

## Refugee rights and responsibilities – project outline

Refugees<sup>1</sup> constitute an important minority in Britain's cultural, social and political history. ICAR's new Rights and Responsibilities research and consultation project explores some fundamental questions about the place of refugees in contemporary British society and, in particular, how the experiences and legal status of refugees shapes their understanding and perceptions of important social changes that are at the heart of current political debates. The project focuses generally on issues related to citizenship, identity, multiculturalism, migration and integration, and specifically on rights and responsibilities as the cornerstones of new citizenship.

The project is funded by [The Sigrid Rausing Trust](#). For more information, please contact [Gareth Morrell](#), project researcher.

### Aims and Objectives

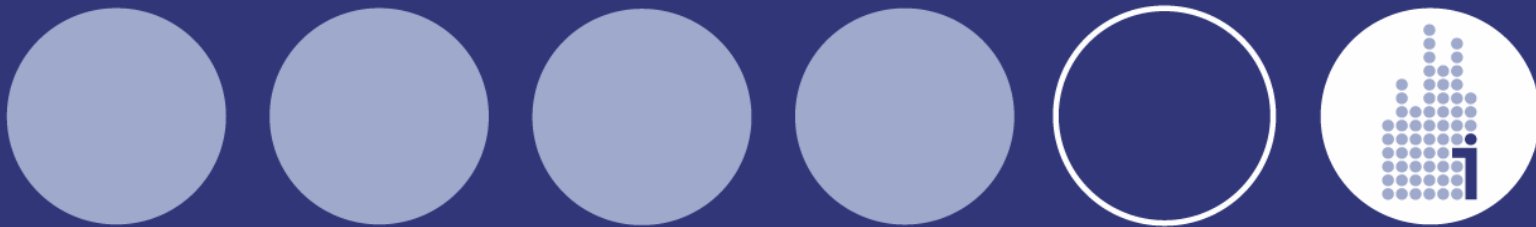
This project has three broad aims:

- to improve our knowledge of refugees' understanding of rights and responsibilities;
- to give refugees a voice in broader debates around citizenship and multiculturalism in the UK; and
- to address the question of whether refugees offer a specific insight into rights and responsibilities, integration and citizenship that may be informative for the wider debates taking place on these issues.

The research will be conducted on the understanding that rights and responsibilities can be interpreted in many different ways and manifested on many different levels, across and between categorised 'communities' and social groups. It is the aim of the research to understand the source of some of these differences while highlighting the value of similarities as a foundation for policy development in these areas.

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<sup>1</sup> We understand that refugees do not constitute a single social group: beyond the granting of official refugee status it is a matter of choice whether people self-identify as refugees, and this identification is likely to change over time at different stages of people's lives and varies between and within national communities – this is one issue the project hopes to address. But for the purposes of this research we believe there is merit in using this categorisation because there are experiences associated with refugees, forced migration and the UK asylum system that are likely to set them apart from other migrants.



## Objectives

*To conduct a thorough evaluation of the way in which the language and concepts of rights and responsibilities are used in legal, political, social and media contexts and assess to what extent the question of refugees has permeated or affected these discourses*

*To engage refugees, academics, policy-makers, advocates and others in an open debate on how refugee rights and responsibilities fit into broader frameworks of citizenship, multiculturalism and national identity in the UK*

*To collect qualitative data about refugees' understanding and appreciation of their rights and responsibilities in respect of the UK, country of origin, diaspora, the family, religion and any other social groups or networks*

*To collect qualitative data from non-refugees<sup>2</sup> about how they perceive the rights and responsibilities of refugees in the context of their own national and civic identity and obligations*

*To evaluate whether, and if so how, the particular status and needs of refugees has influenced policy on citizenship and multiculturalism and how future policy making in these areas can be more effective*

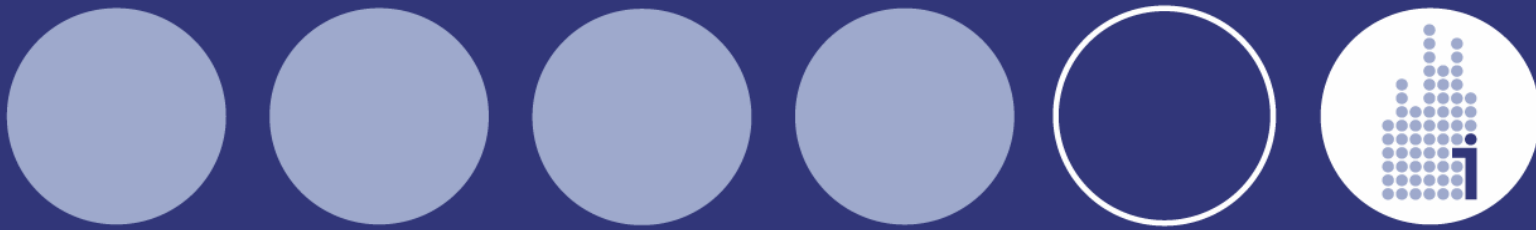
## Methodology and Outputs

The aims of this research require a multi-stranded methodology producing a number of outputs. Three distinct but interacting phases of the project can be identified:

- 1) *Desk-based research and literature review* – this is a necessary precursor to the two subsequent stages of the project. The aim is to provide a discursive and conceptual basis for the consultations and the qualitative research. This review will explore where the debate on multiculturalism and citizenship is in the UK and how it has arrived at this point. It will also investigate how the language of rights and responsibilities is used in other arenas. Analysing the theoretical underpinnings of the current debate and how – if at all – the situation of refugees is cast in this discourse will inform how the consultations and qualitative research are structured.
- 2) *Online consultation* – Drawing on the early findings of the desk-research, an online consultation will tackle some of the issues central to rights and responsibilities. It will take the form of a series of discussions, each launched by an introductory piece written by ICAR staff or by comment pieces from commissioned authors close to the issues, including refugees, academics, policy makers and researchers. This will form the basis for a virtual

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<sup>2</sup> 'non-refugees' is used to distinguish the immigration or citizenship status of other interviewees from the main body of refugees – they are likely to include UK citizens and economic migrants.



forum in which users of ICAR’s site and other interested parties will be invited to respond to the commentaries and articulate any other thoughts they have on the issues. It will provide a space for an open and transparent debate, engaging previously polarised opinion and some formerly marginalised or misrepresented voices. Each issue in the series of consultations will be summarised in a briefing that will be available online.

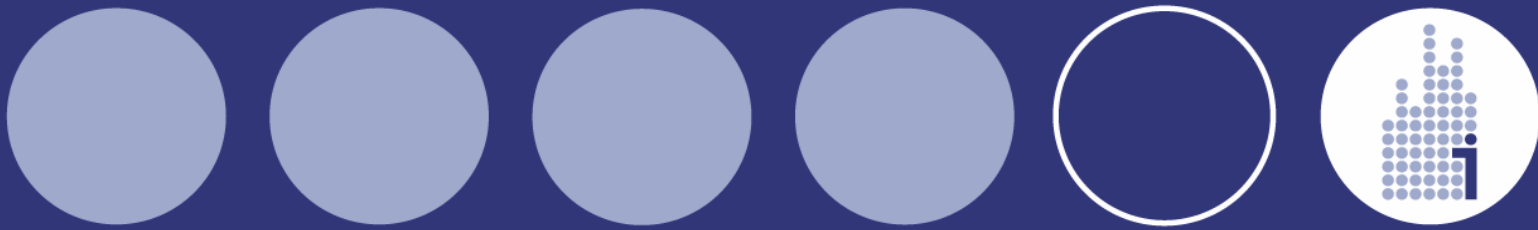
- 3) *Primary qualitative research* – This stage of the project will comprise a number of initial questionnaires and some follow-up in-depth interviews with refugees. These are likely to be drawn from London, given constraints on resources, but their location, country of origin and other social characteristics are yet to be decided. The findings of the previous sections will inform this decision (as well as some practical concerns) and also the content of the questionnaires and interview topic guides. The data gathered will be analysed in the context of a theoretical framework developed from the literature review and findings from the research will be presented at a conference attended by a number of the participants and commentators involved in the project and other stakeholders. A final research report, encompassing all the stages of the project, will be produced and published on ICAR’s website and distributed according to ICAR’s dissemination and communication strategy.

## Project Rationale

The issues of immigration, citizenship, national identity and welfare intersect regularly in recent academic research, newspaper comment pages and blog sites and in political debates. Yet where refugees are mentioned in respect to these issues, it tends to be away from the hype and sensationalism of asylum and amongst a small group of contributors making up the refugee sector. This sector is primarily of an advocacy nature and focuses on the inalienable *rights* of refugees vis-à-vis the state; critics of the sector and those opposed to immigration and sceptical about multiculturalism more generally, would be likely to focus in a narrow way on a refugee’s *responsibilities* to the society that has offered protection. This project will work on both sides of the equation, addressing the absence of the refugee voice and the reality of refugee experiences from the national debate.

