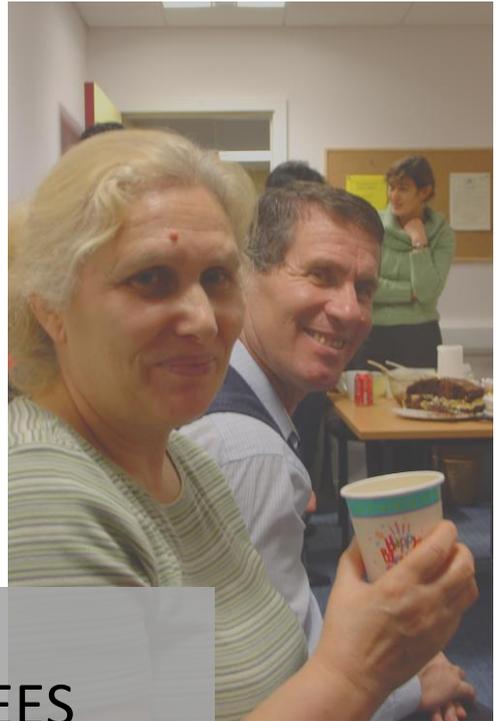


REFUGEE  
RESOURCE

A DATA COLLECTION  
PROJECT ON REFUGEES  
AND ASYLUM SEEKERS IN  
OXFORDSHIRE



**December 2012**

Lead Researcher: Sarah Giles

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In Oxfordshire, the challenge to know the refugee and asylum seeking population reflects the difficulty faced by practitioners and others across the UK trying to understand better the needs of refugees and asylum seekers (RAS) in their area. They are hindered by a scarcity of information about the size and characteristics of local refugee populations; such details are simply not recorded in any formal way. Although the number of asylum seekers in receipt of UK Border Agency or local authority support (the latter in the case of unaccompanied young asylum seekers) is recorded to some extent, once refugee or another status conferring leave to remain is granted, individuals are 'main-streamed' into society and there is no formal on-going recording of their immigration status. This may have some benefits, however, it is difficult to imagine how the specific integration and long-term support needs of refugees, many of whom have traumatic experiences, can be met effectively in the absence of critical data at the local level.

This project aimed to research a broad range of county-wide data sources in order to produce a more accurate estimate of the size of the refugee population of Oxfordshire, and to enable a better understanding of the characteristics of the population. It soon emerged during the initial desk-based research phase that in the absence of relevant data from survey, census and administrative sources, community sources instead would provide a clearer picture of the refugee population. These sources included individual refugees and asylum seekers presenting at local refugee support agencies, and representatives or well-informed members of local refugee communities. In order to elicit information about the population from different perspectives, similar questions about population size and countries of origin were put to individual RAS and their community representatives, by Resource, Asylum Welcome and two community interviewers, and the resulting data was combined and analysed. A workshop for stakeholders from Oxfordshire's voluntary and statutory sectors was held in order to advance the analysis and explore next steps.

The project findings suggest that the current estimate of 3-4,000 refugees and asylum seekers is the lower end of the true range – the 69 individuals consulted during the project themselves knew of just under 3,000 RAS, suggesting that the real number is very likely to be higher. Research participants were also aware of 33 different nationalities in the refugee population, and community groups estimated that approximately two-thirds of the population have some form of status, while one-third are asylum seekers.

Some of the key challenges faced by RAS in Oxfordshire, according to community representatives, are destitution and uncertainty about their future, on-going struggles to access education and training, to gain qualifications and secure employment (for those who have some form of status), and for many, an acute need to find ways to combat isolation and deal with past trauma.

The findings of the project go further than any previous research conducted locally to assess the nature of the refugee population across the county, yet these findings still only scratch the surface of the data gap which hinders efforts to learn how best to support members of this 'invisible' population to access appropriate services, reach their potential and build fulfilling lives in Oxfordshire.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Data on the refugee and asylum-seeking population of Oxfordshire is extremely limited.<sup>1</sup> When this project began, the number of refugees and asylum seekers living in the county was estimated at 3-4,000, however this figure is not attributable to any identified source, nor is it evidence-based.

A similar scarcity of reliable data on refugees and asylum seekers is mirrored across most of the UK, with most regions simply unaware of how many RAS are living locally, although in UK dispersal areas there is a greater degree of accuracy due to the records of asylum seekers who receive support from the UK Border Agency. London, for example, has a greater number of established refugee communities and in some cases providing services, therefore more reliable information can be derived from community group databases in the capital. The difficulty in gathering reliable information about RAS in the UK is exacerbated by the lack of stability in the lives of refugees and asylum seekers; for example, long delays in being recognised, frequent moves, the process of dispersal, and homelessness.

This project was designed to tackle the lack of knowledge around the origins and size of the refugee and asylum seeking population of Oxfordshire and to arrive at a more accurate and complete picture of the level of need in the county. The aim was to do this in an inclusive manner, by involving relevant stakeholders in the public and voluntary sectors and by sharing the resulting data with them. It was hoped that this project would be the starting point for further work, particularly around the needs of RAS in the county, and that relationships built during the research could facilitate developing stronger links with refugee community groups and representatives for future cooperation.

## **2. REFUGEE AND ASYLUM DATA IN THE UK**

The deficiency of asylum data in the UK (and in Oxfordshire) means that not only is it unclear how many RAS live in a particular location, there is also a dearth of knowledge on:

- The causes of refugee flows (countries of origin and why refugees come to the UK);
- The existence and nature of refugees' social networks (where and why refugees settle in the UK);
- Reception and resettlement; what happens to asylum seekers after positive decisions and

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<sup>1</sup> This view is supported by refugee organisations such as Refugee Resource and Asylum Welcome, as well as by statutory bodies in Oxfordshire who work with or provide services to refugees and asylum seekers

the nature of onward migration (refugees gaining status in a European country and then moving to the UK, as well as internal UK migration);

- Identity issues (what does it mean to live as a refugee or asylum seeker in the UK);
- Integration (whether and how this happens);
- The relationship between refugees and their countries of origin after settlement;
- What happens to failed asylum seekers who do not return to their country of origin.

