting increasingly acute. Up to 50,000 refugees estimated to be leaving Iraq each month.
- It emerges that Iraqis who have worked for the British forces during the conflict, mainly as interpreters, have been forced to flee for their lives as a direct consequence of their position. Few, if any, have made it to the UK, in fact asylum claims from Iraqis are at their lowest for years and most are being refused.
- UN Refugee Agency organises a conference to raise funds to help its work with refugees from Iraq.
- The Refugee Council takes the opportunity to write a joint letter with Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch to then Prime Minister, asking the British government to do more to help refugees from Iraq, including offering resettlement to the UK, and better supporting those who are already here. A letter from three interpreters exiled in Damascus in Syria is enclosed, detailing their plight and asking for help from their former employer. The letters receive national media coverage.

May 2007

- A reply is not forthcoming. The interpreters send a letter to the Queen. Finally, a reply comes from the Home Office. It is not encouraging.

July 2007

- The Refugee Council gives evidence to the Iraq Commission, which is filmed for Channel 4. The *Independent* publishes an article outlining the UK's poor treatment of Iraqi refugees, quoting the Refugee Council.

August 2007

- The new Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, pledges to review the situation for Iraqi interpreters who have worked for the British armed forces. The Refugee Council's response to this is widely covered in the national media and Donna Covey writes an opinion piece for the *Independent*.
- The Refugee Council, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch write to the Prime

Minister to welcome this development but again outline their concerns about all refugees fleeing or who have fled Iraq, and the ongoing problems facing Iraqi refugees in the UK. There are widespread reports in the national press of interpreters who have been killed as a result of their work with the coalition forces in Iraq.

September 2007

- A flurry of news reports on the Iraq refugee crisis but still no further action on the part of the government. The trio of organisations head to the Labour Party conference to host a fringe meeting on the crisis. Amnesty releases a report detailing the desperate situation for those displaced both within and outside Iraq.

October 2007

- Details of the government's plans to assist Iraqi refugees are laid out by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, David Miliband MP. They are extremely limited, and apply only to those Iraqi refugees who have worked directly for the British government. Meanwhile, press stories of the ongoing refugee crisis continue.

November 2007

- The trio are joined by the International Rescue Committee, and the four write to David Miliband to request further information about the government's plans and to draw his attention to the wider aspects of the refugee situation.

March 2008

- The Refugee Council contributes to an exclusive story in the Guardian on the forced destitution of Iraqi asylum seekers in the UK. The story leads to widespread media coverage and a resurgence of the issue.

March 19th

- It is the fifth anniversary of the start of the war in Iraq. Fed up with the inadequate response of the British government to the crisis, the four agencies go transatlantic and team up with refugee organisations in the United States, and write their final letter. Addressed to Prime Minister Brown, President Bush and Prime Minister al-Maliki of Iraq, the letter again asks for Iraq's refugee crisis to be considered as a matter of urgency. The letter is signed by 24 agencies from both sides of the Atlantic. So far, there has been no reply.]

photo feature
This photo was taken along the Spanish Coast at a spot where many refugees have fled to from Africa. It illustrates much about the stark and difficult journey many have to face. The photos were taken by the Refugee Council's International Protection Policy team as part of their research and advocacy project 'Protection-Sensitive Borders'.



.....
: Our work on resettlement
: In 2007-08, we continued with our resettlement work both in
: Sheffield and Hull. Specifically, we:
: • Produced the Good Practice Guide on Resettlement with Refugee
: Action.
: • Received a further 88 Burmese and Karen refugees from Thailand
: in Sheffield. This is the third group we have received to date
: • Resettled a further 77 Congolese refugees from Zambia in Hull
: • Set up a Gateway Forum for 32 GPP refugees in Sheffield. It has
: members from the Liberian, Congolese, Karen and Burmese
: communities who have been resettled over the last 4 years in
: the city.
: • Completed a 5-day training course involving the entire
: resettlement team - including Norwich - on working with Gateway
: families. Run by the Medical Foundation, this excellent course
: gave the team a welcome chance to work more closely together.]
:

[relationships]

how do we know each other?

Shpetim Alimeta, Organisational Development Officer for the Basis Project and Dan Cissokho, chairperson of the refugee group PACO, discuss their working relationship.



Shpetim Alimeta is the Basis Project's Organisational Development Officer (ODO) for the East of England. The Basis project is a five-year joint Refugee Council and Refugee Action project. It is funded by the Big Lottery Fund and is aimed at assisting refugee community organisations (RCOs) to manage, develop and sustain their work. Dan Cissokho is the chairperson of the Peterborough African Community Organisation (PACO). PACO runs a community radio project through which it aims to promote social cohesion and integration in Peterborough.

Shpetim: "When I began work on the Basis Project I carried out a mapping exercise of RCOs in the Eastern region, and PACO was one of the first that I interviewed. I was impressed by Dan's ability to spell out very clearly and precisely what his organisation's needs were.

PACO realised that it was time to focus on their strengths unlike some

RCOs which succumb to the tendency of chasing too many rabbits. The community radio project was one of the things that they were good at because they had the skills. Also others were not doing it, so they were filling a gap.

Above all, they had enthusiasm, which made my day. Dan is passionate about his project, which is why he's managed to endure the rejection of funding applications along the way and soldier on.

The first meeting I had with PACO, sometime in February 2008, was to assess their suitability criteria for working with Basis. Chiefly, we look at whether an organisation is legally constituted, has clear internal governance procedures, and is willing to commit time to working with Basis. We then agreed to focus on developing a fundraising strategy for PACO.

I recognise how important and pertinent such a project as PACO's is for their community. Basic needs such as housing and health are crucial, but cultural awareness, having a sense of belonging, co-existence and integration are very important too, and radio helps very well in this area.

More significantly, this radio project is not limited to refugees and asylum seekers, but involves the host community and creates a platform for cultural exchange through facilitating common conversations. PACO has some British youth attending their media training sessions as well.

I have high hopes for PACO and I think this is just the beginning for them. I can see them in three years time not needing Basis because they will have mustered the capacity and confidence to proceed on their own.

