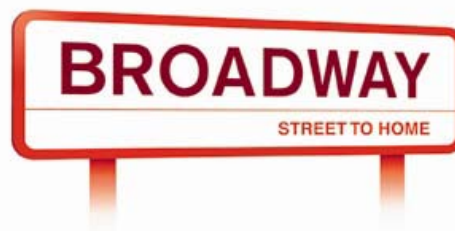




Pathways

**The routes of refugees and asylum seekers
into single homeless accommodation**

November 2006



Pathways: the routes of refugees and asylum seekers into single homeless accommodation

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Foreword

In mid-2004, the London Housing Foundation, with the support and co-operation of the Refugee Council, commissioned Broadway, a leading homeless agency, to undertake a brief snapshot survey to clarify the extent to which generic homelessness services were being asked to meet the needs of refugees and asylum seekers.

The survey, which was undertaken during July and August 2004, reported on the number of refugees and asylum seekers accessing day centres, outreach services and hostel accommodation. The findings of the survey raised several important questions. These were subsequently discussed at a meeting in London, which included representatives from London hostels, day centres, outreach teams, the Refugee Council and UNLEASH (Church Action on Homelessness). The results were subsequently presented to and discussed with representatives of the Home Office.

One of the key findings was that: on a one night count, refugees and asylum seekers accounted for a fifth (474) of the 2,431 bed spaces in fifty-eight participating residential projects for homeless people. It was agreed that this proportion (20%) of bedspaces occupied by refugees and asylum seekers was surprisingly high. The survey also found that refugees in this single homeless accommodation had often been resident in the UK for some time before becoming homeless, and that a large proportion was from Africa.

It was decided that it would be useful to find out more about the histories of refugee residents and their pathways to single homeless accommodation. So, in October 2005, the London Housing Foundation once again commissioned Broadway, this time to undertake a short supplementary study. The aim was to identify any themes in the experiences of refugees in single homeless accommodation.

This report presents the findings of this supplementary study. Whilst the numbers involved were small, we feel that the quality of information from each case study allows us to draw some very useful conclusions about the processes and experiences involved. We hope that it may thus prove useful to others.

Kevin Ireland
London Housing Foundation
November 2006

Acknowledgements

The London Housing Foundation would like to thank all those involved in Broadway for their hard work on this survey and report. Broadway undertook all of the interviews and in their turn they would especially like to thank all of those interviewed and the staff of participating projects for their co-operation.

Key Findings

This report aims to identify common themes in the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in single homeless accommodation. 18 people were interviewed across six homelessness agencies in London¹. Interviews focused on the accommodation, services and support these individuals had accessed since being in the UK.

*** Overview of sample profile**

Seven men and eleven women took part in the study. Nine participants were aged under 26. Five of the nine were under 18 and therefore unaccompanied minors. Seven participants were aged 26 to 35 and two, 36 to 45. 17 participants were African, one was Iranian. Six of the interviewees were asylum seekers, 12 were refugees.

*** Accommodation**

Arrival in the UK

Participants arrived in the UK between 1998 and 2004. All participants arrived in the UK with no accommodation pre-arranged. Participants commented on feeling scared and confused when they arrived in the UK, with very little knowledge of where to go or what to do.

Routes into single homeless accommodation

Routes into accommodation on arriving in the UK initially differed depending on whether or not the participant had claimed asylum upon point of entry. If so, they were accommodated by NASS (post 2000) or by the Home Office (prior to 2000), or by Social Services (if under 18).

In between arriving in the UK and accessing their current single homeless accommodation, all participants spent time in a combination of other temporary accommodation, with friends, with strangers/family contacts, and/ or rough sleeping. Participants' main support in accessing single homeless accommodation was advice from friends and/ or contacts in their community to access day or advice centres, which then referred them on.

NASS (National Asylum Support Service) and Social Services

Seven participants were housed through NASS, and four by Social Services. Of those housed by NASS, five were dispersed outside London. When given notice to leave NASS accommodation all of these five people returned to London, due to a feeling of isolation.

For those who were housed by Social Services or NASS, the main problem once notice to leave was given, was a lack of advice and information to help in securing alternative accommodation. These participants were given notice periods of seven or twenty-eight days. This was felt to be insufficient due to the lack of or limited advice available. The only sources of advice these participants were able to access in the notice period were friends and/or homelessness agencies.

Other temporary accommodation

Seven participants did not access NASS or Social Service accommodation in the UK, and so were accommodated by friends, family, contacts or via referrals by the Home Office. Five participants had spent a period of time sleeping rough since entering the UK.

As with those housed by NASS or Social Services, all other participants also struggled due to a lack of information on the asylum process, and a lack of formal support and advice in securing accommodation and other services.

¹ Twelve of the interviewees were refugees. Six were failed asylum seekers who had been given exceptional or discretionary leave to remain and were awaiting a final decision after submitting a claim for Indefinite Leave to Remain.

* **Integrating and settling into life in the UK**

The main barrier to participants integrating and settling into life in the UK was the difficulty in accessing permanent, settled accommodation. This was the main goal of participants but was also seen as the main problem. Related to this, participants' main difficulties were limited, or no, formal advice on what to expect and where to go for help; a lack of understanding of the UK housing system; and the language barrier.

Support networks and needs

The main source of current support that participants reported was the homelessness agency providing their accommodation. They reported that advice and support was received from keyworkers and staff, as well as friends in their residence. Another source of support for some was people in their community – people from the same home country.

Participants' stated their main needs as support and advice in finding permanent accommodation, and accessing work and services. In contrast they reported that their health needs were largely met. All participants were registered with a doctor and felt able to access health services in the UK.

* **Housing and future aspirations**

14 of the 18 participants wished to stay in the UK. Two hoped to eventually return home, and two could not say either way. The majority said they needed help to find permanent accommodation. The only options for getting this help that participants were aware of were: registering on the council's housing list, or referring to their keyworker or other staff in their current accommodation.

When asked about the future, participants that commented and had plans for the future said that they would like to study. Others commented that they would like to start a family, get married and "be a normal person". Six participants were currently studying and two were working.

* **Recommendations**

Recommendations for the Home Office

- Provide asylum seekers with clearer advice and support on arrival to aid initial orientation, and where to go for support and advice. In particular information is needed on the asylum process and housing market, to provide clarity and also manage expectations. One way this could be done is to produce booklets in community languages for clients. These could be produced and used by homeless agencies, to outline what the asylum and housing process is, what advice and support is available and where to go for information. This was a key action point from the 2004 survey and is still relevant and as yet has not been produced.
- As noted in the 2004 survey, it is clear more assistance for those leaving NASS or Social Services accommodation is required. Support and advice is needed to help secure alternative accommodation and access work and services, especially in the 28 days notice period. If it is necessary for 28 days notice of termination of accommodation following granting refugee status, then NASS needs to ensure that sufficient support is provided to enable those concerned to find alternative accommodation. In no case should accommodation be terminated with less than 28 days notice.

