



ICAR

Navigation guide

Women refugees and asylum seekers  
in the UK

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## About the author

Hildegard has been interested in refugee women's issues for nearly 20 years. During this time, she has actively promoted the development of a gender perspective in refugee policy, both at European level and in the UK. As a senior manager for Refugee Action, she was instrumental in setting up one of the first government-funded, specialist posts for refugee women and is a founder member of Action for Refugee Women (AFRW) and the Refugee Women's Legal Group (RWLG). She works as a freelance researcher and consultant on refugee issues and has conducted a number of research projects, including several specifically on refugee women.

## Acknowledgements

The work being carried out by members of the Refugee Women's Legal Group (RWLG) and Action for Refugee Women (AFRW) has had an influence on the final content of this guide. In particular, the author would like to acknowledge the suggestions and comments from Jane Coker, solicitor; Heaven Crawley, formerly Director of Migration & Equalities Programme at IPPR; Mino Jalali, immigration law practitioner at the Avon and Bristol Law Centre; and Diana Mills, formerly Coordinator of the Refugee Women's Resource Project. The author would also like to thank Esme Peach for her sharp and helpful editing.

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## Introduction

This guide has been written in order to provide an easily digestible and quickly accessible guide to issues relating to women asylum seekers and refugees. It is particularly aimed at those who are new to these issues, but will hopefully be useful to those who want to do a quick check on some of the key points and identify the links and resources available for further study and information.

The term **refugee** will be used in a general way to describe those that have come to the UK and are in the process of seeking asylum as well as those who have achieved refugee status under the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (the Convention). Where it is necessary to differentiate between the two, then the term **asylum seeker** will be used to describe those who have made a claim for asylum but not yet been recognised as a refugee under the terms of the Convention.

The guide covers women who have come to the UK claiming asylum in their own right, as well as those who have come in as dependants or through family reunion.

A deliberate attempt has been made to limit references to UK resources and publications. International references have been included where relevant.

## Context

From the high profile images of groups of refugee men scaling the fences of the Red Cross camp at Sangatte, one would be forgiven for assuming that the issue of seeking asylum was one that affected only young, single men intent on making it to the prosperous shores of the UK. The alternative gendered image, that of a Roma woman with an infant clutched at the hip, begging on the streets of London, provides a similarly unhelpful and misleading image. With a dearth of factual information available on the gendered experiences of asylum-seeking men and women, the power these stereotypical images may have to influence policies and provision of services for this group of people is concerning.

### The invisibility of refugee women

It has been argued that the development of refugee policy in the West has been influenced by the image of the single, male political exile, who was considered to be the main casualty of the Cold War.<sup>1</sup> This stereotype has arguably dominated the priorities of social policy since then with a correlative paucity of research and information on refugee women.

For example, there are still data gaps on women refugees and asylum seekers in the [Home Office asylum statistics](#). Annual statistics have included a breakdown of applications and decisions by nationality, age, and sex since 2001, and both these and the quarterly statistics include a breakdown by sex of persons in immigration detention. The annual statistics also now disaggregate data on the dependants of asylum seekers by age and sex, and provide a breakdown of initial decisions outcomes by sex and nationality.

However, there is still no information published on the sex of those arriving as dependants of asylum seekers after the initial decision stage (i.e. during the appeals process), and data on appeals, NASS support, and removals are not yet disaggregated by sex. Figures on the numbers of dependants arriving to join those with refugee status are also not available, and therefore we do not know how many women join refugees as dependants each year.

In relation to research knowledge, recent Home Office commissioned [mapping exercise](#) identified only six academic publications on refugee women and integration in the UK produced between 1996–2001.<sup>2</sup>

There is a tendency for refugee and asylum-seeking women to be rendered invisible within the development of legislation, social policy, academic theory, and services pertaining to asylum seekers and refugees. It is hard to find among papers discussing the implementation of new policies and practices, such as resettlement, reception centres, return programmes, zones of protection, and so on, an analysis of how these schemes may impact on men and women in different ways.

The current slow progress being made to implement the Platform for Action that came out of the 1995 UN Conference on Women in Beijing provides a very tangible example of how gender issues in refugee policy have failed to be taken seriously at a national level. This was an international agreement on gender mainstreaming that committed governments to have in place mechanisms to assess the gender impact of all

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<sup>1</sup> See also ICAR's [navigation guide to UK asylum law and process](#).

<sup>2</sup> Available at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/rdsolr2803.doc> [accessed 30 November 2004]. It is important to note that due to the manner in which the scope of the study was defined, this study did not include all available material on refugee women in the UK and that many reports were excluded. However, this example is cited here to show that existing material is limited, and that that which does exist may not be identified in mapping exercises and literature reviews of this type.

new legislation. Since 1995, four major Acts of Parliament legislating on asylum have been introduced. The steps taken to assess the gender impact of these Acts are unclear.

The apparently lower number of asylum-seeking women in many industrialised countries has been an additional factor contributing to the manner in which the needs of male asylum seekers have dominated the discourse on asylum law and policy. Whilst the numbers of refugee men and women worldwide are roughly the same, the recorded<sup>3</sup> number of women who make it to industrialised countries to seek asylum in their own right are smaller in number. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that in 2002, the female proportion of the population of concern to UNHCR in Central Europe and the Baltic states, Western Europe, North America and the Caribbean was 41% or less.<sup>4</sup> Home Office statistics for the UK show that 31% of asylum applicants in 2003 were female.<sup>5</sup>

It can be argued that the UK has in place a protection system that makes gendered assumptions about the interpretation of the Convention and systematically marginalises the experiences of women, resulting in women's experiences of seeking asylum being insufficiently documented and not given due attention.

## Development of a gender perspective in refugee law

There is a growing body of scholarship, both internationally and in the UK, demonstrating how women's experiences of persecution are different from those of their male counterparts, and how the model of interpretation applied in industrialised countries discriminates against women in the asylum determination process.

In 1996, the EU Parliament accepted the need for gender guidelines to be drawn up by each nation state to assist in a more gender-sensitive interpretation of the Convention. Progress on this has been slow, with only Sweden having produced such guidelines. In the UK, the Home Office has recently added guidance on [gender issues](#) to its asylum policy instructions (APIs),<sup>6</sup> though it has not accepted the need for separate gender guidelines.

## Ongoing issues

The systematic erosion of the rights of refugees and asylum seekers throughout Europe and the attempts to weaken the protection afforded by the Convention has meant that the concerns of women refugees and asylum seekers are given a low priority by campaigners for refugees, faced with having to fight to retain a commitment to the Convention. However human rights, refugee and women's organisations are working to

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<sup>3</sup> The UNHCR Statistical Yearbook for 2002 notes that 27 countries, virtually all industrialised countries, failed to provide a gender breakdown for the data they collected on refugees. UNHCR (July 2004) *Statistical yearbook 2002: trends in displacement, protection and solutions*. Geneva: UNHCR. Available at <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/template/+GwLFqYrdMneUh5cTPeUzknwBoqeRzknwBo5Boqwce6lxxwGxddAeRyBDX+eRDImq+elybnM> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR (July 2004) 'Demographic characteristics and location', Chapter 4, in *Statistical yearbook 2002: trends in displacement, protection and solutions*. Geneva: UNHCR. Available at <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opedoc.pdf?id=41206f7a0&tbl=STATISTICS> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>5</sup> Tina Heath, Richard Jeffries and James Purcell (August 2004) *Asylum statistics United Kingdom 2003*. London: Home Office. Available at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/hosb1104.pdf> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>6</sup> Available at [http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/ind/en/home/laws\\_policy/policy\\_instructions/apis/gender\\_issues\\_in\\_the.html](http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/ind/en/home/laws_policy/policy_instructions/apis/gender_issues_in_the.html) [accessed 30 November 2004].

ensure that policy changes continue to incorporate a gender perspective and are working on the following issues, some of which the guide will examine further:

- ensuring that national gender guidelines are adopted;<sup>7</sup>
- monitoring of national asylum legislation for its gender impact. It is argued that the changes currently being put into place disproportionately affect women;
- monitoring proposals being presented to the European Parliament for its gender impact; and
- linking in with legislation on related human rights issues such as trafficking<sup>8</sup>, female genital mutilation (FGM)<sup>9</sup> and violence against women, to develop a strong base from which to provide protection to women seeking asylum.

#### Useful resources

**Canadian Council for Refugees** (2001) *Report on International Conference on Refugee Women Fleeing Gender-based Persecution*. Montreal: CCR.