My working relationship with Dan is superb - he has got creativity, which I clearly noticed from the outset. As a

2007/2008 work with refugee community organisations

- Successfully recruited 9 new members of staff to deliver activities of the Basis project to support refugee community organisations (RCOs) nationally for the next 4 years.

- Developed the new Basis project website to provide organisational development toolkits and information products for RCOs.
- Provided 36 short-term advice and consultancy support, 9 training courses for RCOs and 4 "Meet the Funder" seminars for RCOs

in London.

- Provided one to one advice to 103 RCOs in London.
- Produced 6 issues of RCO Newsletter and Women's News, circulated to 950 RCOs and 150 second-tier organisations.
- Contributed to Greater London Authority's refugee

integration strategy and community safety forum.

- Distributed information on funding, events, policy development, campaigning activities and other relevant information to 336 RCOs.
- Contributed to the coordination and organising of Refugee Week events in

Basis officer, I work flexibly with community leaders like Dan, recognising that they are very busy people – something many local government bureaucrats do not realise.

Dan: “PACO (Peterborough African Community Organisation) was set up in November 2005 to provide a contact group for newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers in Peterborough. Since then it has grown and become a fully-fledged RCO providing assistance, advice and orientation.

We got to know about the Basis Project when we attended the launch ceremony in London, courtesy of an invitation from Shpetim.

We welcomed Basis enthusiastically because we recognised the need for a capacity building project to address the organisational deficiencies of most RCOs. RCOs are at the grassroots and constitute the first point of contact with the people, so there is definitely a need to help them achieve the capacity to fulfil their mission.

Shpetim engaged us in discussions on developing an action plan. We decided to focus on developing an effective and sustainable fundraising strategy. Shpetim pointed out that instead of making several minor applications for funding, we needed to design a strategy for pursuing major funding bids and to diversify income sources. After evaluating our work, we also decided to focus on just one project, which is a community radio project aimed at improving social cohesion.

We mobilised small funds to buy start-up equipment and commenced broadcasting over the internet through the PACO website in June 2007. From there we secured more funding to run the project and to launch spin-off skills training projects such as Refugees into Media and Young Refugees into Radio. We have trained up to 30 people to date.

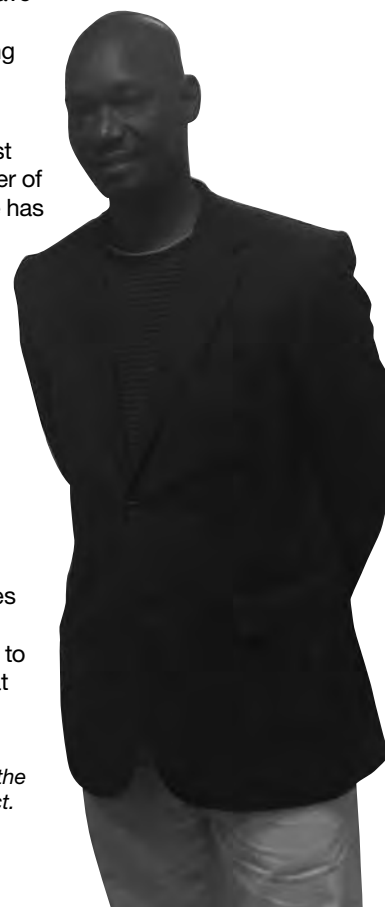
We hope to double these figures once our major funding comes through. Currently, we have funding to recruit a co-ordinator to implement certain aspects of the radio project for a period of at least six months. But a lack of match funding has been a problem.

However, Shpetim spoke to the funders directly to explain our challenges as an RCO and to reassure them that, because of our participation in Basis, we would soon be able to secure matching funds. As a result, the time constraints have been relaxed. Through Basis, we now have a sustainable fundraising strategy in place and the organisation's better off today.

Despite the fact that Shpetim must obviously allocate a limited number of hours to working with an RCO, he has shown great flexibility on this.

Shpetim has been a pleasure to work with. I think he's really committed - he's someone who doesn't mind working on weekends, which suits us brilliantly! If he's working on something he just wants to get it done. He works in a very flexible way, which allows us to approach him readily whenever there is urgent business to discuss. I also appreciate the way he always gives us feedback on the work that we would have done and makes sure to stress all the important details that we need to take into account.]

For more information on The Basis Project and its work with RCOs, see the project website: www.thebasisproject.org.uk



the North East, Yorkshire and Humberside, West Midlands, and East of England, including the national launch in Birmingham.

- 21 clients attended ESOL courses delivered under the CLAS project; 41 clients attended 3 ESOL courses

delivered in partnership with Hackney City Farm.

- 55 clients completed IT training towards their European Computer Driving License (ECDL).
- With KPMG, Lehman Brothers, Goldman Sachs and Waterloo Job Shop, we have supported 11 clients

in employment support including CVs, application forms, interview techniques, and confidence building.

- QASRO training programme was launched and delivered in partnership with the Northern Refugee Centre and Voluntary Action Sheffield in South Yorkshire.

- Grant of £34,000 from Llanckelly Foundation was secured to enable the completion of regional QASRO training programme.]

See also:
www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/rcos

[wellbeing] the **best** of **times** the **worst** of **times**



Alan Javid, a Specialist Team Support Worker reflects on his work supporting a particularly distressed Ugandan refugee, who is finding life easier now that he is involved in political activism again.

“Lewis was in his 30s, and from Uganda. I took up his case after he had become destitute following the refusal of his asylum claim. He had been sleeping rough or in temporary shelters and looked haggard from the physical and mental ordeal of leading a precarious existence on the margins of society.”

Lewis had been referred to a psychiatrist through his church, but after going through several sessions with the psychiatrist he remained agitated and

deeply stressed.

All our clients are different of course, but a common feature is that they present with highly complex sets of needs, including coping with the after-effects of violent incidents, the loss of family members, and anxiety about loved ones who they have left at home or are missing. Many have histories of imprisonment and torture in their countries of origin and then have spent periods in detention

in the UK. Thirty-four per cent of the women assessed by the team in 2007 had been raped or sexually abused.