The key point to make is that the lack of accurate data results in a significant *under-estimation* of the true numbers of RAS in any given area of the UK – and this is certainly true of Oxfordshire as the project findings demonstrate. Once someone is granted status on their asylum application they are not recorded in *any* official registers as having refugee status, therefore many refugees are simply not recognised as such, with the outcome that their needs as a newly-arrived person who is highly likely to have experienced trauma may not be acknowledged. Moreover, asylum seekers are often not documented because of the length of time it takes to process claims and hold appeals, and they may be afraid to make contact with statutory bodies for fear of the consequences of identification. Finally, as Oxfordshire is not a dispersal area, asylum seekers living here are even less likely to be documented than those living in UK dispersal regions.

The negative consequences of data gaps are diverse. These include allowing some parts of the media to misrepresent the true facts around asylum (frequently resulting in articles inciting fear of the UK being 'swamped' or 'flooded' by asylum seekers), to preventing the public from gaining a proper awareness and understanding of the positive contribution that refugees make. Moreover, with crucial information on numbers and demographic details lacking, service providers have to take decisions without knowing the full extent of the need for specific services; this may mean that services are not established on the grounds that the numbers of refugees do not justify the response – when the reality could well be that the need is in fact far greater and more acute.

Whilst this lack of data cannot be comprehensively addressed at the local level in Oxfordshire unfortunately (a decision to capture more information would have to be taken at national level), this project managed to tackle some of the gap in knowledge about the refugee population by addressing the challenge from different perspectives – formal and informal – and by bringing together stakeholders to reflect on and review the results at a workshop.

Refugee Resource has worked extensively with a range of partners in the public and voluntary sectors and has a high level of trust amongst the refugees and asylum seekers with whom the organisation has worked over the past 12 years, thus the organisation felt well-placed to undertake this project.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### Planned methodology

The first step was to collate and review all readily available data on the non-EU/British population of Oxfordshire that could be derived from census, administrative and survey datasets, with the aim of attempting to disaggregate the RAS population from this. The second step was to identify and gather information about the RAS population of Oxfordshire from sources at *community* level. During the first step it was hoped that the RAS population could be identified within the broader Oxfordshire population by applying a statistical model to derive an estimate of the RAS population from the larger population, based on the assumption that RAS form a sub-set of those with non-British nationality, whose place of birth was outside the UK, whose first language is not English etc.

Initial consultations with a statistician suggested this was an approach worth pursuing, although success would ultimately depend on the quality and reliability of the data that could be derived from both 'bigger picture' and community sources.

However, it soon became evident that existing datasets for Oxfordshire simply do not allow for the identification of refugees and/or asylum seekers within the wider population surveyed, neither directly nor through cross-referencing. With advice from a statistician, it was clear that a statistical analysis would not be practical or reliable within a reasonable standard of error, and consequently, the project methodology was altered to re-focus the report on findings gathered through interviews with individual RAS and community groups.

#### Actual methods used

These came in four phases:

1. Desk-based research and literature review
2. Sharing data and identifying refugee community groups
3. Interviews with individual RAS and representatives of refugee communities
4. Stakeholder workshop for review and analysis of findings

As noted above, at the completion of Phase 1, it was clear that it would not be possible to develop a statistical model to cross-reference the various datasets to identify the RAS population of Oxfordshire. Relying on formal data gathering methods to estimate the true number of RAS in the county was clearly not going to be robust or practical, therefore the focus shifted to gleaning estimates of the size of the different refugee communities, from members of those communities themselves. The aim was then to present these findings at a stakeholder workshop to allow for discussion of methods and findings, and to use a peer-review approach to verify the findings and explore next steps.

The section below outlines each phase in more detail and presents the relevant findings.

## **4. DATA RESULTS AND FINDINGS**

### **Phase 1: Desk-based research and literature review**

There is a group of existing datasets for the Oxfordshire population that must include a good number of refugees and asylum seekers living in the county. For example, I was able to source data on recent surveys that show populations numbers for those born outside the UK (usually broken down into geographic region, rather than individual country), for those with non-British and non-EU nationality, the numbers within different ethnic group, and the number of live births to mothers themselves born outside the UK (again this latter category is broken down into geographic regions). It is also possible to gather data on the number of primary and secondary school pupils whose first language is not English (and on what languages are commonly spoken), and on the number of GP registrations of people whose previous address was outside the UK.

It is possible to gather data collected by the UK Border Agency (UKBA) on the numbers of asylum seekers dispersed to Oxfordshire and on the numbers receiving subsistence support only, but these figures only represent a proportion of the total number of asylum seekers, and given Oxfordshire is not a dispersal region, 'official' UKBA figures for the county are very low, although refugee agencies in Oxford record a much higher number of asylum seekers accessing services.

It was impossible to disaggregate the refugee population from these broader survey categories, in part because none of the existing surveys require responses that allow *specific* identification of RAS (i.e. none ask for immigration status) and additionally, because the data does not generally provide sufficient detail about country of origin (or citizenship/nationality) which could allow some extrapolation for RAS by identifying numbers of people coming from refugee-producing countries, for example.

In conclusion, the data provided by the range of surveys and administrative sources were of no use in helping to identify RAS in Oxfordshire to any degree of workable accuracy. (In the regional and policy reports for areas such as health or housing consulted during this phase, it was clear that the report authors had encountered the same challenges when trying to write specifically about RAS within the broader category of migrants – authors highlighted the scarcity of information while acknowledging the clear need to gather this information in order to develop effective service responses.)

This conclusion was reached through extensive research on the following:

1. Census, survey and administrative datasets for Oxfordshire and component districts
2. Existing reports on migration and/or asylum issues within Oxfordshire
3. Evidence-based policy reports (i.e. health needs of migrants in the South-east region)

An example of the disparity between official figures and the numbers of asylum seekers that agencies support locally can be seen in the UK Border Agency reporting of the number of asylum seekers in Oxfordshire in 2011 (as reported in the 2011 annual report of the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration) – 19 asylum seekers in total, comprising 10 dispersed asylum seekers and 9 receiving support only (see <http://www.secouncils.gov.uk/page/4/view/28/migration-partnership>). However, this figure was easily exceeded during one, four-week period in 2012 when 43 asylum seekers visited Asylum Welcome’s office (during the ‘spot check’ exercise carried out for the purposes of this research) - and is confounded by the total of 257 asylum seeking clients who visited Asylum Welcome’s office in 2011. This makes it difficult to rely on official reporting of figures, although it is worth mentioning that both Oxfordshire Social and Health Care and the Children’s Society Oxford do hold much more accurate figures for the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) resident in the county. However, we should consider the fact that many of RAS in Oxfordshire predate UKBA and dispersal and could be one of the reasons for the discrepancy in numbers.