**UNHCR, Van Eyckstraat** (1999) *Towards a gender sensitive asylum policy in Europe*. Brussels: UNHCR.

**UNHCR** (1998) *Refugee Women and UNHCR. Implementing the Beijing Platform for Action*. Geneva: UNHCR.

Information on trafficking can be obtained from **Anti-Slavery** at <http://www.antislavery.org/homepage/antislavery/trafficking.htm>.<sup>10</sup>

Information on FGM can be obtained from **FORWARD** (Foundation for Women's Health Resource and Development) at <http://www.forwarduk.org.uk> and the website for the **All Party Parliamentary Group on Population Development and Reproductive Health** at <http://www.appg-popdevrh.org.uk>.

An overview of refugee women and domestic violence can be obtained from **C. Ditscheid** (2003) 'Refugee women and domestic violence: the failure of state protection in the UK'. *InExile*, issue 27, September 2003. London: Refugee Council.

Details of the government's zero tolerance campaign and related campaigns on domestic violence can be obtained from **Justice For Women** at <http://www.jfw.org.uk>.

Further information on the detention of women can be obtained from **S. Ceneda and S. Cutler** (August 2004) *'They took me away': women's experience of detention*. London: Asylum Aid and Bail for Immigration Detainees. Available at

<sup>7</sup> For example, see the guidelines being promoted by the **Refugee Women's Legal Group** (RWLG), available at <http://www.rwlg.org.uk/genderguidelines.pdf> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>8</sup> See new legislation on trafficking proposed in the Sexual Offences Act 2003, more information available at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/justice/sentencing/sexualoffencesbill/> [accessed 11 November 2004].

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, the websites for the **All Party Parliamentary Group on Population, Development and Reproductive Health** at <http://www.appg-popdevrh.org.uk/> and **FORWARD** at <http://www.forwarduk.org.uk>. The Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 is available at <http://www.legislation.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts2003/20030031.htm> [accessed 11 November 2004].

<sup>10</sup> Accessed 26 August 2003.

[http://www.biduk.org/pdf/women/women\\_in\\_detention\\_in\\_word\\_%2002Sep04.doc](http://www.biduk.org/pdf/women/women_in_detention_in_word_%2002Sep04.doc) [accessed at 30 November 2004].

All urls were accessed and correct at 30 November 2004.

## Legal aspects

Whilst the law pertaining to the rights of refugees has been in existence over the last 50 years, it is only in the last 20 years that its interpretation has begun to incorporate a gender dimension. The legal system has until recent times been regarded as a neutral instrument. Refugee law has been no different. It has typically been argued by the Home Office that in the UK each individual is assessed according to the merit of his or her claim, therefore rendering irrelevant the need for a more gender-sensitive approach to asylum law.

The recent development of a feminist analysis of the law, and of citizenship rights as part of this<sup>11</sup>, has brought asylum law under similar scrutiny. This section will concentrate on some of the definitive milestones that have taken the issue forward.

### Legislation

There is no special legislation for women asylum seekers in the UK. For the assessment of their asylum claims, the usual legislation applies.

- The [Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees 1951](#) and the [Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees 1966](#) (Refugee Convention).<sup>12</sup>
- The [Human Rights Act 1998](#)<sup>13</sup> (HRA) implementing the [Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms 1950](#) ([European Convention on Human Rights](#) – ECHR).<sup>14</sup>
- The [Asylum and Immigration \(Treatment of Claimants, etc.\) Act 2004](#)<sup>15</sup> and its associated statutory instruments, [guidelines and instructions](#).<sup>16</sup>

Legislation defining refugee status is described in detail in the ICAR navigation guide to [UK asylum law and process](#). For a detailed guide on gender-based asylum claims, see *Refugees and gender: law and process* (Heaven Crawley 2001)<sup>17</sup>.

The Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA) has issued its own [Asylum gender guidelines](#) to assist in the assessment of asylum claims<sup>18</sup>. In March 2004, the Home Office added [guidance on gender issues in the asylum claim](#) to its asylum policy instructions for caseworkers.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For a list of resources on feminist legal studies, visit <http://www.rdg.ac.uk/law/femlegalnet/index.htm> and <http://www.kluweronline.com/issn/0966-3622/current> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>12</sup> Available at

[http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/basics/+SwwwBmeJAIS\\_www3wwwwwwwhFqA72ZR0gRfZNFqtxw5oq5zFqtFEIfglAFqA72ZR0gRfZNDzmxwwwwww1FqtFEIfgl/.opendoc.pdf](http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/basics/+SwwwBmeJAIS_www3wwwwwwwhFqA72ZR0gRfZNFqtxw5oq5zFqtFEIfglAFqA72ZR0gRfZNDzmxwwwwww1FqtFEIfgl/.opendoc.pdf) [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>13</sup> Available at <http://www.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts1998/19980042.htm> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>14</sup> Available at <http://www.echr.coe.int/Convention/webConvenENG.pdf> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>15</sup> Available at <http://www.legislation.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts2004/20040019.htm> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>16</sup> Available at [http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/ind/en/home/laws\\_policy/policy\\_instructions/apis.html?](http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/ind/en/home/laws_policy/policy_instructions/apis.html?) [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>17</sup> Heaven Crawley (2001) *Refugees and gender: law and process*. Jordans and Refugee Women Legal Group, London.

<sup>18</sup> Available at <http://www.asylumsupport.info/publications/iaa/gender.pdf> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>19</sup> Immigration and Nationality Directorate (March 2004) *Asylum policy instructions: gender issues in the asylum claim*. Available at

## The relevance of international human rights legislation for the protection of women

In the second half of the twentieth century, human rights began to be redefined to incorporate an understanding of the different ways in which women may be discriminated against and denied the right to the same quality of life as men. This has led to increased awareness of the different ways in which women can be discriminated against, and the development of a body of legislation attempting to counteract such discrimination. For example, much progress has been made in challenging the practice of domestic violence, traditionally seen as a private matter between men and women. Cultural traditions and practices that deny women the right to make choices about their lives and their physical well being, are also increasingly being identified and challenged (see below for examples of human rights instruments that try and address this). In this context, refugee law was becoming increasingly anachronistic in failing to incorporate an awareness of the gendered aspects of human rights that was emerging elsewhere.

Arguments for the protection of women can draw on international legal instruments (see below). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) has particular relevancy.

James Hathaway, a leading authority on asylum law and policy, has argued that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, alongside other international legal instruments, can provide objective indicators for defining persecution under the Convention.<sup>20</sup> Drawing from a range of international agreements, he suggests a hierarchy of rights.

### Hathaway's hierarchy of rights

Level 1 rights: freedom from arbitrary deprivation of life; protection against torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment or treatment; freedom from slavery; freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Level 2 rights: freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention; equal protection of the law; fair criminal proceedings; family privacy; freedom of internal movement; freedom of opinion, expression, assembly and association; rights to vote; access to public employment.

Level 3 rights: right to work; right to essential food, clothing and housing; health care; basic education; cultural expression.

Level 4 rights: private property, protection from unemployment.

(From Crawley 2001<sup>21</sup>)

In Hathaway's analysis, abuse of level one rights should be considered serious harm, and if accompanied by a failure in state protection, would be defined as persecution. Abuse of the other categories could also be

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[http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/ind/en/home/laws\\_policy/policy\\_instructions/apis/gender\\_issues\\_in\\_the.html?](http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/ind/en/home/laws_policy/policy_instructions/apis/gender_issues_in_the.html?)  
[accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>20</sup> James Hathaway (1991) *The law of refugee status*. Toronto: Butterworths.

<sup>21</sup> Heaven Crawley (2001) *Refugees and gender: law and process*. London: Jordans and Refugee Women Legal Group.

persecutory, depending on the degree and nature of the abuse.<sup>22</sup> Women have a role in many societies as the guardians of culture and national or ethnic identity.<sup>23</sup> Therefore they face particular pressures to conform to forms of behaviour (dress codes, restrictions on movement and so on) that are seen as an integral part of group identity. These forms of behaviour, if rejected, can lead to severe punishment by the state or by families or community members effectively acting with immunity from the state. Looking at the above list, it is possible to see how these categories of rights may be used to reassess the rights of women in relation to a number of human rights abuses suffered by women throughout the world.