One of Lewis’s biggest concerns was over the fate of his family back in Uganda. I was able to put that to rest by ensuring that our Day Centre here in Brixton, which dispenses a range of direct, practical support, supplied him with phone cards. Lewis was also able to have hot meals at the centre when he came in for sessions. In addition to that, I helped him register with a new GP and referred him to the British Red Cross, where he managed to get clothing and financial support.

-
- **During the past year, we assisted thousands of refugees with advice and support across a whole range of services that we offer in our operations across the country.**
- **Services delivered from our Day Centre in Brixton:**
- 30,000 hot meals served to Day Centre users
- 550 sessions of Therapeutic Casework support to vulnerable clients
- 80 women assessed and assisted under the Vulnerable Women’s Project
- 6,397 client sessions in ESOL, arts, drama and well being classes
- **The Refugee Council’s One Stop Services across the country worked with tens of thousands of clients. Our staff had:**
- 84,782 clients screened
- 4,348 clients signposted
- 82,712 clients receiving OSS service
- 8,295 receiving telephone advice sessions
- 1,312 clients referred
- **Our resettlement team under the Gateway Protection Programme worked with 238 clients and delivered:**
- 5015 advice Sessions
- 970 home visits
- 740 outreach advice sessions
- 1754 telephone advice session
- **Our Sunrise programme had:**
- 150 new clients
- 203 active clients at the end of March 2008
- 1603 advice sessions delivered
- See also: www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/services
-

[... he had to survive on the charity of others ...]

But there was more to Lewis's case than his immediate needs. He had been a passionate political activist back home and I noticed a hankering for political relevance and the acute alienation he felt from the developments in his home country. So I handled his case very differently from the others I've dealt with in the past.

Back in Uganda he had been confident, well to do and very supportive of his community. He had had a sense of direction and purpose and clearly relished the role he played in the political life of his country.



Above The Specialist Team at Somerset House in central London on their day out.

Now here he was living with a family he had met through the church and clearly finding it difficult to swallow the fact that he had to survive on the charity

Besides the practical support that we offered Lewis, I decided to focus on his politics. My role, as I saw it, was to try and help him achieve that sense of engagement with politics once more. I advised him on how to link up with community groups from his country. I used my own background in politics and my life experiences to relate to his situation. I know how it is when one loses one's positive role, how depressed and disillusioned one becomes.

I used to sit and listen to what he had to say about his life and where he was in contrast to where he wanted to be. Now, having linked up with fellow Ugandans, Lewis is busying himself with organising political activities in his community and presents a more positive disposition.”]

.....
● **Refugee Council hosts therapeutic conference**
● In February 2008, the Refugee Council and the Women's Therapy Centre (WTC) held a collaborative conference at the Anna Freud Centre to focus on their experiences of offering practical and psychotherapeutic support to refugees and asylum seekers.
● The event was a great success with over 100 therapists and other professionals from mental health and refugee organisations attending.
● “This was the first event purely on psychotherapy which the Refugee Council has organised and it was a chance to present our work and models of practice to an audience we had not had contact with before,” said Andrew Keefe, manager of the Specialist Advice Services team.
● The Specialist Team is currently awaiting results of a three year evaluation of the therapeutic casework model by the Centre for Migration & Social Care at the University of Kent. Preliminary results from a survey carried out with clients of the service show a highly positive response.
● The team is set to roll out the model to other Refugee Council centres around the country. Keefe, explains: “Thanks to a very generous donation, we also intend to establish a Family Therapy Centre to deal with families as units and rather than individual clients, and we're in the process of engaging a systemic practitioner as clinical supervisor for the team.”
●



DVD review
One to watch



Hannah Ali featured in the DVD *From isolation to integration*, which explored the issues facing older refugees in the UK.

Experiencing Exile in old age

Many older refugees arrive in the UK hoping for a new beginning. But isolation, health problems and negotiating a complicated social care system can leave them depressed and lonely. Innocent Sithole reviews a poignant DVD illustrating these issues and reports on a conference on older refugees that was held in January 2008.

From isolation to integration

Producers: *Refugee Council and Age Concern*

Released: *January 2008*

Running times: *10mins*

This impressive film vividly illustrates the plight of older refugees living in the UK through the story of Hannah Ali, a 65 year-old Iraqi refugee who is completely blind. We first meet Hannah in her small flat in Kilburn, North London, narrating her solitary struggle to lead a fuller life in the absence of adequate social care.

Before Hannah was permanently moved to this block she had a ground floor flat, which made it easier for her to go outside without assistance. But now, being several floors up the tower block, she has to use the lift to get in and out of her flat.

Her social carer can only spend 12 hours per week with her, which means Hannah has to stay indoors most of the time. Once, after running out of her anti-depression medication and feeling quite distressed, Hannah attempted to use the lift alone. But she collapsed in the lift and was only rescued by a neighbour.

Daily life is a struggle for her; without help she struggles to get by and she has had quite a few domestic accidents. Her hands are scarred from burns she suffered after she lit her gas stove in an attempt to prepare herself a meal.

She says she has not had a decent bath for a month because the bath in her flat is not adapted to her special needs. Hannah is grateful to be in the safety of London, far away from the fear and misery of Iraq. But alone, infirm and speaking no English at all, her road to integration into mainstream UK society appears littered with insurmountable difficulties.

She is not part of any community. She says she sees other Iraqis sometimes, but no one ever calls. If her social carer does not turn up, she never gets to see anyone all day. The soul-crunching loneliness has brought her despair and eerie thoughts of suicide.

Hannah's story resonates in the lives of many elderly refugees living in the UK. Isolation is firmly etched in their experience; they yearn for the safety and reassurance of community and a sense of inclusion.

The film also explores some of the initiatives taken by refugee communities to counter the isolation of elderly refugees. The Centre for Armenian Information and Advice in Hounslow, West London, is one such initiative. Elderly refugees visit the centre to chat in their own language, enjoy traditional Armenian food and revive memories of home through song.

Some of the refugees interviewed in the film identified the failure to speak English as the greatest barrier to integration for elderly refugees. The language barrier, they said, made it impossible for people to seek treatment from GPs, or to understand what services and entitlements were available to them.