- NASS and others need to give more assistance and support to refugees and asylum seekers to help link them into their community and avoid feelings of isolation.
- Provide funding to develop a database and publish a comprehensive directory of Refugee Community Organisations and other refugee and support organisations, and for translated move-on information that would aid refugee integration.

Recommendations for homelessness agencies and/ or refugee support/ community organisations

As noted in the 2004 survey, frontline sector staff would benefit from more information to assist them to work effectively with refugees and asylum seekers. The homelessness sector faces challenges and difficulties in working with refugees and asylum seekers. Staff in this sector often have limited knowledge of a complex asylum system and struggle to provide a service to asylum seekers and refugees. The linking up of homelessness agencies and refugee support organisations around the following, could help address some of these issues.

- Staff in homelessness agencies need to be supported and enabled to work effectively with refugees and asylum seekers, in terms of providing support and information, and making referrals:
 - Homelessness agencies should require staff working with refugees and asylum seekers to attend formal training in this area. Appendix 4 lists some of the training courses available to staff.
 - The homelessness sector should create opportunities for staff to share experiences and best practice in working with refugees and asylum seekers across organisations. Refugee support/ community organisations could have useful input into such sessions.
 - Homelessness agencies should ensure that staff know about and access available information that will aid them in working with refugees and asylum seekers e.g. Refugee Council information: <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/practice/basics/process.htm>. Refugee community and support organisations should share any useful information they have with homelessness agencies.
- Provide group support and advice sessions for clients in community languages. Outline the housing options available to clients and manage expectations regarding the housing process. Providing information about community/language groups to refer clients to would also be useful.
- Provide additional help and information for clients to enable them to access work and or education². Knowledge of what services clients can access and possible linking in with volunteer schemes.

² London Refugee Economic Action (LORECA) is a pan-London project that supports refugees to enter employment, training and enterprise. Their website has a database of London based RCOs and employment services. See: <http://www.loreca.org.uk/>

1. Introduction

In October 2005, the London Housing Foundation commissioned Broadway to undertake a short study across London to seek to explain the key finding from the 2004 survey, that: on a one night count of 2,431 bed-spaces in fifty-eight hostels, refugees and asylum seekers accounted for a fifth (474) of occupied spaces.

The Research Team at Broadway conducted the research over a period of two months, from December 2005 to January 2006. The study takes a qualitative approach to exploring the experiences of refugee and asylum seeker residents in single homeless accommodation, and seeks to identify reasons behind clients' lack of permanent accommodation. In doing so it considers housing history, advice and support networks, the extent to which people have settled in the UK and their future aspirations.³

For the purposes of this report it is useful to outline the immigration and asylum legislation in the UK and to define the asylum process. Please see Appendix 2: Asylum and immigration legislation and definitions.

³ 'Integration Matters - A National Strategy for Refugee Integration' was launched by the Home Office on 9 March 2005. Please see appendix 2 and to see the full report visit www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk.

2. Methodology

Eighteen residents were interviewed across London, from hostels and supported housing projects run by six different homelessness agencies and across four different boroughs. To follow up from the 2004 survey, agencies that had participated in that study were approached to identify possible refugee clients for this research. All of the six participating agencies were involved in the 2004 survey. The option of conducting interviews in a community language was given but not requested by any of the agencies. The interviews focused on collating residents' accounts of their experiences and pathways into accommodation and support services since being in the UK.

2.1 Interviews

Interviews were conducted by Broadway's Research Team. They included structured questions to ensure that basic factual information was collected, as well as open questions to enable individuals to tell their story of life in the UK. At the end of the interview participants had the opportunity to add final comments or views on their experiences. When helpful, during interviews a calendar was used as a tool to aid participants in accurately relaying their housing history since arriving in the UK.

Following on from the meeting to discuss findings of the 2004 survey, the main themes covered by the interviews in this study were:

- Interviewees' backgrounds e.g. country of origin, length of time they had been resident in the UK, age, gender
- Housing history since arriving in the UK
- Trigger factors for losing or not having access to accommodation, including cultural and integration related issues
- Interaction with NASS, including whether or not they were dispersed
- Whether client had or intends to stay in UK
- Experience of accessing or being unable to access essential services in the UK
- Support networks
- Met and unmet needs and aspirations for the future.

2.2 Sample design

The sample of hostels/supported housing projects was taken from the sample of 184 residential services that took part in the 2004 survey. To ensure that the sample was balanced the following criteria were applied to the final sample:

- Conduct a minimum of 15 qualitative interviews
- Include a minimum of four different organisations
- Include accommodation in different areas of London
- Include same sex male and female and mixed accommodation.

Figure A: Sample group

Accommodation project	Borough	Number of clients interviewed
St Louise's hostel, Irish Centre Housing	Westminster	4 female
Bruce House hostel, Centrepont	City	1 male, 2 female
Brecknock Road, Supported Housing, St Mungo's	Camden	2 male
Broadway Supported Housing, Broadway	Westminster & Lambeth	2 male, 1 female
House of St Barnabus	Westminster	4 female
Victoria Hostel, Look Ahead	Westminster	2 male

2.3 Immigration status

Twelve of the interviewees were refugees. Six were failed asylum seekers who had been given exceptional or discretionary leave to remain and were awaiting a final decision after submitting a claim for Indefinite Leave to Remain. Their experiences and routes into single homeless accommodation were very similar to participants who had refugee status.

In collating the sample group it was apparent that some staff working with single homeless people had limited knowledge of the asylum process. Some were unclear on the different types of immigration status. For example, staff were often unaware of the difference between the status of a resident with exceptional or discretionary leave to remain, and a refugee who has Indefinite Leave to Remain. This highlights the complexity and challenge that the homelessness sector faces in working with this client group - a factor that was raised in the 2004 survey.

Appendix 2 provides up-to-date asylum and immigration definitions and information from the Refugee Council. It is useful to note that all groups (those with refugee status, exceptional leave to remain, humanitarian protection and discretionary leave to remain) have identical rights in terms of benefits, access to social housing, homelessness rights and the right to work. The most notable difference between the experiences of refugees and failed asylum seekers in this study, is the added level of insecurity that those without refugee status faced. This difference may not exist in the future due to the change from 30th August 2005 that those who do get refugee status now only get limited leave to remain for five years when it will be reviewed - see 5.1.2.