Relevant international instruments include:

- [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (1948).<sup>24</sup>
- [Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others](#) (1949).<sup>25</sup>
- [European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms](#) (1950).<sup>26</sup>
- [Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimal Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages](#) (1962).<sup>27</sup>
- [Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women](#) (CEDAW) (1979).<sup>28</sup>
- [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CROC) (1989).<sup>29</sup>
- [UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women](#) (1993).<sup>30</sup>
- [UN Platform for Action](#) (1995).<sup>31</sup>

#### Useful resources

**Amnesty International** (2001) *Broken bodies, shattered minds: Torture and ill-treatment of women*. London: Amnesty International.

**J-P Colombey** (ed.) (1995) *Collection of international instruments and other legal texts concerning refugees and displaced persons*. Geneva: UNHCR.

**P. R. Gandhi** (1995) *International human rights documents*. London: Blackstone Press Ltd.

**J. Watson and M. Woolf** (2003) *Human Rights Act toolkit*. London: Legal Action Group.

<sup>22</sup> See **Heaven Crawley** (2001: 40) *Refugees and gender: law and process*. London: Jordans and Refugee Women Legal Group.

<sup>23</sup> See for example, **F. Anthias and N. Yuval-Davis** (1992) *Racialised boundaries; race, nation, gender, colour and class and the anti-racist struggle*. London: Routledge.

<sup>24</sup> Available at <http://www.unhchr.ch/udhr/lang/eng.htm> [accessed 11 November 2004].

<sup>25</sup> Available at <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/33.htm> [accessed 11 November 2004].

<sup>26</sup> Available at <http://conventions.coe.int/treaty/en/WhatYouWant.asp?NT=005> [accessed 11 November 2004].

<sup>27</sup> Available at <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/63.htm> [accessed 11 November 2004].

<sup>28</sup> Available at <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/e1cedaw.htm> [accessed 11 November 2004].

<sup>29</sup> Available at <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu2/6/crc/treaties/crc.htm> [accessed 11 November 2004].

<sup>30</sup> Available at [http://www.unhchr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/\(Symbol\)/A.RES.48.104.En?Opendocument](http://www.unhchr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/(Symbol)/A.RES.48.104.En?Opendocument) [accessed 11 November 2004].

<sup>31</sup> Available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/plat1.htm> [accessed 11 November 2004].

## Gender-based persecution

The term 'gender' describes the social and cultural construction of men and women as opposed to the experiences determined by their biological sex.<sup>32</sup> The term gender-based persecution is increasingly being used in a general way to describe a range of experiences that have led women to seek asylum.

There is growing recognition that historically, definitions of human rights have largely benefited men, but that the abuses women experience can no longer be tolerated as an unfortunate by-product of their gendered destiny. The refusal of women to conform to restrictions imposed upon them on the basis of their gender, such as conforming to prescribed dress codes, restrictions on movement and so on, are gradually being recognised as an activity that falls within the ambit of a Convention ground, frequently that of political opinion.

For example, many asylum determination systems in industrialised countries are only just beginning to recognise that some gender-specific treatment women experience, such as rape or FGM, can be regarded as persecutory within the terms of the Convention. Likewise, the five Convention grounds and the role of the state in protecting women need to be interpreted in accordance with current thinking.

Heaven Crawley<sup>33</sup> differentiates between gender-related persecution and gender-specific persecution. She identifies gender-related persecution as 'the experiences of women who are persecuted because they are women'.

For example, women can be persecuted in ways that men are persecuted (such as house arrest, flogging, and so on), because they have not conformed to certain social constructions of gender behaviour placed upon them as women, such as conforming to dress codes or restrictions on freedom of movement. She uses the term gender-specific persecution to describe the serious harm they experience, which is specific to them as women. For example, rape and female genital mutilation (FGM), which may or may not occur because they are women; e.g. a woman may be raped as a result of her engagement in political activity, not because she is a woman per se.

## Gender guidelines

In March 1993, [Guidelines on women refugee claimants fearing gender-related persecution](#) were produced by the [Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board](#) (CIRB).<sup>34</sup> This was a breakthrough in the development of gender-sensitive policy on the assessment of asylum claims, in that the need to develop an awareness of gender issues affecting refugees and asylum seekers, which had until then been regarded as a concern solely for aid agencies working in refugee-producing countries, was brought into the public arena.

The CIRB guidelines were the first gesture by an industrialised country to formally recognise that the violations of women's human rights in countries around the world had hitherto not been regarded as important as the violations of men's human rights. Subsequent to the Canadian initiative, guidelines were issued by the United States and Australia.

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<sup>32</sup> For more information on this, see **Ann Oakley's** seminal work: *Sex, gender and society* (1972) Aldershot: Gower.

<sup>33</sup> **Heaven Crawley** (2001) *Refugees and gender: law and process*. London: Jordans and Refugee Women Legal Group.

<sup>34</sup> Visit [http://www.cisr-irb.gc.ca/en/about/guidelines/women\\_e.htm](http://www.cisr-irb.gc.ca/en/about/guidelines/women_e.htm) for more information [accessed 30 November 2004].

Within the European Union, member states have been slow to accept the need for and to draw up guidelines. However, guidelines have been formulated by Sweden, and some other countries have addressed the issue by incorporating references to gender into their existing asylum laws.

In the UK, [gender guidelines](#) were drawn up by the Refugee Women's Legal Group (RWLG)<sup>35</sup> in 1998 as a campaigning tool and approved by the House of Lords in the case of Shah and Islam. In 2000, the Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA)<sup>36</sup> adopted much of the content of these and issued their own [Asylum gender guidelines](#) to assist in the assessment of asylum claims.

In March 2004, the Home Office added [guidance on gender issues in the asylum claim](#) to its asylum policy instructions for caseworkers.<sup>37</sup> These cover the additional considerations caseworkers should have in mind when assessing claims for asylum that could include gender related issues; and advice on how to take gender issues into account when looking at the persecution experienced and whether there has been a failure of state protection.

The arguments for guidelines are based on concerns about the way in which the Refugee Convention is interpreted to exclude women's experiences of political activity and persecution and the way the asylum process makes it harder for female asylum seekers to submit a claim for protection.

When a person makes an asylum claim, they must convince the immigration authorities that they have suffered persecution, on the basis of one of the five Convention grounds, and that there has been a failure of state protection. Recent debates on the development of a gender-sensitive asylum policy rest on the interpretation of these key elements of a claim and the recognition and identification of the ways they need to be reinterpreted in order to include the potentially different experiences of women.

Women can be marginalised from the process of seeking asylum in a number of ways, which gender guidelines can attempt to address:

- they may exclude themselves, not knowing that they have the right to claim or not realising that their experiences give grounds for a claim for asylum;
- they may be discouraged by family members, legal representatives and others from making a claim; and
- the practical and physical arrangements at court can work against women throughout the asylum determination process (see below).

Gender guidelines ensure a systematic approach to the substantive and procedural aspects of claiming asylum and stipulate minimum standards and good practice requirements for processing a woman's asylum claim.

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<sup>35</sup> Refugee Women's Legal Group (July 1998) *Gender guidelines for the interpretation of asylum claims*. London: RWLG. Available at <http://www.rwlg.org.uk/genderguidelines.pdf> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>36</sup> Immigration Appellate Authority (November 2000) *Asylum gender guidelines*. Crown Copyright. Available at <http://www.asylumsupport.info/publications/iaa/gender.pdf> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>37</sup> Immigration and Nationality Directorate (March 2004) *Asylum policy instructions: gender issues in the asylum claim*. Home Office: London. Available at [http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/ind/en/home/laws\\_\\_\\_policy/policy\\_instructions/apis/gender\\_issues\\_in\\_the.html?](http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/ind/en/home/laws___policy/policy_instructions/apis/gender_issues_in_the.html?) [accessed 30 November 2004].

A study by the Refugee Women's Resource Project (RWRP) in 2003<sup>38</sup> draws attention to a number of procedural issues that put women at a disadvantage when seeking asylum. These range from the lack of childcare facilities in courts to the need for appropriate, trained interpreters. The RWRP report highlights that more work needs to be done to make asylum policies and procedures more gender-sensitive.

#### Useful resources

**Sophia Ceneda, Refugee Women's Resource Project** (February 2003) *Women asylum seekers in the UK – some facts and figures*. London: Asylum Aid. Available at <http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/Publications/RWRP%20Women%20asylum%20seekers%20Feb%2003.doc>.

Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board's website at <http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/>.

All urls accessed and correct at 30 November 2004.