Another interesting issue thrown up by the film is that elderly refugees want to be part of the new information society, gaining computer literacy so that they can use email and the internet to combat social isolation.

Another thing the refugees would like is a dedicated advocate to take their problems to decision-makers.]

[See also: *Hannah Ali speaks on our radio special from December 2007 at www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/vulnerablewomen*]



Refugee Council co-hosts older refugees' conference

Older refugees are often regarded as invisible. They are seldom recognised as having specific needs or for the contributions they can make to the wider society. Decision-makers do not know enough about the impact of intersecting factors of age, gender, migration status and ethnicity on people's lives. Hence they fail to come up with effective policy responses.

To fill this information void, the Refugee Council co-hosted a groundbreaking conference on older refugees in January 2008. Titled 'From Isolation to integration', the conference was a culmination of the Older Refugees Programme, a two-year partnership initiative to highlight the issues and concerns that older refugees have about their circumstances and daily lives in the UK.

Funded by Lloyds TSB, the Older Refugees Programme was a partnership project between Age Concern England, the Refugee Council, Age Concern London and the Association of Greater London Women (AGLOW).

"The conference focussed on the issues, challenges and service needs of older refugees and how these can best be taken into account when devising services and policies," said Lisa Doyle, the Refugee Council's acting research manager. Hosted by the Mayor of London, the conference presented the findings and key messages from the Older Refugees Programme.

The day offered a unique opportunity to explore how existing and potential initiatives can help to reduce the isolation experienced by many older refugees and promote their integration into the local community and wider society.

"Following the conference, we worked with Age Concern to deliver a working paper bringing together a literature review, which is a comprehensive overview of previous research on issues relating to older refugees and their experience in the UK, and the analysis of interviews with older refugees," Doyle said.

The success of the Older Refugees programme was in its ability to hear directly from older refugees themselves about the considerable problems and challenges that they face in their daily lives, and about what would make a difference to them.]

[See also: [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/research and download the report at www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/olderrefugees](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/research_and_download_the_report_at_www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/olderrefugees)]

The Older Refugee programme was one of several research projects the Refugee Council developed during 2007/2008

Key research work in 2007-08

- Published report of the research findings of Refugees' Experiences of Integration Project. The project looked at the social aspects of refugees' integration, and was undertaken in partnership with the University of Birmingham and funded by the Big Lottery Fund.
- Published policy report concerning employment, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and vocational training. It was based on research findings from Refugees' Experiences of Integration Project.
- Ran Refugees' Experiences of Integration conference to launch report and discuss findings.
- Co-hosted 'From Isolation to Integration' conference as part of the Older Refugees Programme.
- Published Working Paper bringing together a literature review and the analysis of interviews with older refugees.]

a life in a day



Ever wondered what it is like to work in front line services at the Refugee Council? **Caroline Watson**, from our Children's Panel, gives us a personal glimpse into her world.

Plus: Express yourself

Getting young refugees to open up and express themselves is an essential part of learning to cope with a new life away from home. We highlight two projects using very different techniques to do just that.

Caroline Watson – Manager of the Drop-in Centre in the Children's Panel

A social worker by training, Caroline has spent the last 14 years working with children at the Refugee Council.

"I am the quintessential working mother - my day starts quite early in the morning as I have two daughters. The bigger one is alright; she can take care of herself and rarely requires my assistance, but the youngest I have to wake up and prepare for school. I make breakfast for them and have my coffee and a morning cigarette. With so many chores demanding attention at home, I find it convenient to do the laundry before I go to work.

I come into the office at nine-thirty. One of the first things I do is to check the movement sheet which we use to account for every staff member and their duties at any one time. And then I check my emails, as well as the faxes of referrals that would have come in from the UK Border Agency or social services, or solicitors working with some of our clients. I often chip in and go down to the screening desk to see the range of cases coming in and how many clients are waiting to be seen. If the queue is long, which is often the case, I end up seeing clients on top of being on management duty.

Tuesday is typically one of those days where I may not get to sit down - I might just have a minute to check my emails. There is loads of

liaison work to do, such as linking up foster carers and solicitors, for instance. I engage in a lot of advocacy work as well, which is the mainstay of the Refugee Council's work really. I routinely deal with social services about young kids being bullied by their foster carers, for example.

When we get detention cases I have to try and find someone to allocate them to because we always treat these as a priority. A huge area of our work involves age assessment disputes with social services. Recently, this has escalated quite radically on account of an apparent decision by some local authorities to dispute the ages of young Afghanis. One local authority in particular always insists that these children are two years older than their given age so that if one is 15, the local authority claims they're 17, and so on. I just think it's an injustice being done and it also affects their schooling.

I do go downstairs and have a fag and sometimes one of my colleagues makes me a cuppa, which is lovely! I might go for lunch, which is usually a dash to the cafe across the road to get a sandwich, which I then eat at my desk. Often at lunch-time I might have to go and buy my daughters some new school shoes or some medication or shampoo - there's always something to do in my own life that I have to try and squeeze in!

In the afternoon we often come back to a waiting room heaving with clients waiting to be seen. I currently have seven team members. It's a real struggle because my job is to try and manage enough staffing to see the clients. I don't believe in closing the door to clients because you don't know what's coming through the door; they could be quite vulnerable, and they often are because they're young people. Everybody's stress levels shoot up, and I have to try to calm the children down because some get a bit agitated. I also try to calm the staff, and myself too, because I also get stressed you know!

Sometimes I have to limit the numbers by telling some clients to return the next day if their case is not so urgent. They don't take it very well when I do that - they're teenagers, after all. The funny thing is that we usually have only a trickle of clients in the morning. As kids, they love to revel in their long and languid mornings, and suddenly in the afternoon they wake up! A kid can walk in at a quarter past five on a Friday afternoon and expect to be seen straight away! It's one of those things that you get used to when you work with children.

We deal with so many emergency situations. I've frequently had to work late into the night trying to get someone housed, or dealing with a call from solicitors

[... the impact of our work is readily discernible...]

saying they got a court injunction to house a kid. Sometimes it doesn't stop.