3. Profile of participants

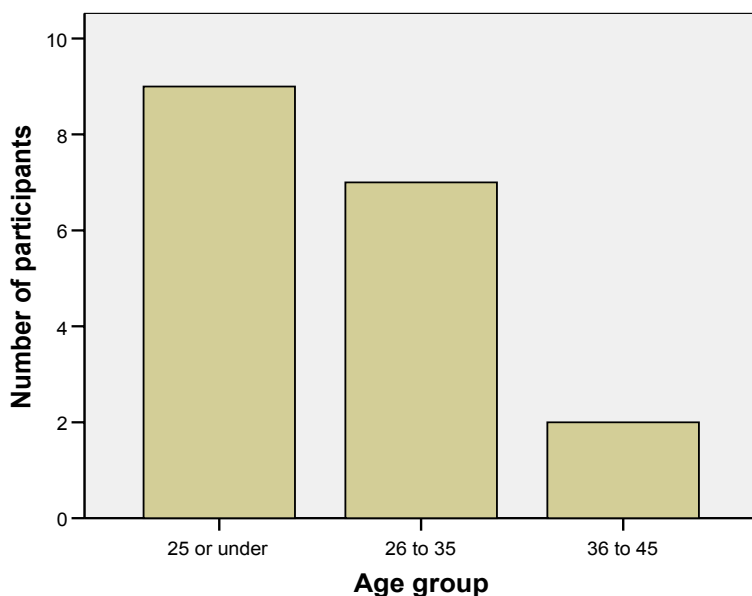
3.1 Gender

Seven men and eleven women took part in the interviews.

3.2 Age

The average age of participants upon arrival in the UK was 23, with the youngest being 15 and the oldest being 40 years of age. Five participants were under the age of 18 upon arrival and therefore classed as unaccompanied minors.⁴ Unaccompanied minors (under 18 years) seeking asylum fall under the care of Social Services.

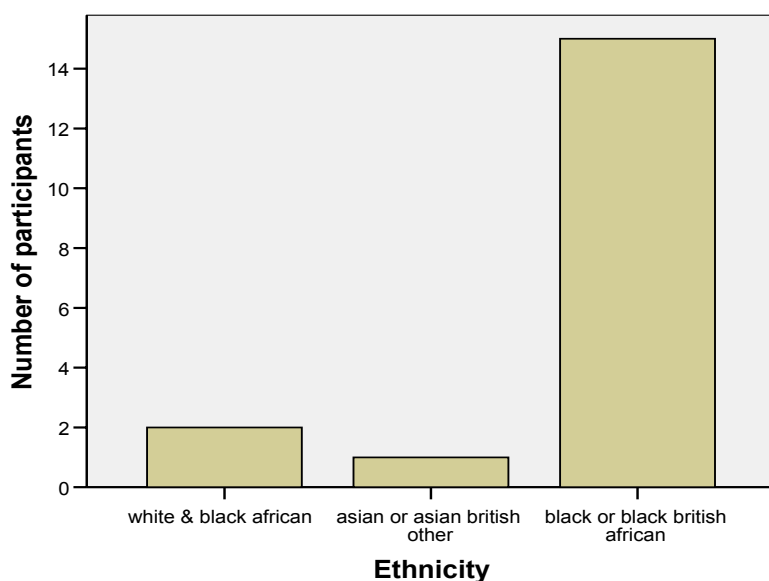
Figure B



3.3 Ethnicity

17 participants were African, one was Iranian. This links with the findings of the 2004 survey in which a disproportionate number of refugees were African.

Figure C

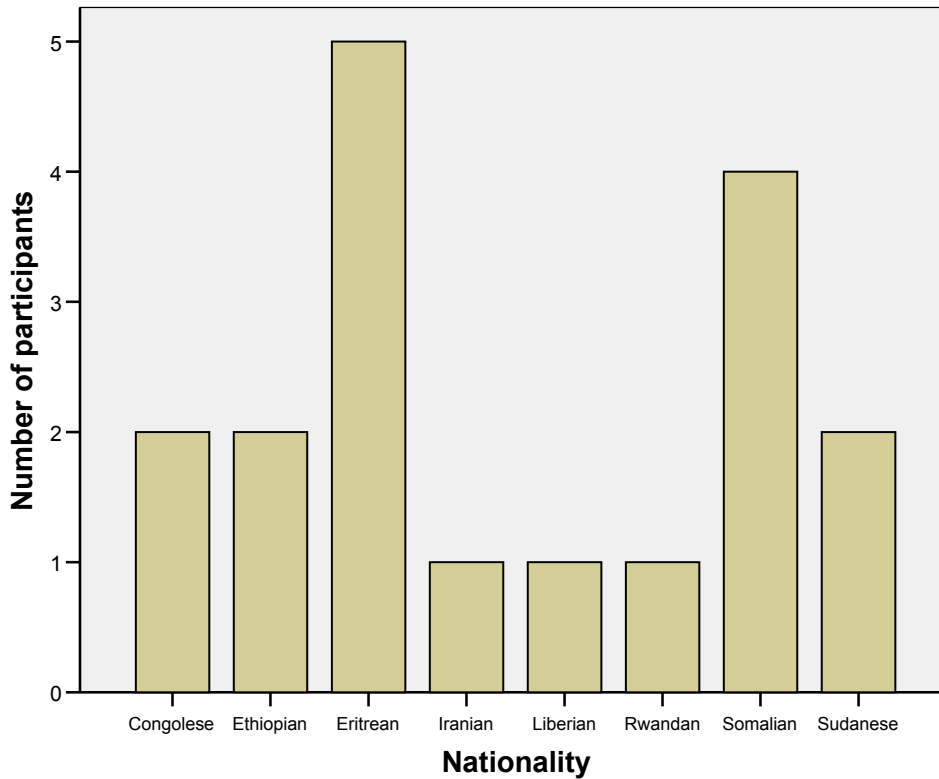


⁴ Unaccompanied asylum seekers under the age of 18 are supported by local authority Social Services, rather than the National Asylum Support Service (NASS).

3.4 Nationality

17 participants were of African nationality, one was Iranian. The most common nationalities within the sample were Eritrean (5) and Somalian (4).

Figure D



3.5 Country seeking refuge from

All were seeking refuge from African countries, with Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea being the most common.

3.6 Length of time since arrival in the UK

Participants arrived in the UK between 1998 and 2004.⁵ Figure E shows the year of arrival. Half of the sample had been in the UK for over three years at the time of the study.