## Some defining cases in female asylum claims

UK jurisprudence concerning the protection of women has been framed by the precedents set in the development of case law and international human rights instruments. The following identifies some of the key cases, both in the UK and in other jurisdictions, that have had a significant impact on UK law and policy. They have been chosen to illustrate some of the key arguments supporting the development of a gender-sensitive asylum protection system. For more examples, see Crawley (2001) and publications by RWRP. The cases below are listed in chronological order.

- *Farah v. Canada* (1994)<sup>39</sup>

This case involved a Somali woman with two children, who argued that if returned to Somalia, her daughter would be subject to the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM). The court ruled that forcing a minor female to undergo FGM would grossly infringe her rights as secured in international human rights instruments, and recognised that the state in Somalia does not protect minor females from suffering this treatment. The Board held that FGM as practised in Somalia grossly infringes minor females' rights, contained in Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This treatment also violates the specific rights included in the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

(Taken from Crawley 2001).<sup>40</sup>

Thus Canada awarded refugee status to the child due to her membership of two social groups, those of women and minors. This was a significant milestone in that until this point, efforts to challenge harmful traditional practices being carried out on women were undermined by

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<sup>38</sup> **Sophia Ceneda, Refugee Women's Resource Project** (February 2003) *Women asylum seekers in the UK – some facts and figures*. London: Asylum Aid. Available at <http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/Publications/RWRP%20Women%20asylum%20seekers%20Feb%2003.doc> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>39</sup> *Farah v. Canada (MEI)* 3 July 1994.

<sup>40</sup> **Heaven Crawley** (2001) *Refugees and gender: law and process*. London: Jordans and Refugee Women Legal Group.

accusations of cultural imperialism. Canada was the first country to acknowledge the protection rights of women and girls threatened with FGM against their will.

Since there are no published statistics giving a breakdown of the grounds on which asylum has been granted, it is difficult to quantify the impact of this decision on the UK asylum determination process. It can, however, be argued that the decision by the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board moved the debate forward and set a benchmark against which the human rights of women at risk of undergoing FGM could be measured. The [survey](#) conducted by RWRP<sup>41</sup> identified a fifth (21) of respondents having applied for asylum on the basis of social group. Out of these, five were claiming on the basis of repressive social norms and two on the basis of FGM.

FGM has been illegal in the UK since the 1985 Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act. This was amended by the [Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003](#)<sup>42</sup> which closed a number of loopholes, such as the practice of parents taking their daughters abroad to have the procedure done there.

- ***Fathi & Ahmady (1996)***<sup>43</sup>

This case set a legal precedent in recognising how women's refusal to conform to social mores can be interpreted, in certain circumstances, as a political act. Fathi was an Iranian woman who came to the UK and claimed asylum. She had been arrested in Iran for wearing make-up and for failing to cover her hair properly. She was detained, taken to court and in place of receiving 50 lashes, was fined. She was forced to leave her employment at a primary school due to her incorrect dress and was unable to find alternative employment.

She lost her initial claim, but on appeal it was argued that the woman's behaviour was seen by the regime as an act of opposition; a political act. Refusal to wear the veil, it was argued, 'is not merely transgression of Islamic mores, it is a transgression of an Islamic more as interpreted by this particular regime.' The woman won her claim for asylum on the basis that, in this case, a violation of social mores could be interpreted as constituting a political opinion.

This was a strategic breakthrough in that the decision recognised that refugee women's experiences must be interpreted within the social and political context in which persecution has taken place.

(Adapted from Crawley 2001:102).<sup>44</sup>

- ***Shah and Islam (1999)***<sup>45</sup>

Syeda Shah and Shahanna Islam were two Pakistani women who applied for asylum in the UK. Ms. Shah was forced out of her home by her violent husband and fled Pakistan for the United Kingdom, where she gave birth to a child. She feared that her husband would accuse her of

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<sup>41</sup> Sophia Ceneda, Refugee Women's Resource Project (February 2003) *Women asylum seekers in the UK – some facts and figures*. London: Asylum Aid. Available at <http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/Publications/RWRP%20Women%20asylum%20seekers%20Feb%202003.doc> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.legislation.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts2003/20030031.htm> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>43</sup> *Fathi and Ahmady v. SSHD* (unreported) 1 December 1996 (14264) (IAT).

<sup>44</sup> Heaven Crawley (2001) *Refugees and gender: law and process*. London: Jordans and Refugee Women Legal Group.

<sup>45</sup> *Islam v SSHD: R v IAT ex parte Shah* [1999] INLR 44, [1999] Imm AR 283 (HL).

adultery or denounce her under Sharia law for the offence of sexual immorality. Ms. Islam also fled a violent husband, who assaulted her for the final time after she was accused of infidelity during a fight between rival political factions. Both feared the violence of their husbands and severe sanctions under Pakistani law as a result of these false charges of infidelity. Based in part on an Amnesty International report, the House of Lords found that women in Pakistan suffer discrimination and are unprotected from domestic violence.

(Taken from Anker, Kelly and Willshire-Carrera 1999).<sup>46</sup>

The majority of Lords found that gender can constitute a 'particular social group'. It was a landmark decision, because it recognised the lack of protection being given to these women by the state, through the police, courts, and legal system. It has since provided a legal precedent in deciding other cases, and helped to expand the debate on the definition of social group to include, amongst others, lesbian and gay people (see ICAR navigation guide on [Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender \(LGBT\) refugees and asylum seekers](#)).

- **Rose Najjemba (2003)**

Ms. Najjemba was a Ugandan woman who ran a shop near the Congolese border and lived with her son. Four soldiers came to her home and questioned her and her son about the rebel group the Allied Defence Forces (ADF). The soldiers brutally beat the son in front of the mother and then found a case under the bed. Ms. Najjemba was questioned about the key to the case and then raped twice.

The soldiers left with her son who appeared to be seriously injured. Ms. Najjemba never saw her son again. Fearing for her life and the safety of her other children, she fled to Kampala. There a friend helped her get to the UK where she applied for asylum. She initially had her application turned down on the grounds that 'there was nothing in the evidence...to suggest that the incident was anything more than a very serious criminal act of sexual gratification on the part of the soldiers.'<sup>47</sup>

Following a public campaign, led by Women Against Rape (WAR), Minister Beverley Hughes intervened to offer asylum based on the grounds that Rose Najjemba had experienced inhuman and degrading treatment and therefore persecutory conduct by agents of the state.

(Taken from *Women's Asylum News* May 2003).<sup>48</sup>

The significance of this case is that rape by agents of the state, in this case by government soldiers, is now acknowledged to be a form of serious harm and persecutory under the terms of the Convention. It also questions the acceptance of rape being used as a form of gratification and reward in war and conflict situations.

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<sup>46</sup> Anker, Kelly and Willshire-Carrera (1999) 'Defining particular social group in terms of gender: the Shah decision and US law'. *Interpreter Releases*, Vol. 76 (25), July 2 1999.

<sup>47</sup> *N v SSHD* (CA) [2002] EWCA Civ 1082.

<sup>48</sup> **RWRP** (May 2003) *Women's Asylum News*, Issue 32. Available at <http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/Publications/Women'sAsylumNews/Issue%2032%20May%202003%20email.doc> [accessed 30 November 2004].

## The rights of dependants

Although women who claim asylum as dependants may be the main applicants for welfare support from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), their entitlement to such support ultimately rests on the existence of their husband or partner's claim.

Should the relationship break down whilst they are awaiting a decision, women are faced with a number of difficulties. There is the risk that the application for asylum made by the husband for them both would be in jeopardy if a wife left her husband and made a claim in her own right. It may mean that both claims would have to start again, delaying even further an already lengthy process. Alternatively, it could mean that the woman is no longer seen as being dependant on her husband and therefore has no basis for staying in the UK. Also if a woman decided to make a claim in her own right after she had already claimed as a dependant, the delay in making an independent claim may be held against her.

Once a decision has been made and the woman is recognised as a refugee, albeit as a dependant, she will retain her refugee status should the marriage break down.

## Key issues

### Why do women seek asylum?

More research needs to be done on the reasons why women seek asylum. The information that is available shows that, in general, women seek asylum for the same reasons as men. However, it is possible to identify some gender differences. Evidence seems to suggest that on the whole, women are more likely to be involved in so-called 'low level' political activities, which reflect their gender role.<sup>49</sup> They are likely to be targets for persecution due to their association with male political activists through their roles as wives, mothers, daughters and so on.