However, as an indication of what is collected on a regular basis, and to highlight the gaps in terms of capturing information about the refugee population, below is a list of datasets consulted.

Data available for Oxfordshire (including component districts):

- Local authority population size overview
- Population by country of birth
- Estimated population by nationality
- Local area migration indicators
- Non-British population estimate
- Migrant National Insurance Number applications

- New Flag 4 GP registrations (patients whose previous address was outside the UK)
- Live births to mothers born outside the UK
- Estimates of the ethnic population
- Pupils whose first language is not English
- Asylum seekers supported by the UKBA
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) supported by local authority

As mentioned above, a range of policy/research reports in areas such as health and housing was also consulted (see Annex C), primarily to review their data sources in case they would be of use, but also to identify needs emerging within the population surveyed. As mentioned above, the authors of these reports encountered the same fundamental problem in trying to assess the extent of the need they were examining – accurate estimates of the refugee population of a particular area do not exist, and thus it was impossible for the report authors to disaggregate the refugee population from the wider migrant population. (It is worth noting that the needs addressed in these reports mirror those identified by Refugee Resource and partner organisations and agencies, listed in section 5 below.) Finally, a study of numbers of refugees and asylum seekers in the East Midlands acknowledged the limitations of existing data sources, so researchers instead contacted a wide range of community groups to seek estimates of numbers of refugees that they serve.

## **Phase 2: Sharing data and identifying refugee community groups**

Contact was made with several regional and local organisations in Oxfordshire that support RAS amongst their client population, to request a sharing of data around the numbers of RAS in the county. Some regional/local service providers and voluntary sector organisations are aware that they support RAS, but they do not keep detailed records of the immigration status of their clients. This can be for reasons of trust-building between service provider and client, or simply because such details are not relevant to the service provided. However, some data was gathered from Refugee Resource's own client database, from Asylum Welcome (a key provider of advice, guidance and signposting to asylum seekers), Oxford Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), and The Children's Society Oxford – the latter runs two projects supporting young refugees and asylum seekers, and refugee parents<sup>2</sup>.

Research was also undertaken to find contact details for active refugee community groups working across the county to support their members. Two directories were consulted for details of refugee community groups active in the county: Refugee Action's BASIS project database (a project run in 2009 that identified *constituted* refugee groups needing capacity-building support – this did not include many in Oxfordshire, as most groups are not constituted), and the Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action (OCVA) community group directory. This latter directory is regularly updated and aims to provide a contact list of all formal and informal groups active in the local community. This directory listed more than 25 groups, however only around half could be reached, indicating how ephemeral many groups are, in part due to lack of financial support and to the unsettled status/location of group organisers.

<sup>2</sup> Fiona Aldridge and Yanina Dutton, Counting up: A study to estimate the existing and future numbers of refugees in the East Midlands region, East Midlands Consortium for Asylum and Refugee Support, September 2006, <http://www.equal-works.com/resources/contentfiles/2237.pdf>

Finally, this phase also included the recruitment and training of two community interviewers with

experience of community-based work, to carry out the interviews with refugee community groups. The two interviewers, Grace Njeri from Kenya and Aziz Barez from Afghanistan, are themselves refugees and both are well-known and active within their communities in Oxford. Both interviewers attended a short training session which covered the process and values of community interviewing.

### **Phase 3: Interviewing individual RAS and refugee community groups**

In Glasgow, a recent assessment of destitution among asylum seekers was done using multiple sources of information, including a snapshot survey of people attending a number of the main support agencies over a one week period <sup>3</sup>. In another example, a study of the minority ethnic population of York used a mix of methods including interviews with key individual informants and community groups, visits to restaurants and food shops, and tracking down, through informal networks, a number of new worshipping communities <sup>4</sup>.

A similar approach adopted in this research was to speak to all clients who attended either of the two refugee agencies in Oxford (Asylum Welcome and Refugee Resource) over a four-week period. Clients were questioned about their knowledge of the refugee population of Oxfordshire. In total 56 clients participated willingly in the research and their responses were recorded by staff of the two agencies.

The 56 individual RAS were asked three questions by agency staff:

1. How many RAS do you know from your own community?
2. How many RAS do you know from other communities?
3. Which communities do those in q.2 come from?

Secondly, contact was made with community representatives (i.e. refugee group leaders or community members who felt confident they knew their community well) in order to ask similar but more detailed questions about the size and characteristics of their community. The aim was to combine the data resulting from individuals and communities to create a clearer impression of the refugee and asylum seeking population.

Two community interviewers spoke to 13 community representatives about their communities, asking them several questions covering the following areas:

1. How many RAS are you aware of in your community?
2. Do you know roughly what proportion are refugees, have some other form of status, or are asylum seekers?
3. In which key areas of Oxford do RAS from your community live?
4. What are the key needs of your community and are these being adequately met?

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<sup>3</sup> Morag Gillespie, *Trapped: Destitution and Asylum in Scotland*. 2012 Published by: Scottish Poverty Information Unit, Institute for Society and Social Justice Research, Glasgow Caledonian University, Cowcaddens Road, Glasgow, G4 0BA

<sup>4</sup> Craig, G., Adamson, S. et al. (2010) *Mapping rapidly changing ethnic minority populations, a case study of York*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/ethnicity-population-change-york-full.pdf> , page 25

What emerged from the interviews with individual refugees and asylum seekers and their community representatives was a valuable and fascinating picture of a diverse refugee and asylum seeking population comprising more than 33 different nationality groups. Responses suggested that the estimated number of RAS circulating (3-4,000) is likely to be much higher, but perhaps more importantly, answers showed that many of the needs of the refugee and asylum seeking population are not known or likely be met by current services, because service providers are simply not aware of their existence.

Appendix A shows the findings from this phase in 'raw' form, and Appendix B shows the detailed analysis of these findings. Most of the women who took part were consulted during a meeting of Refugee Resource's Women's Group; it was mostly male clients who presented at Refugee Resource and Asylum Welcome offices during the four-week period.

Key findings from the 56 individual clients of Refugee Resource and Asylum Welcome who took part in the 'spot check' exercise described above were:

- Clients came from 20 different countries of origin;
- 34% of clients were women and 66% were men;
- In total, the 56 clients estimated they knew over 3,000 RAS within their own communities;
- The 56 clients were aware of RAS from more than 33 nationality groups in Oxfordshire;
- Amongst the 56 clients, the majority came from Sudan, Kurdistan, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and Algeria (although Asylum Welcome had a high number of Syrian clients during this period).