Figure E

Year of Arrival	Number of participants
1998	1
2000	2
2001	2
2002	4
2003	5
2004	4

⁵ National Asylum Support Service (NASS) came into effect in April 2000. It provides accommodation and support (including financial assistance) for asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute, whilst their claims are being considered.

4. Accommodation and support accessed in the UK

Since being in the UK, all participants had been housed in a combination of: temporary accommodation, with friends or family, with contacts or strangers, and/ or rough sleeping. Figure F shows the number of places that participants have stayed since being in the UK.

Figure F

Number of places stayed	Number of participants
3	2
4	3
5	3
6	3
7	1
8	3
9	1
At least 10	2

Figure F indicates that most of the refugees and asylum seekers in this study have moved between several different forms of housing since arriving in the UK. Those housed by NASS or Social Services were often moved several times between different hostels or B&Bs. Two participants had been accommodated in at least ten different places. One of these could not remember the exact number of places stayed as they spent nine months moving around friends and contacts, staying for varying lengths of time, often for only one or two nights. The other participant spent a few weeks moving around friends and contacts, staying for one or two nights at a time, until one friend allowed them to stay for three months. The vast majority of the moves participants made were due to necessity, rather than choice.

4.1 Arrival in UK

Figure G shows the first nights accommodation for participants on arrival in the UK.

Figure G

First nights accommodation	Source of referral	Number of participants
NASS	NASS	3
Contact/ stranger	Contact from community/home/stranger	8
Church	Family contact	1
Social services	Social services	1
Rough sleeping	N/A	2
Hostel	Home office/refugee advice centre/refugee arrival team	3

Eight participants stayed the first night in the UK with contacts or complete strangers. Four were put in touch with these people by members of their community in the UK or contacts from home, but did not know the person prior to arrival in the UK. Four were approached by strangers. Three of these instances occurred in a restaurant of their nationality, where they had been left on arrival. Two of these participants were approached because they were distressed and crying. One participant was approached by a stranger at a tube station, again because they were in distress. Some participants commented that they were brought to England by an agency, meaning that they or their family had paid somebody to bring them. These cases highlight the vulnerability of some asylum seekers upon their arrival in the UK.

The route into accommodation on arriving in the UK was different for participants who claimed asylum upon point of entry. They were accommodated by NASS (post 2000) or by the Home Office (prior to 2000), or by Social Services (if under 18). Three participants declared asylum upon point of entry and were immediately housed in NASS accommodation. Another was housed by the Refugee Arrival Team (prior to April 2000 when NASS was established).

4.2 NASS

4.2.1 NASS accommodation

Seven out of 18 participants had been housed by NASS at some point since being in the UK. Three of these were housed immediately by NASS as noted above. A further four claimed asylum after their arrival in the UK and were housed by NASS.⁶

4.2.2 Dispersal

Of those housed by NASS, two were accommodated in London and five were dispersed. Of those dispersed, two were dispersed for two months, two were dispersed for eight months, and one spent two months dispersed in NASS accommodation before leaving to stay with friends. Upon notice to leave NASS accommodation, the remaining four returned to London due to feeling isolated in their dispersal area. Participants spoke of there being no established community (for their nationality) in their place of dispersal, (Leeds, Newcastle and Birmingham). One participant said they felt lonely in Leeds and wanted to be with people from their own country, which they knew they could do in London.

4.2.3 Moving on from NASS accommodation

On a decision being made regarding their Leave to Remain, participants said they received little or no helpful advice or support from NASS or other sources, to assist them in accessing alternative accommodation. A lack of official advice regarding housing, plus participants' lack of knowledge and confusion on how to access services, meant that they ended up accessing single homeless accommodation. This was usually as a result of advice from friends to visit day or advice centres.

By the time a decision on Leave to Remain was granted, only five of the seven participants who had accessed NASS accommodation were still there (two had left to stay with family or friends). Of these five, three were given 28 days notice and two were given seven days notice to leave their accommodation. Three were advised by NASS to find a hostel or go to the council for housing. The study indicates that the notice periods given by NASS are problematic, especially without adequate help to secure alternative accommodation. Participants reported that apart from very limited advice from NASS for some of them, the only sources of advice they were able to access during their notice period were friends and/ or homelessness agencies.

These experiences regarding dispersal, and advice and support upon leaving NASS accommodation, reflect findings in the Hact report 'Between NASS and a Hard Place'.⁷

⁶ Participants who did not immediately claim asylum and approached NASS after their arrival in the UK:

- One claimed asylum after staying with friends for one night.
- Another claimed asylum after staying with friends for three nights.
- One arrived as an unaccompanied minor and stayed one night with a stranger before claiming asylum. They were referred to Social Services after stating their age as 16. Social Services refused their claim of being only 16, referring them back to the Home Office, who then referred them to NASS.
- The fourth slept rough upon arrival in the UK, and was then housed by the Home Office. After five weeks they were refused support under section 55. Section 55 states that single adults are not deemed entitled to claim NASS support if they fail to apply for asylum 'as soon as reasonably practicable' after arrival in the UK. After being unable to access help they returned to the streets where they were interviewed by ITV. ITV approached a solicitor and NASS on behalf of the participant, who was then housed by NASS after being in the UK for 14 weeks.

⁷ 'Between NASS and a hard place', 2003: www.hact.org.uk

4.2.4 Views of NASS

11 of the 18 participants in this study had some interaction with NASS. In addition to the seven that were housed by NASS, four received money vouchers and/ or access to a solicitor.⁸ Four of the 11 stated that they were satisfied with their experience of NASS, with one participant stating that NASS “were very helpful, very good”. The positive views were largely due to being given accommodation and/ or money vouchers. One participant said they were also given advice on accessing a doctor and other essential services. Another gave positive feedback as they were so happy to have been given Leave to Remain, “Its good to get that, if they go to kick you out, you can’t kick me out I’ve got the permission, you can stay anywhere. That is the feeling, so you don’t see them, (NASS) in a negative kind of way.”

Five of the 11 were dissatisfied with NASS, giving negative comments: “they did not give enough help around everything”, “money is not enough for travel and food” and “money is not regular”. Two gave a neutral response.

4.3 Other routes into single homeless accommodation

11 participants had not accessed NASS accommodation, and so took other routes into their current accommodation.

4.3.1 Home Office

Of these 11, the Home Office housed two. One left after a period of time to live with friends until the outcome of their asylum application. On receiving leave to remain they were referred into a hostel by the Homeless Persons Unit. The other arrived in 1998 and was housed in a B&B for four months. They left due to no longer wanting to share with the other residents, and spent two years in private rented accommodation with a friend, until the landlord evicted them to sell the property. At this point they were unable to raise the money for a deposit. This resulted in a period of time on the streets, until they self-referred to a hostel following advice given to them by a day centre. This case shows how refugees and asylum seekers can end up in accommodation for single homeless people, even after a period of time in the private rented sector.