But there are some very inspiring and self-actualising highlights in my job. I find great joy and fulfilment in confronting the injustices visited upon these young kids and getting them a fair deal. There's nothing more infuriating than, say, social services denying a child support because they believe he's older than he says he is, when you know for a fact that he's not. Taking on social services and actually winning - ah! Nothing gives me greater joy!

The impact of our work is readily discernible. You can see a child's life change for the better, and see them move on with their lives as they get refugee status, get married or have their own children. It's nice to see some of them come back to visit us. In fact, there's one girl whom we helped during her pregnancy who frequently visits us. Her baby, who is now 18-months old, is like our own little mascot!

Another major highlight of my job is the social evening. When I started it seven years ago it made an immediate and overwhelming impact. I think the day the Refugee Council Chair Douglas Board came to visit we had the highest number of kids in here - about 145! We have since made adjustments to retain the social evening as a more manageable event.

So we have about 40 kids now and it's much nicer - you can talk to them and play all sorts of games. There's table tennis and snooker; table football; an art table; scrabble, and some just hang out and listen to music. I have about 12 really great volunteers - they talk to the kids and play with them too. When a kid raises a work-related issue I ask them to hold it and tell them to just sit back, chill and feel safe and get to know other young people. They make loads of friends at the social evening.

When I get home, around 9:30pm, I usually don't eat because by then it's way too late. I don't eat meat, so when the cat's away my husband and the kids take the opportunity to eat their sausages! Tuesday just whacks me, but the idea of waking up to another day and changing at least one more kid's life for the better is way too tempting to resist!"]

Strong Voices for strong minds

Stigmatised, alone and far from home, separated children are among the most vulnerable groups in our society. They do not have the benefit of supportive families, nor do they enjoy the reassurance of cultural familiarity. As such, they find the challenge of integrating into their host society and re-engaging with the normal activities that are typical of the lives of most young people rather daunting.

For the Refugee Council, ensuring the safety of refugee children and maximising their opportunities is a key priority. At its Birmingham offices the charity runs the Strong Voices project, which is designed to empower separated children and help their integration into their local communities.

“The Strong Voices project gives them a voice, an outlet for their creative energy and a safe environment to discuss issues they face on a daily basis, including isolation, mistrust, bullying and uncertainty over their future as they approach eighteen,” explains Blanka Stevenson, the Refugee Council’s Services Development Worker who runs the project.

Blanka, who also fled from persecution in her home country to seek refuge in the UK as a young person, expresses admiration for her young charges: “They certainly have a great deal to cope with. However, they never fail to impress me by their maturity, intelligence, thirst for knowledge and resilience.”

The Strong Voices project

makes no bones about its ambitions to turn out confident and resourceful young people. Underlying this initiative is the belief that empowered youth are better placed to improve their performance at school and chart their way into higher education and employment.

Participants in the Strong Voices project have enjoyed opportunities to interact with decision-makers and to be involved in decision-making processes at both local and national level. They fed their experience of the asylum system and integration process to the UK Children’s Commissioner and also provided their views on their experiences to the Border and Immigration Agency (now renamed UK Border Agency).

This year, some of the young people involved in the project approached their housing provider to voice their concerns as they felt they were being treated unfairly. As a result, their living conditions and the way they are treated have improved considerably.

The children have also been ►

The Children’s Panel’s work with separated children in 2007/08:

- Received 3,108 referrals
- Allocated 833 of these children to named advisers who worked closely with them to ensure that they received the care and support they needed, both in terms of their asylum application and their welfare needs. One child said “You have been very helpful and you have changed my life since I came to this country. I feel safe and loved. Thank you.”
- Attended 158 New Asylum Model appointments with children.
- 5,417 advice sessions given to children at the Drop-In in south London.
- Over 100 children seen each month at surgeries across the country.
- 26 vulnerable girls, many of whom had been trafficked, given intensive support by our specialist Young Women’s Adviser.
- Training and support offered to a range of other professionals including social workers, legal representatives, and foster carers on issues including the asylum process for separated children, trafficking, children found in cannabis factories and age assessment.
- A wide range of activities for children and young people including a weekly social evening, a cinema club, a football club, a music club, a programme of summer activities and trips to lectures, sporting events and other places of interest.]

See also: www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/children

[Life through a lens] Separated children capture their experiences on film

► involved in awareness-raising sessions with a wide range of organisations, including local authorities, housing providers, and the police to highlight their needs and future aspirations.

“Strong Voices is the best project of all in West Midlands,” says Imran, a 17 year-old boy from Afghanistan, “I have experienced a few other projects in Birmingham but this one is the best of all because all the members and volunteers are really friendly”.

Kazim, another teenager from Afghanistan, captures the sentiment of most of his colleagues when he says: “Since becoming a Strong Voices member, I never feel lonely and I am really happy because I have friends now.”]

If you had to present a visual narrative of your sense of home and belonging, what images would you use to tell your story? Young people participating in a six-month photography course hosted by the Refugee Council in Brixton had to grapple with just such an artistic challenge.

Enrolled from the charity’s weekly drop-in social evenings, where separated children meet to relax and make new friends, the young photographers learned exciting and creative ways of expressing their sense of identity and experiences of place and time.

The Photome project and exhibition was organised and

run by Zoom In, a not-for-profit photography school, and supported by the Refugee Council. Participants worked with professional photographer Liane Harris to learn camera techniques.

Under her guidance, the children explored issues that are important to them and which reflected their experiences and sense of community in London and the UK. They also learned Photoshop skills and how to manipulate and enhance their images.

The highlight of the photo project came in June 2007 when one of the young participants was named joint winner of the inaugural Refugee Week Photo competition. Shamin Settuba, from Uganda, impressed the judges with her series of pictures exploring her first encounter with snow.

The Refugee Council’s Online and Information Team manager Barbara Keating, who managed the photography project, says, “We are keen to explore new ways to help the young people we work with express themselves, their dreams, their aspirations.”

The photography course culminated in an exhibition that ran from 30 June to 12 July 2007 at the PYMCA Gallery in East London. An online exhibition was also launched simultaneously on the Refugee Council’s website.]

See also: www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/photome



FREEDOM!

[Cheap and Tasty!]