Key findings from interviews with 13 community representatives were:

- In total, community representatives were aware of just under 3,000 RAS, of which just under 2,000 were thought to be refugees or with some form of status, and approximately 1,000 were thought to be asylum seekers;
- Most RAS live in the OX4 postcode area<sup>2</sup>;
- Of the 18 communities initially contacted, only 5 did not believe their community included any RAS (two Chinese community groups, one Bangladeshi, one Pakistani and one of the two Ethiopian groups consulted);
- Key needs are to gain English language skills, find employment, receive support to deal with past trauma, and to have the facility and resources to bring community members together for activities and celebrations.

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<sup>2</sup> Of 710 clients for whom postcode was recorded during the period 2002-2012, 492 or 69% live(d) in the OX4 postcode area (primarily Cowley, Rosehill, Littlemore) , and a further 127 or 18% live(d) in the OX3 (Headington) postcode area. The next most common postcodes were OX1 and OX2, which include the central districts of the city of Oxford.

Whilst the emerging data from individual and community interviews cannot be backed up with statistical evidence, it describes the extent of individual refugee and asylum seeker's social networks, and reflects the diversity of countries from where refugees come to seek sanctuary in the UK. Assuming that the numbers are only approximations – it is of course, very difficult for anyone to assess large numbers with a strong degree of accuracy - we can certainly assume that a fairly accurate picture emerges of the *relative* sizes of refugee communities, i.e. which are the larger and smaller communities, plus the picture shows us to what extent individuals are connected to their own communities or not. More extensive surveying of this kind (which was outside the scope of this project) could provide a more accurate picture.

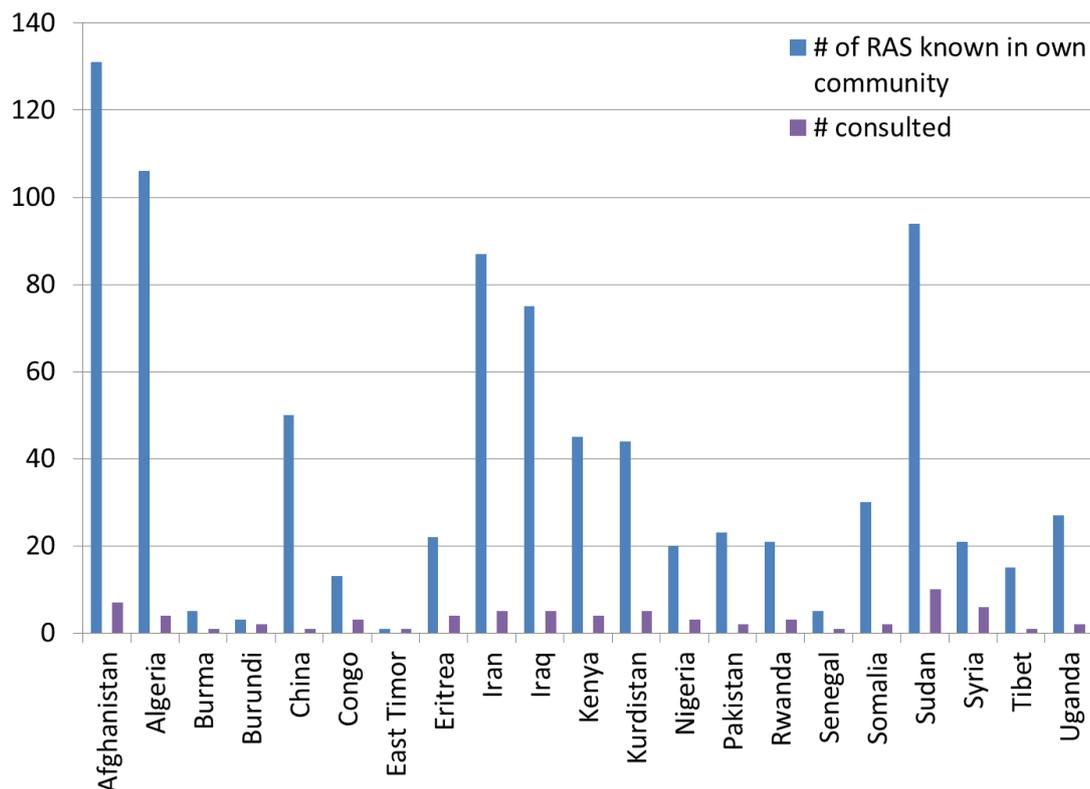


Fig 1.1 Chart showing estimates of RAS known by the 56 clients consulted

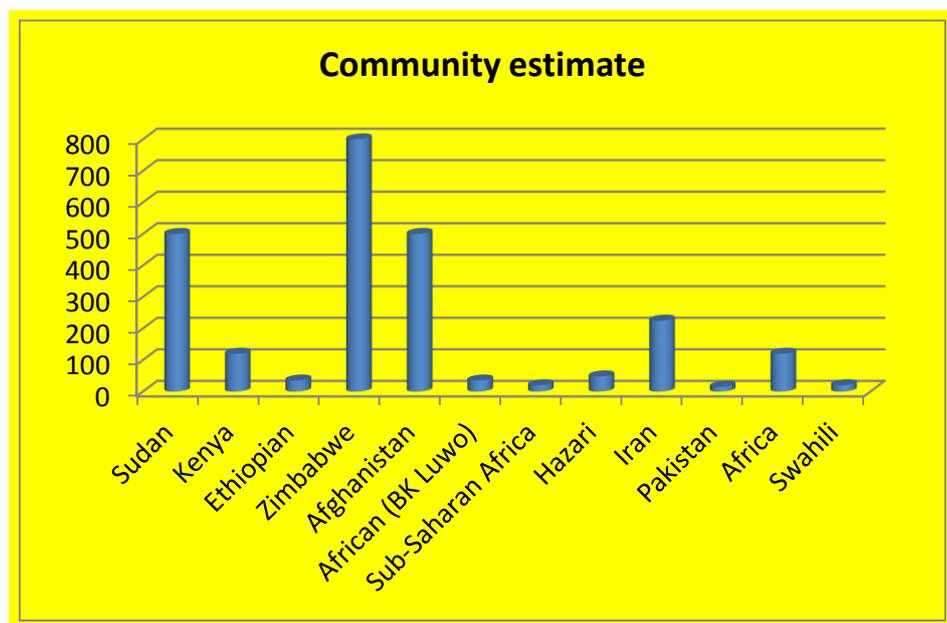


Fig 1.2 Chart showing estimates of RAS in the different communities and language background consulted