Research by RWRP<sup>50</sup> found that the majority of women in their research sample of 102 cases cited imputed political opinion as their main ground, or one of the grounds, for claiming asylum. Many women may not describe their experiences in terms that fit into the categories of the Convention but when their reason for flight is analysed, it is possible to see that their experiences may be precisely the kind that the Convention aimed to provide protection for.

In a Refugee Action study<sup>51</sup>, just over a quarter of the respondents cited war in their country as their main reason for leaving. See chart below.

Reason for leaving	Number	Percentage
Refused to answer	13	11.9%
War	29	26.6%
Persecution (ethnic, religious)	14	12.8%
Political reasons	22	20.2%
Lack of safety/Lives in danger	16	14.7%
Other	15	13.8%

Some of the responses from women interviewed as part of this research illustrate the complexities of individual cases:

'I fled from my country to save my life', Congolese woman (21).

'My husband was working for an overseas charity and was forced to leave', woman from Iraq (28).

'I left because of the war. It was hell there for women', Afghani woman (38).

'I left because there was no law, no protection, no safety', Somali woman (35).

<sup>49</sup> Heaven Crawley (2001) *Refugees and gender: law and process*. London: Jordans and Refugee Women Legal Group, p. 69.

<sup>50</sup> Sophia Ceneda, Refugee Women's Resource Project (February 2003) *Women asylum seekers in the UK – some facts and figures*. London: Asylum Aid, p. 50.  
Available at <http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/Publications/RWRP%20Women%20asylum%20seekers%20Feb%2003.doc> [accessed 11 November 2004].

<sup>51</sup> Hildegard Dumper (December 2002) *Is it safe here? Refugee women's experiences in the UK*. London: Refugee Action. Available at <http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/researchreport.pdf> [accessed 11 November 2004].

'There was constant rape and lack of safety', Somali woman (30).<sup>52</sup>

An analysis of country of origin situations reveals that the proportion of women asylum seekers is higher for countries where civil unrest and war is widespread. For countries where human rights violations tend to be overtly political and where women's rights are repressed, the number of women asylum seekers tends to be lower.<sup>53</sup>

For further information on why women may leave particular countries, see RWRP's [country reports](#)<sup>54</sup>.

## Why should we be concerned about developing a gender perspective to asylum law and policy when the numbers of affected women are so small?

Whilst the UK data available may indicate that fewer women than men apply for asylum in industrialised countries (31% against 69%), the actual numbers that come in as dependants of asylum seekers or through family reunion,<sup>55</sup> means that the overall proportion of asylum-seeking or refugee women may be approximately the same as men, or possibly higher.

In 2003, the total number of spouses and dependants accompanying or joining principal applicants for asylum in the UK prior to a decision being made was 10,640.<sup>56</sup> Of these, 55% (5,860) were female. However, this figure only includes those accompanying or joining the principal applicant prior to an initial decision being made, and does not include those who arrive during the appeal stage of a claim.

Furthermore, gender-disaggregated data on spouses and dependants that arrive to join those with refugee status through family reunion entitlements are also not released. Finally, although the number of principal female applicants is much less than that of male principal applicants, the refugee recognition rate for female applicants at the initial decision stage was slightly higher than that for men in 2003 (9% for women versus 5% for men); although the percentage of those granted exceptional leave to remain, humanitarian protection, or discretionary leave was roughly the same in 2003 (11% for men compared with 10% for women). In the continued absence of detailed data on dependants, it is difficult to surmise that the number of refugee and asylum-seeking women is really that 'small'.

The focus on refugee women has traditionally been regarded as an aid issue, in particular, featuring women in camps. Refugee women in camps outside the UK continue to experience great danger.<sup>57</sup> However, by

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<sup>52</sup> Hildegard Dumper (December 2002) *Is it safe here? Refugee women's experiences in the UK*. London: Refugee Action. Available at <http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/researchreport.pdf> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>53</sup> Sophia Ceneda, Refugee Women's Resource Project (February 2003) *Women asylum seekers in the UK – some facts and figures*. London: Asylum Aid. Available at <http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/Publications/RWRP%20Women%20asylum%20seekers%20Feb%202003.doc> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>54</sup> Available at <http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/AA%20pages/DV%20reports%20download.htm> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>55</sup> Family reunion here applies to those joining someone with refugee status in the UK.

<sup>56</sup> Tina Heath, Richard Jeffries and James Purcell (August 2004) *Asylum statistics United Kingdom 2003*. Issue 11/04. London: Home Office. Available at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/hosb1104.pdf> [accessed 11 November 2003].

<sup>57</sup> See for example, Human Rights Watch news report 'Nepal/Bhutan: sexual abuse highlights plight of refugees' (22 November 2002), available at <http://hrw.org/press/2002/11/nepal1122.htm> [accessed 11 November 2003].

focussing on those outside the UK, it becomes possible to forget about the injustice experienced by women seeking protection in industrialised countries. It is particularly at this time, when the European tradition of granting asylum under the UN Convention is being reviewed and is under threat of limitation, that the rights of women to protection need to be safeguarded.

As policies to contain asylum seeking are introduced in European countries, it is vital that the impact on women is monitored. For example, the proposal put forward by the UK for zones of protection to process asylum claims outside European states, though now rejected, would have required proper analysis in relation to the specific impact it may have had on women and their ability to seek asylum. The particular difficulties women face in fleeing, the evidence of sexual assault and abuse that women suffer in refugee camps, and a lack of confidence in the ability to process their claims in a gender-sensitive way would all have to have been taken into account.

In the UK, there is concern that changes in domestic asylum law and procedures may disproportionately affect women. For example, the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act (2002) set out a list of countries that it regards as safe. These are countries that joined the European Union in May 2004. In addition, fourteen more have been added to the list, some of which are countries where domestic violence is known to be prevalent without any state protection, as well as others that are known countries of origin for trafficking victims.<sup>58</sup> The list includes Albania, Bulgaria, Jamaica, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Brazil, Ecuador, Bolivia, South Africa, Ukraine, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. In addition, parts of Somalia and Somaliland have been added. The list can be changed at any time.

Another change that is planned is the restriction of Legal Aid for asylum applicants to five hours per applicant. The restriction of Legal Aid to five hours will also mean that complex claims, which those relating to women asylum seekers often are, will not be given the chance to be heard adequately.

Without a proper understanding of the ways in which gender analysis is key to ensuring appropriate provisions for both male and female asylum seekers, service providers can be caught unawares. Through an over-reliance on data for the main applicant, organisations can find that the data they keep does not truly reflect the type of demands being placed upon them. This can inhibit their ability to develop targeted services appropriate to their client group. For example, one office providing advice to asylum seekers supported by NASS found that their record keeping system does not reflect the services it provides to dependants.

'This is a problem as many wives of husbands, who are the principal client, use the service. There is no way of knowing how many women we need to plan for or what their needs are.'  
(Interview by the author with worker from a UK asylum advice service.)

Given these considerations, it is clear that developing a gender-sensitive approach to asylum policy has to be promoted at national, EU and UN levels.

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<sup>58</sup> See for example, **Caroline Howard, Refugee Women's Resource Project** (June 2004) *Safe for whom? Women's human rights abuses and protection in 'safe list' countries: Albania, Jamaica and the Ukraine*. London: Asylum Aid. Available at <http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/New%20RWRP/RWRP%20Publications/RWRP%20Safe%20for%20Whom%20Jun04.pdf> [accessed 30 November 2004].

### Useful resources

**Amnesty International** (2001) *Broken bodies, shattered minds: Torture and ill-treatment of women*. London: Amnesty International.

**Human Rights Watch** website section on women's rights. Available at <http://www.hrw.org/women/index.php>.

**S. Forbes Martin** (1991) *Refugee women*. London: Zed Books.

**ILPA/Resource Information Service** (January 2004) *Asylum seekers – a guide to recent legislation*. 4<sup>th</sup> edition. London: ILPA. Available at [http://www.ris.org.uk/downloads/asg\\_2004.pdf](http://www.ris.org.uk/downloads/asg_2004.pdf).

**Caroline Howard**, Refugee Women's Resource Project (June 2004) *Safe for whom? Women's human rights abuses and protection in 'safe list' countries: Albania, Jamaica and the Ukraine*. London: Asylum Aid. Available at <http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/New%20RWRP/RWRP%20Publications/RWRP%20Safe%20for%20Whom%20Jun04.pdf>.