We are all being encouraged to eat a healthy diet these days, but this is particularly difficult for people claiming asylum. With this in mind, the Refugee Council's West London office has set up its Healthy Eating Project.

Co-ordinated by manager, Farida Stanikzai, and volunteer, Rachael Fernandes, the project helps clients to maintain a balanced, nutritious diet in order to keep themselves and their families healthy. It provides practical information about how to do this on a shoestring budget and with limited access to food retailers, as well as cooking facilities. As Rachael explains, the project gives particular focus to clients living on vouchers.

"We recognised that a lot of our clients were not eating healthily and we're mainly teaching them how to get the best nutritional value out of the cheapest food available in the supermarkets. A major worry among clients living on vouchers is that they are not able to get some of the ethnic foods they are familiar with. But volunteers give them advice on creative shopping skills, accompany them to supermarkets and help ensure that their limited allowances stretch as far as possible".

[... the classes have also provided a social network for clients who report feelings of isolation and exclusion ...]

Those taking part in the project have learnt some tasty new recipes that others may want to try at home.

The project is funded by the Marsh Christian Trust Refugee Volunteer Award scheme and also supported by Hounslow Primary Care Trust, which got involved in the project after observing the nutritional deficit among asylum-seeking clients who attended its women's group.

"We acquired a classroom to run the cookery classes around October 2007 when we applied for the Marsh



Award. We currently have a trainee chef from the PCT who is conducting the classes," Rachael explains.

Each session consists of six classes, after which a new set of students commence their lessons. The first session has now run its course; in each class, clients learned about a different food group, followed by a demonstration of how to use these foods to create something simple, inexpensive, nutritious and tasty. They were also given recipe cards providing simple instructions of what to buy and how to prepare the week's recipe at home.

The healthy eating classes have been received with great enthusiasm. "The clients said they really enjoyed the course as it gave them the opportunity to learn simple ways to cook healthy food," Farida explains, "The classes have also provided a social network for clients who report feelings of isolation and exclusion, allowing them to engage in a positive social activity in order to improve their own well-being."

Volunteering at the Refugee Council:

- Approximately 350 volunteers a week provided services
- Over 500 people on waiting lists for volunteering with RC
- Over 150 volunteer advice sessions each week
- 50 corporate volunteers provided employment support to refugee job-seekers
- Financial value of their work in excess of £250,000



Home-made cheese burger

Makes 4

Ingredients

1 large red onion
 500g beef steak mince
 Handful chopped fresh parsley
 Olive oil for brushing
 Salt & pepper
 4 burger buns split in two
 1 little Gem lettuce leaves separated
 1 beef tomato, sliced
 One gherkin sliced
 4 pieces of cheese
 Mayonnaise & tomato ketchup

Preparation instructions

1. Cut half the onion in ring and set aside. Finely chop the remainder and put into a large bowl, along with mince and parsley. Season and mix well with your hands. Shape into 4 burgers.
2. Brush the burgers with a little oil and cook on a hot griddle or frying pan for 10 minutes, until cooked through.
3. Spread one tsp of mayonnaise on the base bread, put lettuce leaves. Top with the burger, cheese, tomato and a slice of gherkin, spoon over some tomato ketchup and top with the other half of bun.

Spinach & ricotta lasagne

Makes 4

Ingredients

Butter 50g
 1 clove of garlic, crushed
 Fresh spinach 250g, roughly chopped
 1 tub ricotta cheese 250g
 125 grated cheddar cheese
 2 tablespoon plain flour
 250ml milk
 Pack of 500g fresh lasagne sheets
 2 tablespoons olive oil
 1 jar passata
 1 teaspoon oregano
 Salt & pepper

Preparation instructions

1. Preheat the oven to 180C, gas mark 4. Make the cheese sauce: pour the milk in a small saucepan, followed by flour and mix well. Add the butter and season well; put on low heat, stirring all the time when it is thick and smooth. Add half the cheese and remove from heat.
2. Cook spinach briefly with 1 tablespoon of olive oil and garlic. Add the nutmeg and ricotta, followed by a few spoons of cheese sauce to it.
3. Add the remaining olive oil and oregano to passata.
4. In a suitable ovenproof dish, place a layer of spinach mixture, followed by cheese sauce and passata, top with lasagne sheets and repeat.
5. Put the dish on the top shelf of the oven, for 30 minutes or till the topping is golden.



[...
 simple
 ways
 to cook
 healthy
 food
 ...]

statement of financial activities

For the Year Ended 31 March 2008

Incorporating the income and expenditure statement

Incoming resources from generated funds	Unrestricted Funds £000	Restricted Funds £000	2008 total	2007 total
Voluntary income				
Donations, legacies and other voluntary income	1,269	1,558	2,827	2,365
Investment income	354	6	360	238
Incoming resources from charitable activities				
Direct services to refugees and asylum seekers	2,326	11,188	13,514	13,102
Campaigning and policy	176	208	384	367
Education and training	272	642	914	1,180
Capacity building	197	595	792	1,220
Other incoming resources	29	-	29	38
Total incoming resources	4,623	14,197	18,820	18,510
Less: Cost of generating funds				
Voluntary income				
Fundraising costs	636	-	636	551
Total cost of generating funds	636	-	636	551
Net incoming resources available for charitable activities	3,987	14,197	18,184	17,959
Resources Expended				
Charitable activities				
Direct services to refugees and asylum seekers	2,100	12,009	14,109	13,324
Campaigning and policy	482	551	1,033	1,112
Education and training	446	829	1,275	1,347
Capacity building	303	1,128	1,431	1,480
Total charitable activity costs	3,331	14,517	17,848	17,263
Governance cost	44	-	44	69
Total resources expended	4,011	14,517	18,528	17,883
Net incoming before other recognised gains and losses	612	(320)	292	627
Other recognised gains				
Gains on investment assets	-	-	-	1
Net movement in funds in year	612	(320)	292	628
Reconciliation of Funds				
Total funds brought forward 1 April	2,334	1,941	4,275	3,647
Total funds carried forward 31 March	2,946	1,621	4,567	4,275

balance sheet

As at 31 March 2008

Assets	2008 £000	2007 £000
Fixed assets		
Tangible assets	342	337
Investments	11	25
Total fixed assets	353	362
Current assets		
Debtors	2,168	2,215
Cash at bank and in hand	5,335	7,009
Total current assets	7,503	9,224
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	(2,199)	(4,536)
Net current assets	5,304	4,688
Total assets less current liabilities	5,657	5,050
Provisions for liabilities	(1,090)	(775)
Net assets	4,567	4,275
Funds		
Unrestricted funds		
General	1,837	1,512
Designated	1,109	822
Total unrestricted funds	2,946	2,334
Restricted funds	1,621	1,941
Total funds	4,567	4,275

The summarised financial statements set out on pages 28 to 30 have been extracted from the full annual accounts prepared in accordance with the Companies Act 1985, which were approved by the Council on 7 November 2008.