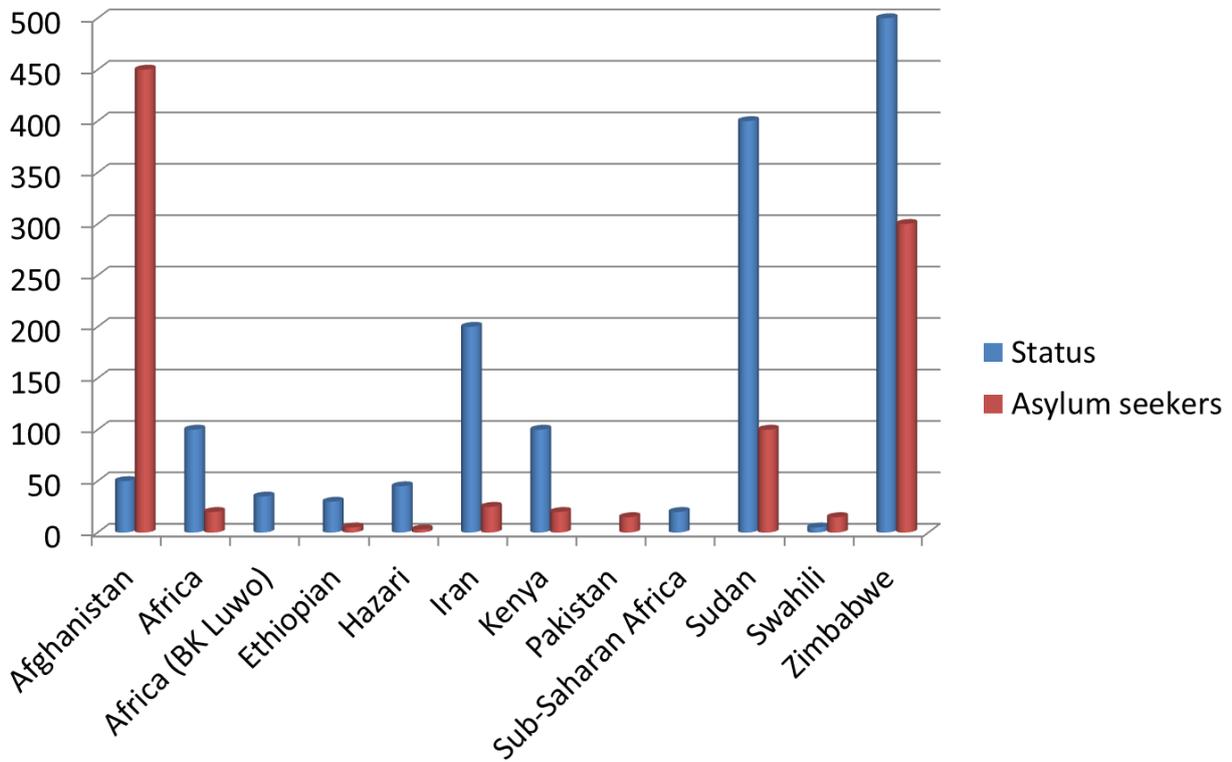


Fig 1.3: Estimate of community members with status (Refugee, Discretionary Leave, Humanitarian Protection) and of those seeking asylum, by the community groups consulted

#### Phase 4: Stakeholder workshop for review and analysis

In this phase a workshop for stakeholders was held to present and analyse the findings. 18 participants from the Oxfordshire statutory and voluntary sector attended:

- Oxfordshire County Council
- Oxford City Council
- Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire NHS Cluster
- Thames Valley Police
- Oxford Citizens Advice Bureau
- Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action
- British Red Cross
- CRISIS Skylight
- Open Door
- Asylum Welcome

The purpose of the workshop was to review and analyse the data gathered, and to review the needs of the RAS population. A secondary objective was to discuss the challenges in capturing data about refugees and asylum seekers in Oxfordshire and identify whether more could be done by working together.

Participants were asked to review the original estimate of 3-4,000 refugees and asylum seekers in the light of data presented and analysed. All agreed that this was a conservative estimate and that, although the real number would probably never be known, the true size of the refugee and asylum seeking population of Oxfordshire could be as high as 10,000.

In small groups, participants discussed four questions relating to the project's findings. Their answers are recorded here (the final question posed to participants regarding next steps is reported in the conclusions/recommendations section of this report):

1. To what extent does this data satisfy your information needs?

The project was acknowledged to provide a strong foundation and starting point for accessing more data about the RAS population. Participants would like further breakdown by age, gender and other demographics, plus specifically more information from female RAS and young RAS. The shifting nature of the data was noted; how quickly this can become outdated. Participants were concerned about the lack of data available in Oxfordshire on 'vulnerable migrants' and those not currently accessing services.

2. What would be a reliable estimate of the total RAS population from this data?

Following the data presentation, groups felt that the current estimate of 3,000 for Oxfordshire was conservative (one group proposed 3-10,000 as a better estimate), but that the true figure would probably never be known.

3. What do you think are the key learning points from the data gathered?

Participants were surprised by the diversity of the communities across the region, and highlighted the negative consequences on already vulnerable people, in the absence of data on numbers and needs. They felt more research was needed into the different communities, to acknowledge the diversity of needs and broaden awareness.

Participants were keen to ensure that follow-up occurred, prioritising a focus on learning more about communities and identifying key needs, rather than the need to firm up the estimate of numbers.

## **5. ASSESSMENT OF NEEDS OF REFUGEE AND ASYLUM SEEKING POPULATION OF OXFORDSHIRE**

Whilst the focus of the research was primarily to identify the size of the RAS population, it was clear that this project would provide an opportunity to review recent assessments of the needs of refugees and asylum seekers, those arising from recent reports by local agencies, as well as from the chance to speak to community representatives about the most pressing needs at the current time. It was also hoped that a more accurate sense of population size would stimulate a renewed focus on the needs of the population by service providers from the voluntary and statutory sectors.