4.3.2 Social Services

Four participants were housed by Social Services due to being under the age of 18. All were given notice to leave their accommodation once they turned 18. In two cases only two weeks notice was given. As with those in NASS housing, participants in Social Services accommodation struggled when given notice to leave due to a lack of advice and information - “Because you are 18 you have to find yourself (somewhere to stay). But at that time I didn’t know nobody, I didn’t have nobody in the county.” Another stated “No-one told me what I would have to do, or what is my rights. They didn’t provide me with any information”. When given notice to leave, one of these four participants was offered a place outside of London, which they refused. Another was referred to a hostel. A third stated that Social Services tried to find them a hostel but then “gave up”. The final participant said they were not given any assistance in moving on.

4.3.3 Family and friends and rough sleeping

Four participants stayed with friends or family on arrival in the UK. A further seven stayed with friends or family at some point. Participants usually moved on from this accommodation after being asked to leave, or feeling a need to leave due to overcrowding or overstaying their welcome. One participant commented that they had been living on a kitchen floor for three months, whilst staying with a friend. It was clear that participants were often uncomfortable when staying with family or friends. Living space was often limited and they felt they were imposing. This source of accommodation was often a last resort to avoid sleeping rough, due to having no other options.

⁸ If asylum seekers have somewhere to stay, they can apply to NASS for ‘subsistence only’ support, rather than accommodation.

Five participants had slept rough since entering the UK. Two slept on the streets on their first night in the UK.

Participants who stayed with friends or family, or who had slept rough, accessed single homeless accommodation in similar ways to those coming from NASS, Social Services or Home Office accommodation. They approached day and advice centres, and church projects, which provided information on housing options. In one case a participant's college was particularly supportive and made a referral to a hostel.

4.3.4 Current accommodation

All participants were staying in single homeless accommodation at the time of the study, five in supported housing and the rest in hostels, as shown in Figure H.

Figure H

Current accommodation	Source of referral	Number of participants
Hostel	Self referral	3
Hostel	Day centre/ advice centre	6
Hostel	Church	1
Hostel	College	1
Hostel	Social Services/ HPU	2
Supported housing	Hostel/ day centre	5

Generally participants viewed the agencies that had given advice or referred them into their current accommodation favourably, although three stated that they were given a list of hostels to ring themselves and so made a self-referral.

Participants were asked about what they liked and didn't like about their current accommodation. The likes focused on appreciation of support from staff, the lifeskills sessions, and the social aspect. The dislikes were that they were bored, there was a lack of privacy due to having to share, support was insufficient, and their keyworker kept changing so they felt there was no progress in moving on.

5. Integrating and settling into life in the UK

5.1 Barriers to integration

11 of the 18 participants thought that refugees had particular difficulties in accessing services, four felt that refugees had no particular difficulties, and three did not respond. The main difficulties refugees faced in accessing services were identified as:

- Language
- Finding housing
- Knowing where to go for help
- Not understanding or not being advised on UK systems and their rights
- Unhelpful staff
- Forms and advice
- Everything

5.1.1 Insufficient advice and support

Participants raised the need for more information and advice to access services. One said, “The main problem is getting hostels and getting accommodation.” Another stated that they needed support, but “didn’t know where to go to get it”. A lack of clear, official advice on where to go for support and information is a theme running throughout this study.

Another unmet need was having somewhere to go to talk and be listened to. Participants wanted more help to overcome problems, not just concerning accommodation. One said there was only one office in London, at Brixton, for the Refugee Council, and more services were needed to give advice and to listen to refugees.⁹ Another said, “Refugees have big problems and there is nobody to trust or talk to when you come to England...you get scared to talk to people in case you get kicked out...support is here but you don’t know where to go to get it...need an advisor for refugees.”

5.1.2 Lengthy asylum process

Although the experiences and routes into single homeless accommodation for asylum seekers, as opposed to refugees in this study, are similar, asylum seekers were less able to progress their plans for the future due to its increased uncertainty. This makes integration and settling whilst in the UK a greater challenge for asylum seekers. Six participants were awaiting final decisions on their fresh claims for asylum, after their time-limited Leave to Remain had expired. They were frustrated at the length of time the asylum process takes and expressed a desire for a decision so that they could settle and make plans. One participant stated that until this happened they could not apply for permanent housing, or go to university and study - “a piece of paper is stopping my life; my life depends on a piece of paper.”

Another participant had been in the UK since 1998 and stated “I’ve been here for about eight years so this is good for me. If I go to another place I will have to start from the beginning. I am already integrated in this society, I like to live here.” However, they were unable to go ahead with their plan to go to university, due to the uncertainty of their current situation and the constraints on their eligibility for grants.

Since 30th August 2005 refugees are no longer granted Indefinite Leave to Remain – they are now only granted limited leave, initially for five years. At the end of the five years their case will be reviewed to see whether the situation in their country of origin has changed and they are no longer in fear of persecution. Refugees could at that stage be faced with removal. If not, they would then get Indefinite Leave to Remain, subject to possible additional tests relating to language skills. During the first five years refugees retain full entitlement to family reunion, welfare benefits, housing and health care, and the

⁹ There are two offices for the Refugee Council in London, the head office in Brixton and a Learning and Integration Unit in Vauxhall.

right to work.’ Despite these rights, this legislation may further prolong the time that refugees are unable to fully settle and integrate into British society.

5.1.3 Language barrier

Language was also identified by participants as a barrier to accessing accommodation, and settling in the UK. As one said, “If you don’t know the language you can’t ask for help”. Another commented that “Refugees have problems, you don’t know your rights, you don’t know how to talk, you don’t know how to express yourself.” Figure I shows participants’ confidence in using the English language. Only one participant stated that English was their first language.

Figure I

Level of Confidence	Not at all	Not very	Quite	Very
In speaking		4	11	3
In reading		1	9	8
In writing	1	7	6	4

5.2 Support networks and needs

5.2.1 Advice and information

Participants’ main need for support and advice was finding permanent accommodation. In addition, some said they required assistance to access work and other services.

At the time of being interviewed, participants’ main support network was homelessness agencies and their place of accommodation. They reported that advice and support was received from keyworkers and staff, as well as friends in their community. The main sources of support and advice that participants identified are shown in Figure J.