The full annual accounts:

- have been audited and the auditors' opinion was unqualified; and
- will be delivered to the Registrar of Companies and the Charity Commission.

Douglas Board,
Chair
John Wenger,
Honorary Treasurer

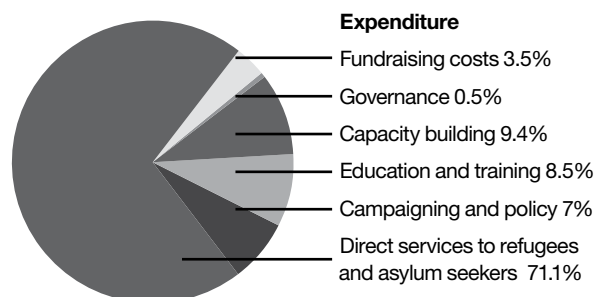
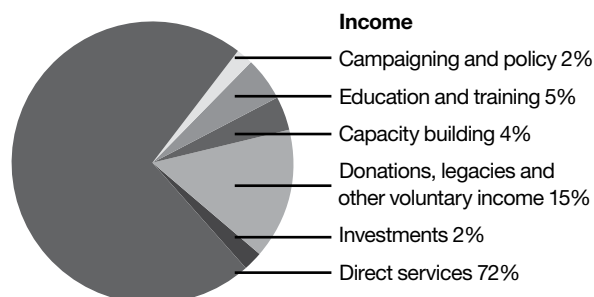
These summarised financial statements may not contain sufficient information to allow a full understanding of the financial affairs of the Charity.

For further information, the full accounts and auditors' report on these accounts should be consulted.

Copies of these can be obtained from: The Chief Executive's Office, Refugee Council, 240-250 Ferndale Road, London SW9 8BB.

income and expenditure

For the year ended 31 March 2008



independent auditors' statement

[We have examined the summarised financial statements of The British Refugee Council.

This statement is made solely to the trustees, as a body in accordance with the terms of our engagement. Our work has been undertaken so that we might state to the trustees those matters we have agreed to state to them in this statement and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the trustees as a body, for our work, for this statement, or for the opinions we have formed.

Respective responsibilities of trustees and auditors

The trustees are responsible for preparing the summarised financial statements in accordance with the recommendations of the Charities Statement of Recommended Practices 2005.

Our responsibility is to report to you our opinion on the consistency of the summarised financial statements with the full financial statements and trustees' report. We also read the other information contained in the summarised annual report and consider the implications for our report if we become aware of any apparent misstatements or material inconsistencies with the summarised financial statements.

Basis of opinion

We conducted our work in accordance with Bulletin 1999/6 'The auditors' statement on the summary financial statement' issued by the Auditing Practices Board for use in the United Kingdom.

Opinion

In our opinion the summarised financial statements are consistent with the full financial statements and the trustees' report of The British Refugee Council for the year ended 31 March 2008.

PKF (UK) LLP

Registered auditors
7 November 2008

Farringdon Place
20 Farringdon Road
London, UK
EC1M 3AP

Bankers

National Westminster Bank plc
1-4 Berkeley Square
London W1J 6BR

Solicitors

Gregory, Rowcliffe & Milners
1 Bedford Row
London WC1R 4BZ

board of trustees

The Board of Trustees comprises up to 15 members, ten elected by and from organisations which are members of the Refugee Council.

Of the 10 elected by members, five trustees are nominated by refugee community organisations, and five nominated by Non-Governmental Organisations) and the remainder coopted by the Board to fill gaps in skills and experience.

The Board currently meets six times a year in London. There is also a Resources Committee chaired by the Honorary Treasurer and composed of four other trustees, and a Fundraising Committee. Our trustees are not paid for their work, although their expenses are met by the Refugee Council.

Our current trustees are:

Douglas Board

Chair, Co-opted

John Wenger

Honorary Treasurer, Co-opted

John Akker

Council for Assisting Refugee Academics (NGO)

Alex da Costa

Angolan Civic Communities Alliance (RCO)

Michael Bartlet

Quaker Peace and Social Witness (NGO)
Retired December 2007

Richard Foster

Co-opted

Farrukh Husain

Migrants Resource Centre (NGO)

Elected December 2007

Resigned May 2008

Helen Ireland

Association of Visitors to Immigration Detainees (NGO)

Resigned March 2008

Helena Ismail (Vice-Chair)

Horn of Africa Community Group (RCO)

Resigned September 2007

Sandra Jenner

Co-opted

Keefa Kiwanuka

One World Foundation (RCO)

Mohamed Maigag

Haringey Somali Community and Cultural Association (HSCCA) (RCO)

Elected December 2007

Afzal Mirza

Refugee Advice Centre (RCO)

Hooshang Paigir

Afghan Association of London (RCO)

Resigned May 2008

Sunetra Puri

Co-opted

Appointed September 2007

Maurice Wren

Asylum Aid (NGO)

Louise Zanré

Jesuit Refugee Service (NGO)

Elected December 2007

members

The Refugee Council is a human rights charity, independent of government, working to ensure that refugees are given the protection they need, that they are treated with respect and understanding and that they have the same rights, opportunities and responsibilities as other members of our society. The Refugee Council is a membership organisation and works closely with its members to champion the rights of refugees and asylum seekers.