**UNHCR** (1989) *Working with refugee women: A practical guide*. Geneva: UNHCR.

**UNHCR** (1995) *UNHCR and refugee women: Rebuilding a future together*. Geneva: UNHCR.

**UNHCR** (1995) *Sexual violence against refugees: Guidelines on prevention and response*.

Geneva: UNHCR.

**UNHCR** (1995) *Reproductive health in refugee situations: An inter-agency field manual*. Geneva: UNHCR.

All urls accessed and correct at 30 November 2004.

## Why are there fewer female than male asylum seekers in the UK?

The financial costs involved in seeking asylum in industrialised countries are enormous and it is often a male member of the family for whom the family clubs together to raise the funds to send away. This may be because it is his political activities that are causing the family to suffer. Sending him away can protect the family from further abuse and harassment.

For women, the barriers to being able to flee to industrialised countries are enormous. They may not have the financial means. Many may be single mothers who have lost their husbands and will not have access to the funds to escape. Their role as carers and often the main providers of food, may mean that they are relied upon to remain and look after the more vulnerable members of the family, especially children, the elderly, and the infirm. These women tend to flee to neighbouring areas in the region.

Many women face restrictions on their ability to move around in public without a male chaperone and

travelling on their own in some areas would attract unwanted attention. Women from such deeply gender segregated societies are often not used to travelling alone and using public transport.

In societies that are war torn, women may feel particularly vulnerable to rape and sexual harassment. In recent research by Refugee Action,<sup>59</sup> the women respondents overwhelmingly affirmed that it was difficult to make the decision to leave. Whilst it is also difficult for men to decide to leave, these women's responses, reveal particular concerns around safety and emotional distress that, one could argue, affect women in a particular way.

'It is difficult for a woman to leave her whole family.'

'[Women] find it hard to leave their kids at home.'

'It is difficult and frightening for a woman to travel alone.'

'Many young women disappeared during the journey.'

'In our culture we have to depend on men.'

(Women of various nationalities interviewed by Refugee Action.)<sup>60</sup>

An additional argument is that women's activities in defence of human rights have not been recognised by asylum determination systems in industrialised countries. Women asylum seekers do not always recognise that they may have grounds for making a claim, and may not be encouraged or given the opportunity to consider whether they should claim asylum based on their own activities. Their activities within human rights struggles around the world therefore remain largely undocumented, and in many cases excluded from qualitative and quantitative data.

#### Useful resources

**Refugee Women's Resource Project** (February 2001) *Only crooked words. Home Office decisions on Kenyan women's asylum claims*. London: Asylum Aid. Available at <http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/Publications/Kenya%20reports/Only%20Crooked%20Words%20July%202001.PDF> [accessed 26 August 2003].

**Refugee Women's Resource Project** (March 2002) *Romani women from Central and Eastern Europe: A 'fourth world', or experience of multiple discrimination*. London: Asylum Aid. Available at <http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/Publications/Roma%20reports/RWRP%20A%20Fourth%20World.pdf>.

**Hildegard Dumper** (December 2002) *Is it safe here? Refugee women's experiences in the UK*. London: Refugee Action. Available at <http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/researchreport.pdf>.

All urls accessed and correct at 30 November 2004.

<sup>59</sup> **Hildegard Dumper** (December 2002) *Is it safe here? Refugee women's experiences in the UK*. London: Refugee Action. Available at <http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/researchreport.pdf> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>60</sup> **Hildegard Dumper** (December 2002) *Is it safe here? Refugee women's experiences in the UK*. London: Refugee Action. Available at <http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/researchreport.pdf> [accessed 30 November 2004].

## Are refugee women's needs being met by the UK asylum system?

It has been suggested that the asylum system in the UK is based on assumptions that address mainly male protection needs. It is argued that these assumptions overemphasise male human rights violations and political activities and that this has led to a male bias throughout the asylum system.<sup>61</sup>

Many commentators suggest that the system is discriminatory against women and fails them at all stages of the **legal process**. The RWRP report<sup>62</sup> documents evidence of the ways in which the asylum process may work against women asylum seekers, some of which are mentioned below.

- Women are not actively encouraged to make a claim in their own right.
- Many do not know that this is an option.
- The system relies on the efforts of gender-aware legal advisors to look at the experiences of the wives of male asylum applicants and encourage them to make a claim based on their own activities.
- Gender insensitive interviewing techniques.
- Lack of childcare facilities.
- Country of origin reports used by immigration officers to assess human rights violations do not include sufficient information on the position of women and how they may be treated unfairly.

### Case study

A heavily pregnant mother of two, based in the London area, had to travel to Liverpool to attend her asylum interview. Her husband was also attending his asylum interview in Liverpool on the same day. They had no one to take and collect their children from school, so they decided to take their children with them.

They thought that the father could look after the children whilst the mother would attend her interview. However, as a result of the delay in her husband's interview, he was not released in time to take care of the children when his wife was called into her interview. The very sensitive nature of her claim – she had been sexually assaulted on several occasions in front of her children – meant that she did not wish her children to be present in the interview and a request was made for her interview to be delayed in order that her husband could look after the children.

The officer at reception refused to allow the interview to be delayed for half an hour to ensure that the children would not have to go into their mother's interview, even though the husband had been in interview for two hours by this time and would be due out soon. This decision was contrary to UNHCR

<sup>61</sup> See work of the RWLG; Heaven Crawley (2001) *Refugees and gender: law and process*. London: Jordans and Refugee Women Legal Group; Sophia Ceneda, Refugee Women's Resource Project (February 2003) *Women asylum seekers in the UK – some facts and figures*. London: Asylum Aid. Available at <http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/Publications/RWRP%20Women%20asylum%20seekers%20Feb%2003.doc> [30 November 2004]; and others.

<sup>62</sup> Sophia Ceneda, Refugee Women's Resource Project (February 2003) *Women asylum seekers in the UK – some facts and figures*. London: Asylum Aid. Available at <http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/Publications/RWRP%20Women%20asylum%20seekers%20Feb%2003.doc> [accessed 30 November 2004].

guidance according to which interviewers should:

'Provide women the opportunity to be questioned by themselves, out of the hearing of other members of their family. Victims of sexual abuse may not feel comfortable recounting their experiences in front of their fathers, husbands, brothers or children'.

UNHCR (1991: 41-42) 'Guidelines on gender sensitive techniques for interviewing women refugees' in *UNHCR Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women*.

Rather than allow the interview to be delayed, the reception officer threatened this woman with the issue of a non-compliance refusal. In a letter of complaint from the representatives, it was noted that the officer responsible for issuing this threat was:

'Clearly trying to intimidate our representative, our client and the Home Office interviewing officer into commencing the interview with the children present. Her only concern was for the administrative smooth running of the interview unit and she displayed no consideration or concern for the adults who were the "clients" of the interview unit'.

(Case study no. 17 from Sophia Ceneda, Refugee Women's Resource Project [February 2003] *Women asylum seekers in the UK – some facts and figures*. London: Asylum Aid. Available at <http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/Publications/RWRP%20Women%20asylum%20seekers%20Feb%2003.doc> [accessed 30 November 2004].

Research by the Refugee Women's Resource Project (RWRP)<sup>63</sup> and others has also found that some women have been discouraged from making their own asylum claims by some solicitors and Home Office officials.

'When I went for my interview for asylum, they kept asking to speak to my husband. Why do you want to speak to him, I said. It is me that is claiming for asylum!' Iranian woman describing her experiences to the author.<sup>64</sup>

The absence of a coherent gender analysis of asylum seekers to the UK has meant that government asylum support services have been slow to respond adequately to their needs. For example, it has been argued that the arrangements for **dispersal** under the 1999 Act did not incorporate a gender perspective, look at the numbers of female asylum seekers that were likely to be affected, or plan adequately for their needs.

The Refugee Action report (2002)<sup>65</sup> investigating the experiences of 110 female asylum seekers highlighted the vulnerability and isolation these women experience:

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<sup>63</sup> Sophia Ceneda, Refugee Women's Resource Project (February 2003) *Women asylum seekers in the UK – some facts and figures*. London: Asylum Aid. Available at <http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/Publications/RWRP%20Women%20asylum%20seekers%20Feb%2003.doc> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>64</sup> From research carried out by the author in the course of completing an MSc in Gender and Social Policy, 1998, Bristol University.

<sup>65</sup> Hildegard Dumper (December 2002) *Is it safe here? Refugee women's experiences in the UK*. London: Refugee Action. Available at <http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/researchreport.pdf> [accessed 30 November 2004].