### **Community assessments:**

Community representatives interviewed talked of the need to improve employment opportunities for their community by strengthening skills, and gaining relevant qualifications through education and training. Through interviews the impression emerged of an under-employed population, unable to reach its potential but keen to contribute to the local economy. A number of representatives spoke of their desire to have somewhere where community members could gather for celebrations and mutual support, a need perhaps connected to the isolation that several representatives spoke of their members experiencing. Although most interviewees confirmed that their communities tended to be focused in the Oxford city area, for those who live in outlying areas, a greater sense of isolation was noted, coupled with more difficulty in accessing services.

One interviewee spoke poignantly how desperately many of the asylum seekers in his community needed to gain clarity about their future, to receive resolution in their asylum case, and to be allowed to stay in this country and build new lives here.

Several interviewees spoke of the need for greater access to good quality English language classes so that they could gain the required level to enter further education, achieve qualifications and find employment. Some talked about still needing support to understand and complete forms relating to benefits and entitlements. One representative said that she was aware of community members with HIV who struggle with their condition, facing stigma in the wider community.

Those who mentioned the needs of young people talked of struggles to gain useful qualifications, of low English language skills and of drug problems amongst those unable to find work. One community representative talked of the need for mentoring and career advice for young people leaving formal education and for help with homework for school-aged children.

### **Agency assessments:**

Refugee Resource's records show that of the 1,000 clients the organisation has supported over the past 13 years, most arrive without financial support, functional English or local links, deeply traumatised by their experiences and suffering from poor mental health with exacerbating symptoms. In trying to integrate, refugees face considerable challenges including poverty, health problems and alienation.

Within Oxfordshire, refugees comprise one of the most vulnerable groups within an affluent region marked by extreme inequality, and deprivation is concentrated in the eastern and southern edges of the city where most of Refugee Resource's clients live. Statistical data from the Oxfordshire Data Observatory 2008 shows that in these areas (Rosehill, Blackbird Leys, Cowley, Barton and Littlemore), education and skill levels are amongst the lowest 5% in England.

From the provision of services (mental health, employment, mentoring, coaching and advice/advocacy), and from strong partnerships with a range of local service providers, Refugee Resource has evidence of the following three critical needs for:

- Emotional and psychological support to help refugees manage the impact of war, torture, rape and separation;
- Advice and support around health, education, housing, and finance and benefits;
- Practical support to overcome barriers to education, training, employment and social activities.

This evidence is supported by four internal evaluations with beneficiaries in 2011 (Mentoring and Coaching; Employment; Counselling; Women's Service), which confirmed that:

1. **Mainstream mental health services do not** (cannot) provide the flexibility and client-centred approach that refugees need, along with a high level of cultural and gender awareness;
2. **Refugees have complex integration needs** that are met more effectively by Refugee Resource's holistic approach - provision of counselling, mentoring, coaching, advice and advocacy, therapeutic gardening and women's groups;
3. **Refugees benefit hugely from one-to-one support** in mentoring and coaching, enabling them to access local knowledge, services and facilities;
4. **Refugees value the integrated nature of Refugee Resource's services**, enabling them to achieve positive outcomes through a combination of services, for example, relieving traumatic symptoms through counselling whilst addressing social isolation through a mentoring relationship.

Key findings from consultation meetings with beneficiaries carried out by Refugee Resource in 2011 confirmed that refugees continue to need:

- Ways to contribute to their local community - the mentoring service is needed to identify paths to education, training, employment and social opportunities;
  - support from people with listening, understanding and skills to build confidence and enable independent living;
- Access to trusted psychological support/skills in dealing with trauma, with expert support from interpreters. Refugees trust Refugee Resource and feel safe and welcome.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusions

The project findings suggest that the true number of refugees and asylum seekers in Oxfordshire is far higher than the original estimate of 3-4,000 shared by service providers. The 69 individual refugees and asylum seekers consulted during the project *themselves* knew of just under 3,000 RAS from 33 different nationalities, and this figure was reflected in the interviews with 13 community representatives. Of the challenges faced by the refugee population, those highlighted were the struggles to access education and training, to gain qualifications and secure employment, and the need to find ways to combat isolation and deal with trauma.

The strengths of this report – and of its findings – lie in the process of interviewing individual refugees and asylum seekers, and community representatives, which reflected a strong degree of trust between the two agencies and their clients, and the trust developed by the two community interviewers. Limitations to the accuracy of data gathered were imposed by the lack of official data available, as has been documented above, however, adapting the methodology to focus on community sources did produce useful data relevant to the project aims.

We learned that in order to elicit more comprehensive information about the needs of the refugee population, we would need to develop more focused training around interviewing skills and invest time and resources in providing this type of training for community interviewers.

One can reasonably assume that if a wider consultation had been possible, the estimated number would have increased – even allowing for overlap and a degree of inaccuracy in people's capacity

to estimate population numbers. (Moreover, although during the four-week consultation period with individual clients of Refugee Resource and Asylum Welcome, no Zimbabwean clients were recorded, subsequent interviews with community representatives estimated around 800 Zimbabwean RAS across Oxfordshire.)

Of course, until there is a decision at national level to implement more accurate recording of RAS in the UK, it will remain impossible to provide an accurate number derived from census or administrative data sources. This project has therefore confirmed the suspicions of many practitioners in the refugee sector, namely that the true figure of RAS is much higher, and that in the absence of reliable, accurate data, there is a deep concern that existing services are insufficiently resourced to respond effectively to the greater need that exists across the county amongst the RAS population.

Of the estimated numbers of RAS known to research participants, an estimated two-thirds of this population are believed to have some form of status, while one-third are thought to be asylum seekers. This is a significant finding, as official data records a very small number of asylum seekers across Oxfordshire – the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration recorded 19 asylum seekers (10 dispersed and 9 with support only) in their annual report for 2011 (see <http://www.secouncils.gov.uk/page/4/view/28/migration-partnership>). The same report identifies 210 UASC being supported by the local authority within Oxfordshire. However, we should consider the fact that many of RAS in Oxfordshire predate UKBA and dispersal and could be one of the reasons for the discrepancy in numbers.

There were several useful outcomes from the project; firstly we now have a clearer picture of the diversity of the RAS population across the county (i.e. the range of nationalities), as well as the relative sizes of the different communities settled in Oxfordshire. Secondly, the project itself has acted to raise awareness of the challenges around estimating numbers, and was successful in engaging and drawing together 18 representatives from the county's voluntary and statutory sectors to review and analyse the findings, and to express their intention and commitment to advancing this initiative to learn more about the RAS population.