Figure J

Main source of support and advice	Number of participants
Homelessness agencies, i.e. advice / day centres	4
Current accommodation – hostel / Supported Housing	3
Friends	2
Community	2
Refugee Council	2
College	1
No support needed	3
No comment	1

Help from homelessness agencies is clearly needed and valued by refugees and asylum seekers. This re-emphasises the importance of relevant homelessness sector staff being supported and expected to attend training on the asylum process and working with this client group.

5.2.2 Health services

One area in which participants' needs were met is health. They stated no problems in finding and using health services. All participants were registered with a doctor and felt able to access health services in the UK. Only one participant thought that accessing health services was more difficult for refugees than others. Due to language barriers, culture, religion and colour, they thought that refugees did not have access to the same medical treatment as others.

5.3 Future aspirations

When asked about their general future plans, two participants commented that they would like to start a family, get married and "be a normal person". Other participants did not comment or were unclear on what their future may be. In at least some cases, this seemed to be due to their focus being entirely on the present, and finding it difficult to see beyond this until their situation became more certain and settled.

5.3.1 Location

14 of the 18 participants wished to stay in the UK. One participant stated, "I am happy in the UK, I can't go back, I love the government here, they have helped me. I went to other countries but only got help here in the UK". Only two participants wished to eventually return home, and two could not say either way.

5.3.2 Accommodation

All expressed a desire for permanent accommodation, with the majority saying they needed help to achieve this. 16 stated a desire for a place of their own. One said they would not mind being in shared permanent accommodation. Another stated that all they wanted was some accommodation that allowed them to be "free, with no keyworking sessions".

The only options for assistance in getting the accommodation they wanted that participants were aware of were: registering on the council's housing list, their keyworker or current accommodation, or as one said, "winning the lottery".

5.3.3 Work and study

Only two participants were currently employed, one at Marks and Spencer and one part-time in a soup shop. Three commented that they would like to find work in the future, and two were doing voluntary work in a charity shop in order to work towards this. One was in training via a 'New Deal' scheme at their job centre. The participants that commented said they needed help and advice to secure work.

15 participants had attended college, of these, six were still studying. 11 had studied English via a course such as ESOL. Other qualifications gained were in, health and social care, music technology, IT, plumbing painting and decorating, care assistant and food and hygiene. Other courses currently being studied were computer networking, counselling and accountancy.

When asked about their future plans, five participants said they would like to study. Subjects they would like to study were carpentry, English and nursing. Two participants expressed their frustration at not being able to plan for the future regarding study. They both wished to go to University, but until they received a final decision on their application for Indefinite Leave to Remain, they could not apply.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Sample

Seven men and eleven women took part in the study. Participants arrived in the UK between 1998 and 2004. Half of the 18 participants arrived in 2002 or earlier. This links with the finding in the 2004 survey – that the majority of refugees in single homeless accommodation have been resident in the UK for some time. Most (12) of the sample have gained refugee status (indefinite leave to remain) but are currently residing in homelessness accommodation due to a lack of move-on options.

6.2 Arrival in the UK

All participants arrived in the UK with no accommodation pre-arranged. The experiences of participants since arriving in the UK highlighted the difficulty refugees and asylum seekers have in adapting to a new life in a new country. As one participant said, “It is tough to leave your country and go and live abroad.”

Participants arrived with no clear plan upon arrival, apart from claiming asylum. Most had no contacts in the UK. Three had family members in the UK (often whom they had never met or not seen for years) or were given contacts by their family before leaving their home country. Hence the first night’s accommodation for participants was often with contacts or family they had just met, with strangers, or on the street. Many participants commented on feeling scared, confused and disorientated on arrival, with one saying they did not even know which country they were in. Those that did not have an immediate contact or did not immediately access official agencies, were often very distressed and were approached by strangers who offered assistance. These cases highlight the extreme vulnerability of some asylum seekers.

6.3 Accommodation

Finding accommodation was always the key focus for participants. This was a challenge as they had little or no knowledge of the asylum process and housing options, and no idea of where to go for advice or how to access services. Those that did not claim asylum upon entry relied upon advice from their contacts or strangers on where to go and what to do in order to get help and access accommodation.

After the first night’s accommodation, which was often only an arrangement for one night, participants were housed in temporary accommodation provided by NASS, the Home Office or Social Services (under 18), or were accommodated by contacts or family. Two participants spent their first night in the UK sleeping rough. All participants went on to experience an unstable housing history of moving between temporary accommodation. This often involved several moves in and out of hostels, and periods on the street or staying with friends, contacts or family. Accessing their current homelessness accommodation will not end this transient lifestyle, as it is still usually a temporary option. The reasons for participants’ many moves were: notice being given due to a change in circumstance; maximum periods of stay in hostels elapsing; or having to leave contacts or family due to overcrowding, overstaying their welcome or disputes.

Staying with contacts or family was usually only a short-term option. Often the offer to stay was only for a few nights or weeks, to avoid the individual having to sleep on the streets. In these instances, participants often felt uncomfortable at imposing and were aware of the instability of the situation.

6.4 NASS and Statutory Services

NASS provided 11 participants with accommodation and/ or access to solicitors and money vouchers. Although this assistance was valued, asylum seekers in the study had some problems in their experience of NASS. Participants that were dispersed by NASS returned to London. They commented on feeling isolated and wanting to be with other members of their community, which had not been possible in their dispersal area.

The other main difficulty was a lack of move on assistance when notice was given to leave NASS accommodation. On being granted Indefinite Leave to Remain, refugees received insufficient support and information to enable them to find alternative accommodation within the notice period given. This echoes a finding of the 2004 survey that there was a 'need for a clearer route into temporary accommodation where a permanent home cannot be secured in the time available after leaving NASS accommodation.' The same problems were faced by participants that had been housed by Social Services but had to move on once they turned 18.

Agencies involved in the NASS process do provide advice through their One Stop Services. However, opportunities open to single, non-priority adults are limited and may require some time to locate. It is not possible to keep people in NASS accommodation until an accommodation solution is found, which results in some people having to leave before move on accommodation has been found. There is a need to have meaningful move on arrangements if there is to be a coherent integration strategy for refugees.

Whatever accommodation refugees and asylum seekers had accessed since being in the UK, the majority were referred into their current single homeless accommodation through homelessness agencies or advice centres, which they had been told about by friends or community contacts. This indicates that refugees and asylum seekers are largely reliant on the voluntary sector and informal networks (of family, friends and contacts) for support and access to housing.

6.5 Barriers to settling in the UK, and the future

For participants arriving with limited language skills and little or no knowledge of the UK, informal support networks were often used to gain understanding of the processes, and were vital for emotional support needed due to being in a foreign country and feeling isolated.