- many were housed in inappropriate accommodation in which they felt inhibited to move around freely, or leave the house after dark;
- a large majority did not have access to a phone;
- a third could not afford public transport; and
- few allowances were made for mothers with babies and small children.

#### Case study: the International Hotel

One of the interviewers for the research commissioned by Refugee Action made the following report:

'I interviewed several women who were staying at The International Hotel. This hotel provides accommodation to dispersed asylum seekers in the Midlands. It currently holds around 332 residents, of which around 50 are women. Many of the women are pregnant. Reports from female residents seem to indicate that there is no attempt to accommodate women residents in a specially allocated section of the hotel.

The women come from a culture where it is not acceptable for pregnant women to be around men who are not part of their family. The hotel has many young single men housed there, who are also not accustomed to seeing pregnant women outside their own family members. This situation leads to intense discomfort for the women, who dislike being stared at in communal areas, like the dining room. It has also led to conflicts and incidences of domestic violence from husbands, who dislike their wives being stared at. This means that many of the women are unable to leave their bedrooms.

They would like to be able to go for a walk in the evenings to ensure they get plenty of exercise, but feel unsafe doing so due to the quantity of pubs and nightclubs in the area.

When they give birth, they will have to face being housed straight from hospital, meaning they will have to leave hospital and go straight to a strange house to clean it and move their belongings in. This causes a great deal of pressure, physically and emotionally, at a time when they need all their strength to cope with the exhaustion after labour, hormonal and emotional upheaval and the sleepless nights.'

From Hildegard Dumper (December 2002) *Is it safe here? Refugee women's experiences in the UK*. London: Refugee Action, p. 11. Available at <http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/researchreport.pdf> [accessed 30 November 2004].

Women in **detention** face particular problems. Women who are pregnant have been held in detention centres without any research being undertaken on the impact this has on them and their babies.<sup>66</sup> Recent research conducted by Bail for Immigration Detainees and Asylum Aid involving 13 mainly African women,<sup>67</sup> found that the women were often unable to exercise their legal rights or secure legal representation to challenge their detention. Some were unable to address their physical and mental health needs whilst in

<sup>66</sup> **Maternity Alliance** (September 2002) *A crying shame: pregnant asylum seekers and their babies in detention*. London: Bail for Immigration Detainees, Maternity Alliance, London Detainee Support Group. Available at [http://www.biduk.org/pdf/res\\_reports/a\\_crying\\_shame\\_colour\\_version.pdf](http://www.biduk.org/pdf/res_reports/a_crying_shame_colour_version.pdf) [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>67</sup> **S. Cutler and S. Ceneda** (August 2004) *'They took me away': women's experiences of immigration detention in the UK*. London: Bail for Immigration Detainees and Asylum Aid. Available at [http://www.biduk.org/pdf/women/women\\_in\\_detention\\_in\\_word\\_%2002Sep04.doc](http://www.biduk.org/pdf/women/women_in_detention_in_word_%2002Sep04.doc) [accessed 30 November 2004].

detention and in some cases, detention exacerbated existing physical and mental health problems. The institutionalised regime for food and other activities also left the women feeling 'like criminals' deprived of control over meeting their basic needs, especially in the cases of pregnant women or those with young children.

The research also presents some accounts of ill-treatment in detention facilities, especially in relation to removal procedures, and those that have been released in detention continue to experience fears of re-detention and deportation. The women taking part in the research were detained for periods ranging from just a few days in two cases to over 83 weeks in another two cases, and eight out of the 13 had spent several months or more in detention. 10 women in the sample had been detained in more than one detention centre. At July 2004, women asylum seekers could be held at Tinsley House Removal Centre, Yarl's Wood Removal Centre, Dungavel House Removal Centre and Oakington Reception Centre, and a number of prisons also hold women under Immigration Act powers.

- For further quantitative data on female asylum detainees, see the section on 'statistics'.

There is still not enough being done to monitor the **gender impact of other asylum policies** in spite of the fact that many recent changes to asylum procedures may affect women in specific ways. The safe country lists introduced by the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act (2002) set out a list of countries that regarded as 'safe'.

Initially these were countries that joined the European Union in May 2004, but fourteen more have been added to the list, some of which are countries where domestic violence is known to be prevalent without any state protection, as well as others that are known countries of origin for trafficking victims. The list includes Albania, Bulgaria, Jamaica, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Brazil, Ecuador, Bolivia, South Africa, Ukraine, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. In addition, parts of Somalia and Somaliland have been added. The list can be changed at any time.

Another major change that is being introduced is the restriction of **Legal Aid** for asylum applicants to five hours per applicant. The restriction of Legal Aid to five hours will mean that complex claims, which those relating to women asylum seekers often are, will not be given the chance to be heard adequately. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that any dependants will even be interviewed due to the restricted time available.

In addition, the UK government has started to operate an annual **resettlement programme** in the UK (the Gateway Protection Programme) and is going ahead with plans to pilot **accommodation centres**. It would be useful to know if a gender-sensitive analysis of these schemes that considers how they will impact on women and that accounts for the structures that need to be put in place to provide for them, has taken place or will form part of any evaluations planned.

## Are refugee and asylum-seeking women's needs being met by service providers in the UK?

The limited data on women in the UK asylum process, particularly those who are dependants, means that it is difficult for service providers to have a true picture of their client group and plan and prepare accordingly.

The marginalisation of refugee women has meant that until recently their voices have not always been given the platform to be heard. The traditional gatekeepers and spokespersons for refugee communities have, in

the main, been male community leaders. It is only through the establishment of specific women's projects that the issues that concern them are beginning to be identified and addressed.

One of the first studies to focus on the specific needs of refugee women was a small study of refugee and asylum-seeking women in Brighton.<sup>68</sup> In this, the author Manal Ahmed identified six specific service areas that needed to be addressed:

- training and employment;
- education, including ESOL, further education and schools;
- social services;
- health;
- housing; and
- racial harassment.

Whilst refugee and asylum-seeking women may face many of the same problems all women face, their circumstances can make it harder to access the services they need. For example, being able to access advice services is a problem for many women refugees and asylum seekers. They may be restricted by cultural codes from leaving the house without a male chaperone, they may not know enough English to use public transport, they may not be used to using public transport, and they may be caring for children and family members which restricts their movement. In addition, they may be forbidden to attend any public place where men may gather.

It is only recently that service providers are realising how they may exclude some refugee women from their services. Women-only advice sessions are beginning to be offered as well as outreach advice sessions for women in their homes.

Refugee women also have to struggle against gendered stereotypes that put male needs centre-stage, such as that of the male breadwinner. A study of women professionals commissioned by the Refugee Women's Association (RWA) and the Greater London Authority (GLA) revealed that nearly three quarters of the women interviewed described themselves as employed in their country of origin, whereas now less than a fifth described themselves as employed.<sup>69</sup>

A significant number of refugee women are the head of their household. Research indicates the number could be around 50%.<sup>70</sup> However, many refugee women feel their employment needs are not taken seriously. They feel vocational courses do not recognise the skills and experiences they have and direct them to low skilled and low paid jobs.

An acute area of neglect is in the health sector. Women are more likely to make use of the health services for reasons that are not directly related to their own illness. For example, women of all cultures tend to be

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<sup>68</sup> Manal Ahmed (1996) *Refugee women in East Sussex*. London: Refugee Action.

<sup>69</sup> Hildegard Dumper (December 2002) *Missed opportunities: A skills audit of refugee women in London from the teaching, nursing and medical professions*. London: The Mayor of London in association with Refugee Women's Association (RWA). Available at [http://www.london.gov.uk/approot/mayor/refugees/docs/skills\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.london.gov.uk/approot/mayor/refugees/docs/skills_rpt.pdf) [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>70</sup> Hildegard Dumper (December 2002) *Missed opportunities: A skills audit of refugee women in London from the teaching, nursing and medical professions*. London: The Mayor of London in association with Refugee Women's Association (RWA). Available at [http://www.london.gov.uk/approot/mayor/refugees/docs/skills\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.london.gov.uk/approot/mayor/refugees/docs/skills_rpt.pdf) [accessed 30 November 2004]; Hildegard Dumper (December 2002) *Is it safe here? Refugee women's experiences in the UK*. London: Refugee Action. Available at <http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/researchreport.pdf> [accessed 30 November 2004].

responsible for the health of their families. They will also need to use the health services to address routine sexual health issues.