Thirdly, although the project found that it was extremely difficult to identify refugee community groups and representatives (the majority of whom are not currently in partnership or working with bodies from the statutory or voluntary sectors), the two community researchers were eventually able to engage with 13 community representatives, which could be the start of building stronger relationships between the statutory, voluntary and community sectors with a focus on RAS and their needs. Although the identity of refugee community groups appears to change frequently (this may be linked to the lack of support most of them receive), all 13 groups engaged willingly and enthusiastically with the two researchers, and were keen to share what they knew.

## **Recommendations**

Whilst it was not the intention of this project to recommend national policy changes, nonetheless we believe that the benefit of recording data more formally about the RAS population should be considered (both for its positive and potentially negative consequences for refugees), in the hope that this would lead to better outcomes for refugees and asylum seekers in terms of effective services that meet their needs.

While accepting that the picture will inevitably be a partial one, we do recommend exploring more comprehensively the potential for gathering data from within community sources, less to gain more accurate figures for the refugee population, but rather to identify the characteristics and the needs of RAS in Oxfordshire.

This could be in part facilitated by building on the new relationships developed with refugee community groups and their representatives initiated during this research, as well as through greater sharing of information between the two key refugee agencies – Refugee Resource and Asylum Welcome.

A recommendation that emerged during the stakeholder workshop was to recognise that certain geographic areas across the city (for example Barton, Rose Hill and Cowley) are home to the majority of RAS in the city, and that it may be possible to access resources to support and strengthen refugee community groups as well as services to individuals in these areas. Linking geographic areas to indices of deprivation and looking at resources through this avenue was also proposed. A further point relating to geography is the clear need to extend the reach of this project across the county, by attempting to gather more data from areas such as Banbury, Bicester and Abingdon, which unfortunately could not be addressed within the scope of this project (for example, Refugee Resource has informal reports of a sizeable but hard-to-reach Zimbabwean refugee community in Banbury).

It was felt that the gender issue, particularly in relation to the differing needs of refugee men and women, now needs to be explored in greater depth than it was during this project. Refugee Resource's own outreach work with women has shown that although many refugee women are extremely isolated, it is possible to reach them, for example by having a female outreach worker visit locations where refugee women will gather (shopping centres, GP surgeries, school gates). This could be addressed through a 'mapping' approach whereby such locations within a postcode area known to be home to a large number of RAS could be identified.

The project revealed that very little is known about the newly-arrived East Timorese community (at the stakeholder workshop, the participant from CRISIS Skylight reported that a large number of East Timorese were accessing their English language and advice services), and it was felt that this is an important information gap that should be addressed.

This research has shown clearly that innovative methods need to be used in trying to estimate the needs of populations that are not well documented or which change rapidly. Any further research to focus on under-represented communities such as the East Timorese, or to focus more specifically on women's needs would need to employ such methods.

During the stakeholder workshop, participants were asked what steps they would propose to strengthen and expand the data gathered. It was proposed that this data should be updated at least annually and that funding should be found to support on-going research. Participants felt

there should be a mechanism for feeding back to participants (individuals and communities) in the research, and that ways of supporting/responding to them should be found – i.e. 'acting' on the data gathered. (One suggestion was to share comprehensive information about ESOL providers, thus responding to one of the key needs identified: English language skills). The project could consider how to gather data from those not currently accessing services, and source more data from i.e. housing and places of worship. Some participants felt there could be a permanent forum to discuss the issues (and needs of the RAS population) raised by the project, and that more research into individual communities should be undertaken.

Both the author of the report and Refugee Resource acknowledge the limitations of this type of data, for example we were unable to ascertain the degree of overlap in membership of the community groups (although anecdotal evidence suggests that most refugees belong to only one community group\*), nor the extent to which the community estimates given by interviewees included an overlap of individuals. In part, some of these challenges could be addressed by extending the scope of the research (i.e. interviewing many more individuals and community representatives), but it is clear that gathering robust and reliable figures will remain impossible until there is a change in policy around the recording of individuals' immigration status.

However, there is much that organisations and agencies in Oxfordshire that support refugees and asylum seekers can do to monitor and share data about service users more accurately, in order to ensure reliable recording of both existing and new refugee and asylum seeking clients across the county. This report strongly recommends that service providers (such as those present at the stakeholder workshop for this project) work together to set up monitoring systems that will enable better understanding of the refugee population in order hopefully to lead to more responsive and effective services for refugee clients."

## Appendix A

### Data from community sources

#### 1. SPOT CHECK EXERCISE carried out with 56 clients of Refugee Resource and Asylum Welcome

(A number in brackets in the first column reflects the different approach to capturing estimates of population size by the two agencies: when Asylum Welcome noted more than one client from the same country of origin, they provided an average estimate of population size by dividing the sum of the estimates given, by the number of clients presenting from the same country of origin.)

Country of origin of person interviewed	How many RAS do you know from your own community?	How many RAS do you know from other communities? Which communities do these come from?	
Eritrea	6	Sudanese	2
Burundi	3	Arab communities	5
Algerian	70	Congo, Zambia, Tunisia	200
Sudan	25	Uganda, Kenya, Senegal, Algeria, Congo, Cameroon	12
Sudan	20	Eritrea	15
		Algeria	3
		Zimbabwe	7
Afghanistan	55	Iran	2
		Kurdish	1
Sudan	40	Other Africa	400
Kurdistan/Iran	30	Somalia	10
		Afghani	20
		Iraqi	25
		Kurdish Syria	8
		Algeria	5
		Syria	10
		Kenya	3
		Lebanese	4
Sudan	2		
Algeria	55	Iran	9
		Sudan	7
		Kenya	3
		Albania	45
		India	30
		Morocco	25
Pakistan/Afghanistan	15	Pakistan	5
Nigeria	8	Senegalese	4

Sudan	150-200		
Sudan	300	Nigeria	7
		Congo	2
		Chad	3
		Egypt	5
		Syria	7
		Libya	3
		Kenya	1
		Eritrea	10
		Afghanistan	6
		Ethiopia	5
		Thailand	1
		Zimbabwe	1
		Rwanda	1
		Uganda	1
Congo	5	Kenya	1
		Sudan	3
Congo	5	Rwanda	2
		Afghanistan	8
		Uganda	3
		Ghana	1
		Ethiopia	1
		Nigeria	1
		Eritrea	1
		Kenya	1
		Sudan	3
		India	4
Algeria (2)	300	Iraq	286
Iraq (5)	372	Palestine	3
Somalia	50	Kurdistan	116
Burundi	0	Afghanistan	208
Iran (4)	300	Kenya	28
Senegal	5	Zimbabwe	4
Nigeria (2)	52	Cameroon	1
Tibet	15	South Africa	1
Chinese	50	Pakistan	41
Kurdish (4)	220	Somalia	30
Sudan (3)	250	Eritrea	40
Eritrea	5	Egypt	23
Uganda	3	Sudan	4