As for most people in single homeless accommodation, the primary aim of all participants was securing longer term housing. Participants felt confusion and frustration at the difficulty in achieving this. Besides waiting on the council list or relying on support from their current accommodation provider, participants were at a loss on how to access housing. With such limited permanent accommodation options, and a lack of funds to privately rent, individuals felt stuck in a position of instability and uncertainty. This feeling was intensified for asylum seekers who were still awaiting a final decision on their Indefinite Leave to Remain. A frustration at the lengthy asylum process was evident as they could not make any plans for the future.

Evidence from the 2004 survey indicated that staff within homelessness agencies do not always feel adequately equipped to meet the needs of the refugees and asylum seekers that they work with. This is largely due to barriers of culture and language, and the complexity and length of the asylum process. Despite this, this latest study shows that the homelessness sector continues to be an important source of accommodation and support for this client group. Refugees and asylum seekers are only going to rely less on this sector and informal networks, if there are accessible alternative sources of advice and support available.

6.6 Recommendations

Recommendations are presented in the knowledge that the Home Office has published "Integration Matters" and are currently piloting "Sunrise" – see Appendix 3.

Recommendations for the Home Office

- Provide asylum seekers with clearer advice and support on arrival to aid initial orientation, and where to go for support and advice. In particular information is needed on the asylum process and housing market, to provide clarity and also manage expectations. One way this could be done is to produce booklets in community languages for clients. These could be produced and used by homeless agencies, to outline what the asylum and housing process is, what advice and support is available and where to go for information. This was a key action point from the 2004 survey and is still relevant and as yet has not been produced.
- As noted in the 2004 survey, it is clear more assistance for those leaving NASS or Social Services accommodation is required. Support and advice is needed to help secure alternative accommodation and access work and services, especially in the 28 days notice period. If it is necessary for 28 days notice of termination of accommodation following granting refugee status, then NASS needs to ensure that sufficient support is provided to enable those concerned to find alternative accommodation. In no case should accommodation be terminated with less than 28 days notice.
- NASS and others need to give more assistance and support to refugees and asylum seekers to help link them into their community and avoid feelings of isolation.
- Provide funding to develop a database and publish a comprehensive directory of Refugee Community Organisations and other refugee and support organisations, and for translated move-on information that would aid refugee integration.

Recommendations for homelessness agencies and/ or refugee support/ community organisations

As noted in the 2004 survey, frontline sector staff would benefit from more information to assist them to work effectively with refugees and asylum seekers. The homelessness sector faces challenges and difficulties in working with refugees and asylum seekers. Staff in this sector often have limited knowledge of a complex asylum system and struggle to provide a service to asylum seekers and refugees. The linking up of homelessness agencies and refugee support organisations around the following, could help address some of these issues.

- Staff in homelessness agencies need to be supported and enabled to work effectively with refugees and asylum seekers, in terms of providing support and information, and making referrals:
 - Homelessness agencies should require staff working with refugees and asylum seekers to attend formal training in this area. Appendix 4 lists some of the training courses available to staff.
 - The homelessness sector should create opportunities for staff to share experiences and best practice in working with refugees and asylum seekers across organisations. Refugee support/ community organisations could have useful input into such sessions.
 - Homelessness agencies should ensure that staff know about and access available information that will aid them in working with refugees and asylum seekers e.g. Refugee Council information: <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/practice/basics/process.htm>. Refugee community and support organisations should share any useful information they have with homelessness agencies.

- Provide group support and advice sessions for clients in community languages. Outline the housing options available to clients and manage expectations regarding the housing process. Providing information about community/language groups to refer clients to would be useful.
- Provide additional help and information for clients to enable them to access work and or education¹⁰. Knowledge of what services clients can access and possible linking in with volunteer schemes.

¹⁰ London Refugee Economic Action (LORECA) is a pan-London project that supports refugees to enter employment, training and enterprise. Their website has a database of London based RCOs and employment services. See: <http://www.loreca.org.uk/>

Appendix 1: Case studies of research participants

Participant A: arrived in the UK in 2002 at the age of 20. She was fleeing from the Congo and was brought to the UK from Paris by a friend of her fathers. This friend left participant A at a community church in London where she spent her first night, feeling scared and alone. At the church she asked around to see if anyone knew her brother, which they did. Contact was made with her brother and she went to stay with him for two years. She was in the UK a year before she was granted Indefinite Leave to Remain and only approached NASS for access to a lawyer and money. Due to a relationship breakdown and difficulties with her sister-in-law, it became increasingly difficult to stay. Staff at the college she was attending to study English were particularly helpful and took the time to call a number of hostels, until they managed to find her a place. Participant A feels that there is no-one to help refugees. She was unaware that she had to sign on the housing list until a friend told her, and she gets her main source of support from her community church. Participant A would like to work and improve her English. She feels that the only way she will get permanent accommodation is if she gets a job and privately rents, but is unsure of how to get help to achieve this.

Participant B: arrived in the UK in January 2004, at the age of 23. Although originally Iranian, he was fleeing from South Africa. Participant B claimed asylum upon entry to the UK and spent the first night in accommodation at Heathrow arranged by immigration. He was dispersed the next day to Leeds, initially to a hostel for 10 days. After this he was moved a further three times by NASS – to a hostel for a week, then a shared flat for a week, and then another flat where he stayed for about six months. He did not like this accommodation as it was a ‘rough’ area and in a tower block, but said he had no choice but to stay. As well as accommodation he commented that NASS provided him with a solicitor. It was whilst in a NASS flat that he was given Indefinite Leave to Remain. At this point he was given 28 days notice to leave his accommodation. The only advice he was given by NASS at this time was to find a hostel and wait for council housing.

He decided to leave Leeds and come to London to look for a friend from home, who he hoped he would be able to stay with. Upon arriving at Victoria station he slept rough for three nights, as he was unable to contact his friend. When he did make contact he found he was unable to stay with this friend as he had hoped. A security guard at Victoria told him about the Cardinal Hume day centre. They referred him to a church hostel in Dean St, where he stayed for eight or nine nights as it was only a temporary option. Cardinal Hume then referred him to Centrepoint’s hostel in Greek St, where he stayed for six months, which was the maximum period of stay. His keyworker then referred him onto his current hostel accommodation. He would like his own place, but other than advice from his keyworker he is unsure of how to access permanent accommodation. And although he was a businessman and a student of engineering he has not found that this has helped him find work in the UK due to the language barrier.

Appendix 2: Asylum and immigration legislation and definitions

In the UK, a person is known as a refugee only when their claim for asylum has been recognised by the Home Office. When a person has lodged an asylum claim with the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) at the Home Office and is waiting for a decision on their claim, s/he is called an 'asylum seeker'.