In its 2005 report, *Integration Matters: A National Strategy for Refugee Integration*, the Home Office described integration as “the process that takes place when refugees are empowered to achieve their full potential as members of British society, to contribute to the community, and become fully able to exercise the rights and responsibilities that they share with other residents” (Home Office 2005). The report also highlighted a lack of political (as well as social) participation on the part of refugees. This project has the capacity both to increase our understanding of refugee perceptions of rights and responsibilities and to provide a space for refugee voices to be heard in this debate. Consequently, the project can be an important contribution to the understanding of refugee integration.

The imminent [Home Office review](#) also promises to affect immigration and asylum as well as citizenship policy. In this context the debates around rights and responsibilities are central to many contemporary policy challenges.



## Multiculturalism, citizenship and identity in Britain

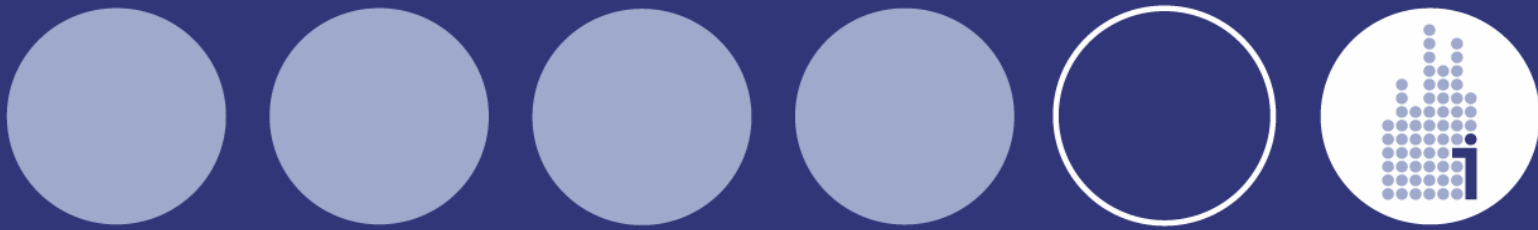
The nexus of these three contested concepts is the location for significant contemporary debate across Western Europe with policy ramifications for the EU and individual member state governments. The British case is no different from the others in that it has its own historical, cultural and political context. There has been much high profile debate around multiculturalism in recent years – its meaning, relevance and practical usefulness being the central talking points. The proponents of multiculturalism claim that it is a concept entirely compatible with Britishness, that Britishness is itself an example of multiculturalism [Crick 2005].<sup>3</sup> It is also advocated by those who see social benefits in diversity, suggesting that a multicultural society is one where no single culture is dominant, and in fact all benefit from mutual critique and dialogue [Parekh 2000]. Opponents of multiculturalism argue that it leads to a form of cultural relativism in which, as a society, we lose sight of shared history and further undermines attempts to generate core and shared values as the basis of any society. Multiculturalism is also criticised as leading to divisive policies unless backed up by an overarching ‘thread’ or ‘glue’ that bonds and unites all groups [Goodhart 2004 and 2006].

The debate also extends to criticisms of the effects of ‘multiculturalist’ policies that, it is argued, have emphasised difference and not similarity, thereby reifying that difference and generating competition between groups for funding and political representation. There is ample evidence that this argument is being accepted at a policy level with government ministers recently accepting that there have been some failures of multiculturalism. The creation of both the [Commission for Equality and Human Rights](#) and the [Commission for Integration and Cohesion](#) are indicative of a shift in policy towards focusing on what people have in common. Most recently, it has been argued that while multiculturalism – a plurality of cultures and cultural experiences – may be the norm of many people’s lives in the UK, this is not the case for all of Britain; this provides the opportunity to allow difference and diversity to flourish in the private sphere while in the public sphere the challenge must be to identify that which binds people.

The debate has implications for immigration control and for the integration of migrants yet what these implications are is not clear: the specific position of refugees in the debate is rarely touched upon. Despite this, the social transformations that comprise the umbrella concept of globalisation have changed the nature of migration. This has impacted upon attitudes to multiculturalism and diversity but also challenged the meaning of citizenship. The history of citizenship is characterised by an increasing desire to formalise equality and rights, politically, socially and, more recently, culturally. The significance of globalisation is that the irreducibility of multicultural difference is becoming increasingly obvious. Many argue that these differences are partly historically constructed [Castles and Davidson 2000]; the challenge, therefore, is for concepts of citizenship to respond to what is a ‘de facto’ multi-ethnicity in many western nation states [Grillo 2006] with multiple levels of identity and

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<sup>3</sup> This report didn’t pass without some controversy, as the accuracy of the ‘historical introduction’ written for this report was questioned in a number of press articles and interviews. Crick responded saying that in a 10,000 summary, meant as an introductory guide not a historical document, there will be some inevitable condensing and simplification.



belonging – what has also been labelled a ‘super-diversity’ [Vertovec 2006]. Refugees in the UK have a distinct (though often administratively inefficient) route to citizenship; yet there is little understanding of whether refugees see this as an acceptable or even necessary route to belonging or inclusion - do they even want to ‘be’ British?