Action for Social Integration
Afghan Association of London
Africa Educational Trust
African Support and Project Centre
African Women's Group
Airey Neave Trust
Amnesty International UK
Angolan Civic Communities Alliance
Angolan Refugee Project
Association of Visitors to Immigration Detainees (AVID)
Asylum Seeker and Refugees of Kingston Upon Hull (ARKH)
Barnardo's
Brent Refugee Forum
British Association of Social Workers (BASW)
Catholic Bishop's Conference
Children's Society
Congoese Voluntary Organisation
Council for Assisting Refugee Academics
East Lancashire Welcome Project
Ethiopian Community in Britain
First Asian Support Trust (FAST)
Gateway Training and Regeneration Services
Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group
Haringey Somali Community and Cultural Association
Harrow Refugee Forum
Hazara Charitable Trust
Helping Hands for Refugees and Disabled
Immigration Law Practitioner's Association (ILPA)
International Care Network
International Tamil Refugee Network
Iranian Association
Iraqi Association
Jesuit Refugee Service
Jewish Council for Racial Equality
Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants
Kurdish Advice Centre
Kurdish Housing Association
Latin American Association
Latin American Women's Rights Service
Lewisham Indo Chinese Community Chinese School
Lewisham Refugee Network
Medical Foundation
Methodist Church
Migrant and Refugee Communities Forum
Migrants Resource Centre
Minority Rights Group Intl
Nomad Cultural Forum
Norfolk French Speakers Association (NORFRESA)
North of England Refugee Service (NERS)
Northern Refugee Centre
One World Foundation
One World UK
OXFAM
Pan African People's Welfare Advisory Service
Polish Ex-Combatants Association
PRAXIS
Quaker Peace and Social Witness (Religious Society of Friends)
Reading Refugee Support Group
Reconnect
Red Sea Community Programme
Refugee Action
Refugee Advice Centre
Refugee and Migrant Centre (formerly Wolverhampton WARS)
Refugee and Migrant Forum of East London (RAMFEL) (formerly Redbridge Refugee Forum)
Refugee Education and Employment Programme
Refugee Legal Centre
Russian Immigrants Association
Russian Refugee's Aid Society
Scottish Refugee Council
Sierra Leone Women's Forum UK
Sion Centre for Dialogue
Skills Active Forward
Somali Advisory Bureau
Somali Carers Project
Somali Centre for Information and Advocacy (SOCFIA)
Somali Development Organisation
Somali Enterprise Community and Cultural Association (SENCA)
Somali Refugee Action Group
South Sudanese Community Association UK
St Mary Magdalene Centre for Refugees and Asylum Seekers
Tamil Relief Centre
UKCISA (UK Council for International Student Affairs)
United Nations Association of the UK (UNA-UK)
Vietnamese Mental Health Services
Waaberi Community Development Association
Watford and Three Rivers Refugee Project
Welsh Refugee Council
Western Kurdistan Association
Wolverhampton Asylum Seeker and Refugee Service
Women's Association for African Networking and Development (WAND UK)
York Racial Equality Network
Zimbabwean Women's Network

Become a member of the Refugee Council?

Help shape the debate. Our policy and campaigning teams work in consultation with members to ensure that refugee issues are at the forefront of the political agenda and handled in a measured and sensible manner. Email members@refugeecouncil.org.uk for details.

Acknowledgements

Our thanks to all the staff and volunteers of the Refugee Council who gave their time and help in the development of this impact report. Thanks to Chipo, Dan, Aisha, Lewis, Hannah and all the others whose stories have been told in this report and to our volunteers, Caroline, Rachael, Liane and all of those who give their time to help support our work.

Thanks to Tom Sears who did the illustration on the front cover and to Innocent Sithole who wrote all the content.

We would also like to thank our donors, trusts, companies and statutory funders who support us so generously. Without them, none of the great work featured in this report would be possible.

Photos Credits

Front cover *Tom Sears*

Photo of Caroline Watson
Caroline Thomas

All others *Refugee Council*

The Refugee Council is a human rights charity, independent of government, working to ensure that refugees are given the protection they need, that they are treated with respect and understanding and that they have the same rights, opportunities and responsibilities as other members of our society.

www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

British Refugee Council, (commonly called the Refugee Council) is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales, [No 2727514] and a registered charity, [No 1014576]. Registered office: 240-250 Ferndale Road, London SW9 8BB, United Kingdom



At the Refugee Council, we believe that refugees should be treated as we would expect to be treated ourselves. During the past year, we assisted thousands of refugees with advice and support across a whole range of services that we offer in our operations across the country. Our friendly and professional staff was on hand to deliver high quality services to our clients, making us the leading independent human rights charity working with refugees in the UK.

Our services

Whether in London, the West Midlands, East of England or Yorkshire and Humberside, our staff see thousands of clients, answer thousands of queries and make every effort to be available and helpful.

Last year alone the staff in our One Stop Services worked with over 100,000 clients and helped to signpost nearly 12,000 to other services. Our telephone service received over 9,000 queries.

Staff at 'Sunrise', a pilot project in West London for those who newly received status, had just over 1600 advice sessions with clients. Our Resettlement team also worked intensively with 238 newly arrived refugees with over 5000 advice sessions, whether at the office or in the client's home or by phone.

www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

Contact us

East of England

Refugee Council Ipswich
office

1st Floor, 4 - 8 Museum Street
Ipswich IP1 1HT

T 01473 297 900

Advice line: 01473 297 900

London

Refugee Council Brixton
office (and Head Office)

240/250 Ferndale Road
London SW9 8BB

T 020 7346 6700

Advice line: 020 7346 6777

Refugee Council West
London office

Units 4 & 5, Hounslow
Business Park

Alice Way

Hounslow

Middlesex TW3 3UD

T 020 8607 6888

West Midlands

Refugee Council

Birmingham office

Lionel Street

Birmingham B3 1AG

T 0121 234 1950

Advice line: 0121 234 1950

Yorkshire & Humberside

Refugee Council Leeds office

Ground Floor

Hurley House

1 Dewsbury Road

Leeds LS11 5DQ

T 0113 244 9404

Advice line: 0113 386 2210