As a signatory to the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the United Kingdom has an obligation to consider all applications for asylum made in this country.

Asylum Seeker: An asylum seeker is a person who has left their country of origin and applied for asylum "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reason of race, religion, nationality or membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear is unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of the country". They apply under the 1951 Refugee Convention and remain an asylum seeker until the Home Office has made a decision on their case (including any subsequent appeal).

The term "asylum seeker" includes people who claim that their removal would breach Article 3 of the European Convention of Human Rights that prohibits torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

The whole system for dealing with asylum claims is being radically redesigned under a New Asylum Model (NAM). For an up-to-date briefing on the NAM see the Refugee Council website: <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/policy/briefings/2006/nam.htm>

There are four alternative outcomes for applications on asylum:

1. Refugee status

The applicant might be recognized as a refugee as defined by the 1951 United Convention. However since 30th August 2005 refugees are only granted a period of limited leave of up to 5 years. At the end of any leave they are subject to an "active review" and only if they are judged to be still at risk of persecution will they be given Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) i.e. permanent residency and settlement. During this period they do have rights of family reunion (immediate family only), they are entitled to work and are eligible for benefits and housing.

See:

<http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/asylumpolicyinstructions/apis/refugeeleave.pdf?view=Binary>

From October 2006 they will be entitled to apply for Integration Loans.

See: <http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/lawandpolicy/refugeeintegration/integrationloan>

They can apply for British citizenship after 5 years lawful residence plus one year free of any immigration restriction.

See: <http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/applying/nationality/advice/bn1>

2. Humanitarian Protection (HP)

Since 1st April 2003 HP is awarded to people who have been refused refugee status but cannot be returned to their country of origin as they face a serious risk to life or person for one or more of the following reasons: death penalty, unlawful killing, torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Thus they are generally eligible under Article 3 of the ECHR.

They can work during this period and are entitled to claim benefits and housing. They do not have rights of family reunion until they get ILR.

After the end of the HP period the circumstances of the person will be reviewed. If the circumstances are found to be the same after 5 years HP they can apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR).

See:

<http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/asylumpolicyinstructions/apis/humanitarianprotection.pdf?view=Binary>

3. Discretionary Leave (DL)

Since 1st April 2003 DL is awarded to people who have been refused refugee status but who do not fulfil the criteria of HP. It is only awarded in very limited circumstances, often on medical grounds. DL will be granted for up to three years and will be reviewed at the end of that period. At that point it can be extended for further three years. After six years of DL an application can be made for ILR.

Separated children who are minors are commonly granted DL until the age of 18.

See:

<http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/asylumpolicyinstructions/apis/discretionaryleave.pdf?view=Binary>

(Note prior to 1st April 2003 people were granted Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR) for up to four years. Anybody who had 4 years ELR prior to that date is entitled to ILR and settlement on the completion of four years. Thus there will still be cases to whom this applies until 1st April 2007).

Non asylum applicants, who also used to get ELR, now can apply for Leave Outside the Rules (LOTR).

<http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/idischapter1/section14.pdf?view=Binary>

4. Refusal

If the applicant is refused both asylum and HP or DL then he/she can exercise their right of appeal. Some cases (known as non-suspensive appeal (NSA) cases) can only do so after they have been removed to their country of origin. This is on the grounds that their claim is clearly unfounded.

See:

<http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/asylumpolicyinstructions/apis/certification.pdf?view=Binary>

All others can appeal from within the UK but once all avenues of appeal have been exhausted then the applicant must leave the UK or be removed¹¹.

¹¹ Further detail on Asylum and Immigration issues and status is available in the Information Service on the Refugee Council's website: <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/practice/asylum/information/>. There is a charge for this service but it is one that the Refugee Council would class as indispensable for agencies.

Appendix 3: Immigration Matters

On the 9th March 2005 the government published “Integration Matters” The National Refugee Integration Strategy. This is the second national strategy for refugee integration for England and will take over from Full and Equal Citizens published in 2000.

A major part of this new strategy is Sunrise (Strategic Upgrade of National Refugee Integration Services)¹².

“Sunrise is a new approach, whereby each newly-recognized refugee¹³ who chooses to participate will work with a caseworker to produce a 'Personal Integration Plan'. The integration plan will be produced during the 28 days following receipt of refugee status and will include consideration of employment, housing and other needs.”¹⁴

¹² For up-to-date information on Sunrise visit:

<http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/lawandpolicy/refugeeintegration/sunrise/sunriseprogressreport>

¹³ The government has stated that the Personal Integration Plan will only begin with those that have been awarded refugee status, together with those who have been granted discretionary leave or humanitarian protection. To see the full report visit www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk

¹⁴ Information taken from the refugee council website: www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

Appendix 4: Training courses on asylum and refugee issues available to staff in the homelessness sector

Source	Course	Available to	Regularity
Broadway	Asylum seekers and refugees: their entitlements and rights	Internal and external staff	On demand
Centrepoint	In house staff training on the following issues: (1) The UK asylum process (including internal obligations) (2) Specific needs of refugees in-general and the specific needs of young refugees we work with in-particular (3) Brief overview of the UK immigration, asylum and nationality law	Internal staff	On an ad-hoc basis
St Mungo's	Immigration Status and Housing Rights Examines the interaction between immigration status and housing rights and provide an update on changes in statute, case law and practice.	Specialist workers only	On an ad-hoc basis
SITRA	Asylum Seekers and Refugees aims to provide a grounding in legislative framework and explore areas of potentially discriminatory practice	All relevant staff	Once a year / on demand
Shelter	(1) Asylum, Refugees and Housing Rights Explains the asylum process and its relation to housing entitlements and the rights of refugees, people with exceptional leave, humanitarian protection or discretionary leave, and asylum seekers.	Specialist workers only	5 times between now and October
Shelter	(2) Immigration Status and Housing Rights Examines the interaction between immigration status and housing rights and provide an update on changes in statute, case law and practice.	Specialist workers only	5 times between now and October
Shelter	(3) Support Arrangements for Asylum Seekers and Benefits for Refugees Aims to provide a clear framework to the varying forms of provision for refugees and asylum seekers.	All relevant staff	2 times between now and October
Shelter	(4) Immigration, Asylum and Housing Rights: Update Aims to provide an update on the latest legislation, immigration rule changes, case law, regulations and new areas of provision.	Specialist workers only	3 times between now and October

The Refugee Council also offers a range of training courses.

To access their training brochure visit:

<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/eventsandtraining/training/service/>