## Global tensions: migration, security and refugee protection

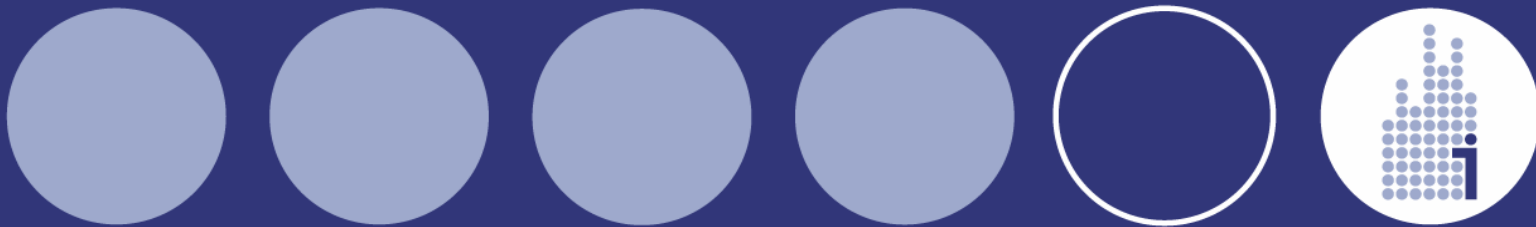
The end of the Cold War and the more recent era of ‘global terror’ have distinctly changed the nature of international relations and global politics. The new dynamics and realities of forced migration have emerged out of a more uncertain global order, shaped by aspects of social and economic globalisation and a global security discourse that presents a transformed set of threats to sovereign states. The Prime Minister has alluded to the impact this insecurity, widely understood, is having on the global outlook of many nationally-bound societies [Blair 2006]. What Tony Blair describes as ‘nativism’ has also been discussed as tribalism and is seen as an insular response to the global challenges of the contemporary world.

This nativism, or tribalism, has been explained as a backlash against the impacts of globalisation [Peters 2006]. It provides a real and significant challenge for diverse societies, as it may have the potential to cause divisions amongst racial, religious or ethnic groups as people turn inwards to their base social characteristics as the only means of identification. There is a tension between this insular attitude and policies promoting equality, championing diversity and accepting multi-ethnicity as a modern reality – these are based on outward looking attitudes.

In this context, the last decade has seen a shift in the global system of refugee protection away from the facilitation of spontaneous asylum to more managed processes of protecting forced migrants. At its height in 2001, spontaneous asylum - when combined with a sometimes poorly managed dispersal policy, the increased fear of terrorism and an increasing perception of community breakdown and segregation - did not sit well with large proportions of an insecure and uncertain British public. Conversely, extra-territorial processing of asylum claims [Betts 2005], gradual closing of legal asylum-migration routes to the UK [Schuster 2005] and increasingly harsh social condition for people seeking asylum in the UK are designed to quell some of the vocal public discord that has emerged out of this era of perceived global uncertainty. International NGOs have asserted that this represents a securitisation of asylum and migration policy and has attempted to externalise (at the EU level) the perceived threat from asylum seekers [Oxfam 2005]. Yet the current climate has led many, including the Prime Minister [BBC 2001], to question the relevance and efficacy of the 1951 Geneva Convention, in a world where the dynamics of seeking refuge are far removed from the time for which it was designed.

## Refugee integration – a disengaged debate?

It is in this securitised global context it is accepted that refugee integration is a priority. Though it is largely absent from the discussion of multiculturalism and citizenship outlined above, the



refugee integration debate in the UK currently represents a separation of rights and responsibilities. Those who advocate for refugees talk primarily in terms of international law and treaty obligations on the universal right to asylum as well as the rights of refugees to access support services in the UK. There is little engagement from this sector with what a refugee's responsibilities should be to the UK as a country of refuge or what they may still be to their country of origin or the diaspora. In opposition to this argument are those who are circumspect about the whole concept of asylum and, therefore, refugees. It is argued that asylum is used as an alternative migration route and so, consequently, extra demands are often put on refugees to prove or display their loyalty or gratification. Yet this argument rarely engages with the question of the rights of those forced to migrate from their country of origin or the international obligations the receiving state has to determine asylum claims. These two positions are often played out in the press and also popular discourse [Lewis 2005; and for a critique of how data on attitudes toward asylum is collected see Crawley 2005].