Rwanda	0	Tanzania	2
Syria (6)	128	Nigeria	6
Kenya (2)	20	Jordan	3
East Timor	0	Iran	23
Afghanistan (3)	565	Iraqi Kurdistan	15
		Albania	20
		Libya	25
		Algeria	320
		Morocco	7
		Arab	60
<b>Total: 56</b>	<b>3136</b>		<b>1796</b>

## 2. COMMUNITY INTERVIEWS

Community	Size	With status (e.g. indefinite leave to remain (ILR), discretionary leave (DL), humanitarian protection (HP) etc.	Asylum Seekers	Where they are living
Sudanese	200-500	150-400 DL, then ILR given	50-100	
Kenyan	120	Approximately 100 were refugees, many now naturalised	20	
Ethiopian		20-30	5	
Zimbabwean	800	200 ILR; 300 recently given status	300	
Afghani	498	50 refugee status/ILR	450	Blackbird Leys, Cowley
African women (BK Luwo)		30-35		All over Oxford, some Bicester
Sub-Saharan Africa		20		All over Oxfordshire, but 80% live near Oxford city centre
Hazari	105	45	3	
Iranian	800	200	25	
Pakistani	5000		15	
African	250	100	20	
Sudanese	900	500	11	
Swahili	150	5	15	
Total		1985	964	

Communities consulted who stated they have no refugees or asylum seekers:

1. Chinese
2. Bangladeshi
3. Ethiopian (although see other interviewer's results above, from a separate interview)

### 3. POSTCODE ANALYSIS

#### Asylum Welcome

Of the 257 clients that AW saw in the financial year 2011/2012, they estimate that 95 per cent of these clients live in the Cowley/OX4 area, with a few in Headington/OX3, and in Botley/OX1.

#### Refugee Resource:

Of 710 clients recorded in the database, 492 live in OX4 (or 70 per cent); 127 (18 per cent) live in OX3 and 32 (5 per cent) in OX1 and 32 (5 per cent) in OX2 (North Oxford).

### 4. SUMMARY POINTS ABOUT COMMUNITY DATA

#### Spot check:

- clients presenting during the 4-week period represented **20** different countries of origin
- clients were aware of refugees and asylum seekers from more than **33** countries
- **95%** of the clients presenting as individuals for appointments and/or specific support needs were male [Refugee Resource then consulted members of the Women's Group during their regular fortnightly meeting and this provided the additional information regarding women, which altered the percentage to 34% women consulted and 66% men consulted]
- the largest estimates of refugees and asylum seekers are from Sudan, Kurdistan, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and Algeria

#### Community interviews:

- interviews were held with representatives of 11 single community groups and with 2 groups that support people from several African communities

#### Other points:

- individual clients are aware of over **3,000** members of their own communities; community groups state they support **3,000** members of their communities
- approximately **two-thirds** of people supported by community groups have some form of status; the other third are asylum seekers
- **OX4** is the postcode where most clients of Refugee Resource and Asylum Welcome live; similarly the largest number of refugees and asylum seekers supported by community groups live in the OX4 postcode area.

## Appendix B

### Refugee Resource Data Project Workshop: 10 July 2012

Participant list:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Representing:</b>
Amanda Webb-Johnson	Refugee Resource
Antony Kingsley	Refugee Resource
Sarah Giles	Refugee Resource
Matt Renshaw	CRISIS Skylight
Grace Njeri	Community Interviewer
Aziz Barez	Community Interviewer
Gill Tishler	Oxford Citizens Advice Bureau
Jo Moffett-Levy	Open Door
Zainab Koroma	British Red Cross
Kerri Chana	British Red Cross
Jane Noike	British Red Cross
Mary Hardwick	Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire NHS Cluster
Shohana Shabnam	The Children's Society in Oxford
Saeeda Imaan	Asylum Welcome
John Hayes	Oxfordshire Community & Voluntary Action
Martin Tudge	Oxford City Council
Mark Franklin	Thames Valley Police
Inga Doherty	Oxfordshire County Council

## Appendix C:

Reports consulted included:

- Blinder, Dr. Scott. BRIEFING: *Migration to the UK: Asylum* Migration Observatory, University of Oxford, Oxford 2011
- Quevedo, Gabriela *Mapping refugee and migrant communities in the UK* ICAR Resource Guide, London 2010
- Stewart, Emma. *Deficiencies in UK Asylum Data: Practical and Theoretical Challenges* Journal of Refugee Studies, Vol. 17, No.1, Oxford University Press 2004, Oxford
- Stewart, Emma. *UK Dispersal Policy and Onward Migration: Mapping the Current State of Knowledge* Journal of Refugee Studies, Vol. 25, No. 1, Oxford University Press 2011, Oxford
- *Migration and Asylum in Oxfordshire*, Oxfordshire Data Observatory Briefing Note, February 2011
- *Ethnicity in Oxfordshire*, Oxfordshire Data Observatory, July 2010
- *Understanding the Health Needs of Migrants in the South East Region*, Health Protection Agency and partners, 2010
- *Migration Statistics: the Way Ahead?* UK Statistics Authority July 2009 (Report 4)
- Rutter, J. and Lattore, M., *Social Housing Allocation and Immigrant Communities*, Equalities and Human Rights Commission, Spring 2009
- *An evidence base on migration and integration in London*, ESRC Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, University of Oxford August 2010, Dr Ben Gidley and Dr Hiranthi Jayaweera
- *What happens when international migrants settle? Ethnic group population trends and projections for UK local areas*, Phil Rees, Pia Wohland, Paul Norman and Peter Boden, School of Geography, University of Leeds, October 2010
- BRIEFING: *Migration to the UK: Asylum*, Dr Scott Blinder, December 2011, The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford
- *Estimate of population by ethnic group, 2006 and 2011 for Oxfordshire and Oxford city*, Experimental statistics, November 2006, Data Observatory Oxford
- *Mapping refugee and migrant communities in the UK*, ICAR, Gabriela Quevedo, September 2010