In this light, it may be unsurprising that the position of refugees has rarely been articulated in broader debates around multiculturalism, as it is a highly contested position.<sup>4</sup> The challenge at the policy level, therefore, is to develop refugee integration policy in a way that is integral to and not separate from wider policies for community cohesion and citizenship. In this way, refugees are more likely to have a voice and a stake in shaping national-level debates on these issues.

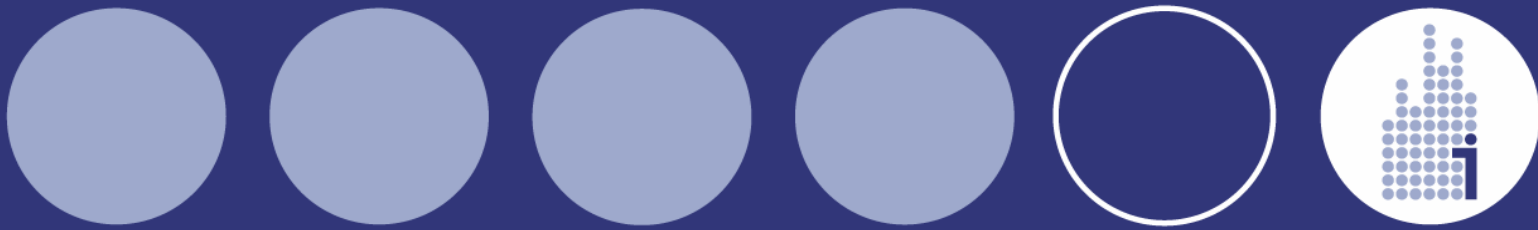
### Introducing complexity into rights and responsibilities

As depicted above, refugee rights are often considered as a narrow set of human rights contested in a legal setting [Pupavac 2006]; but scholars of citizenship make it clear that rights are more complex. Legal and political rights can be formalised for migrants but, as the experience of the 1960s and 1970s in the UK illustrates, these cannot be fully enjoyed without full social and cultural rights [Castles and Davidson 2000]. Which approaches to multiculturalism, diversity and citizenship can satisfy all of these rights without being divisive? The evolution of a 'patchwork' of rights [Spencer 1995] for different categories of migrants is evidence of the difficulty of addressing this question and, it is argued, represents a form of civic stratification [Morris 2004].

The rights of refugees are also dependent upon their complex and often conflicting responsibilities. Refugees are torn in several directions when it comes to responsibilities, with obligations to, inter alia, their country of origin, the global diaspora and the new community often all needing to be satisfied. This places refugees in a unique predicament, particularly when compared to UK citizens, but also compared to other groups of migrants, and has implications for determining the civic rights of refugees, how refugees reconstruct their identity and also for their social and economic integration. This presents a research challenge to explore the nuanced levels of responsibility for refugees and the implications of this for their place in society.

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<sup>4</sup> Though there are projects specifically dealing with refugee integration that have had successes, they have rarely impacted upon mainstream debate. This project aims to explore whether refugee attitudes towards these issues can offer a new insight to on integration and multi-ethnic relations.



## 'Balancing' rights and responsibilities in policy?

The challenge for policy on multiculturalism, diversity and citizenship is to develop a framework that has the flexibility to allow mutual public recognition and understanding of rights and responsibilities for individuals who view both concepts in a variety of ways. This is reflected in what has been called the new politics of identity [Cable 2005]. Many academics, commentators and politicians have written and spoken about how to approach these questions in the era of identity politics.

Paul Gilroy has proposed the concept of conviviality as a challenger to contested concepts of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism [Gilroy 2004]; politicians from across the political spectrum have been debating whether a re-assertion of 'Britishness' is required to provide a common thread that is woven through all social and cultural groups [Brown 2006; Cleverley 2006]. At the same time, political commentators have been proposing that the political right embrace multiculturalism [D'Ancona 2002] with some on the left wanting the government to row back from it [Goodhart 2006]. In this confused political climate, others have argued that it is human rights that can provide the 'social glue' [Klug 2002].

This project seeks to investigate whether refugee rights and responsibilities are compatible with any of these models and whether or not their situation is significantly different to other migrant groups. Exploring these questions may also provide some illuminating insights for the wider debates alluded to above.



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