In the Brighton study, 82% of the women interviewed were dissatisfied with their GP. The inadequacies of the system arise mainly from the reluctance of many GP practices to improve the accessibility of their services. Many refuse to take refugees and asylum seekers onto their lists or fail to use proper interpreters when they do. There is still a lot of fear and ignorance amongst health professionals about the health needs of refugees and asylum seekers, especially around cultural practices such as FGM, and their mental health needs. Women are more likely to be on the receiving end of this.

The lack of counselling support is also a significant gap. The stress refugee and asylum-seeking women may go through can contribute to a host of stress-related physical symptoms.

In research conducted by Ruth Wilson (1998), refugee and asylum-seeking women and health service providers made the following statements:

“Translating through husbands is very difficult. Women won’t say things to the doctor that implicate the husband. They can’t talk about sexual difficulties for instance.”

“You are meant to keep quiet about these things and your mother or older women are not here to give advice.”

The author also observed:

‘The following diseases, conditions and practices were named as taboo by members of the group: HIV; AIDS; sexual diseases; drugs; drinking; contraception; virginity (or sexual experience); and female genital mutilation (FGM).’

(From Ruth Wilson (1998) *Health in exile*. London: Refugee Action.)

#### Useful resources

**Manal Ahmed** (1996) *Refugee women in East Sussex*. London: Refugee Action.

**Hildegard Dumper** (December 2002) *Missed opportunities: A skills audit of refugee women in London from the teaching, nursing and medical professions*. London: The Mayor of London in association with Refugee Women’s Association. Available at [http://www.london.gov.uk/approot/mayor/refugees/docs/skills\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.london.gov.uk/approot/mayor/refugees/docs/skills_rpt.pdf).

**Evelyn Oldfield Unit** *Compassionate leadership: A question of gender?* London: Evelyn Oldfield Unit.

**Jayne Hum** (1998) *Domestic violence against women from the Vietnamese refugee community: implications for housing and other services*. London: Refugee Action, Community Foundation, Au Co Housing Association.

**Jenny McLeish** (February 2002) *Mothers in exile: Maternity experiences of asylum seekers in England*.

London: The Maternity Alliance. Briefing paper available at [http://www.maternityalliance.org.uk/documents/mothers\\_exile.pdf](http://www.maternityalliance.org.uk/documents/mothers_exile.pdf).

**Ruth Wilson** (1998) *Health in exile: the experience of refugees and evacuees in Leeds*. London: Refugee Action.

For examples of services specifically developed to be accessible for women, the following websites may be useful:

**The Health for Asylum Seekers and Refugees Portal (HARP)**, available at <http://www.harweb.org.uk/content.php?section=women>.

**Education Action International** (formerly RETAS), available at <http://www.education-action.org/home.asp.htm>

**Refugee Women's Association**, available at <http://www.refugeewomen.org>.

**Refugee Women's Resource Project**, available at <http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/RWRP/RWRP.htm>.

(All the above urls were accessed and correct at 30 November 2004)

## How do refugee women's experiences in the UK differ from men's?

As has already been described, women's experiences are largely shaped by an asylum system that identifies the main actors as being predominantly male. Women, if they do appear, do so as shadowy figures in the wings, as dependants and auxiliaries to the dominant masculine narrative. As a result, there is a lot that we do not know about the experiences of refugee women in the UK. However, there is enough small-scale research to be able to identify some common themes. Whilst refugee and asylum-seeking women have many similar experiences to their male counterparts, they also face experiences that are unique to them because of their gender.

One of the overriding issues is that many refugee and asylum-seeking women come from highly segregated gendered societies. Once here, they no longer have the support of the family and an extended female network that they would have grown up with. In addition, some will not be used to participating in the kind of public life found in the UK, where there is an emphasis on the role of the state and a weakening of the role of the family.

In general, male asylum seekers, if single, are more likely to be living with other men from the same nationality. Single female asylum seekers however, their numbers being smaller, are more likely to be living alone or with men and women from other nationalities. They can find themselves living on their own in a strange town; fearing to go out; lonely, depressed and extremely vulnerable. Young women are particularly open to exploitation by the men around them and can become pregnant, adding further to their loneliness and vulnerability.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> **Lisa Hunt** (2003) 'Women asylum seekers and refugees in West Yorkshire: Opportunities, constraints and the role of agency'. Paper presented at First Annual Student Conference on Forced Migration, 22 February 2003, Oxford.

The educational background of refugee and asylum-seeking women can vary considerably. A study of Somali professional qualifications<sup>72</sup> found that Somali women were more likely to have no formal education at all. Various studies have identified higher education as being key to the ability to adapt to a new country. Women from certain communities therefore face particular problems in adjusting to living here. On the other hand, those women who are professionally qualified with skills and experience from their home country, often find it hard to be taken seriously and provided with the support needed to enter the workforce.<sup>73</sup>

One explanation for this is that refugee and asylum-seeking women, alongside other black and minority ethnic women, face a double prejudice of racism and sexism. There is a quick readiness to assume that these women come from backgrounds where they are oppressed and that therefore their expectations of life in the UK should be low.

Refugee and asylum-seeking women may also face the pressure to maintain the culture and customs of their community. Anthias and Yuval-Davis<sup>74</sup> describe women as having a role in being the 'guardians of the race'. It is from women's behaviour and dress that a community may derive its sense of identity. Male members of that community may not be expected to conform in the same way.

### Useful resources

**A. Bloch** (2002) *Refugees' opportunities and barriers in employment and training*. Department for Work and Pensions, Research Report No. 179. Available at <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrep179.asp>.

**C. Ditscheid** (2003) *Against all odds: refugee women and employment*. In *Exile*, issue 27, September 2003. London: Refugee Council.

**H. Dumper** (2002) *Missed opportunities: A skills audit of refugee women in London from the teaching, nursing and medical professions*. London: The Mayor of London in association with Refugee Women's Association (RWA). Available at [http://www.london.gov.uk/approot/mayor/refugees/docs/skills\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.london.gov.uk/approot/mayor/refugees/docs/skills_rpt.pdf).

**Refugee Women's Association** (2003) *Refugee Women's News*, issue 24, August and September 2003. London: Refugee Women's Association (RWA). Available at <http://www.refugeewomen.org.uk>.

**H. Summerfield** (1993) 'Patterns of adaptation: Somali and Bangladeshi women in Britain' in G. Buijs (ed.) *Migrant women: crossing boundaries and changing identities*. Oxford: Berg.

**C. F. El-Solh** (1993) 'Somali Muslim women in the East End of London: renegotiating gender and ethno-religious identity'. Presented to RSP seminar on Forced Migration, 24 February 1993, Oxford.

**Linda Williams; Shamis Dirir; Sada Elmi; and Ahmed Dirir** (March 1998) *Experiences, attitudes and views of young, single Somalis in London on female circumcision*. London: London Black Women's Health Action Project and London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

<sup>72</sup> **Alice Bloch & Gaby Atfield** (2002) *The professional capacity of nationals from the Somali regions in Britain*. London: Refugee Action, Goldsmith's College, IOM.

<sup>73</sup> **Hildegard Dumper** (December 2002) *Missed opportunities: A skills audit of refugee women in London from the teaching, nursing and medical professions*. London: The Mayor of London in association with Refugee Women's Association (RWA). Available at [http://www.london.gov.uk/approot/mayor/refugees/docs/skills\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.london.gov.uk/approot/mayor/refugees/docs/skills_rpt.pdf) [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>74</sup> **F. Anthias and N. Yuval-Davis** (1992) *Racialised boundaries: race, nation, gender, colour and class and the anti-racist struggle*. London: Routledge.

All urls were accessed and correct at 30 November 2004.

## What is the European Parliament doing on this issue?

In November 1996, the European Parliament issued a resolution urging member states to adopt guidelines for the protection of women asylum seekers. It also stated that it is 'crucial that sexual violence be recognised as a form of torture, particularly given the use of rape as a weapon of war and the cultural traditions of certain countries which involve gender persecution'.<sup>75</sup>

To date no EU country has officially adopted UNHCR Gender Guidelines into their legislation or policy, whilst only Sweden and the UK have produced guidance on the assessment of gender-related asylum claims.<sup>76</sup> In March 2004, the Home Office added [guidance on gender issues in the asylum claim](#) to its asylum policy instructions for caseworkers.<sup>77</sup>

Guidelines are essential in safeguarding the interests of women asylum seekers within the drive towards a common European asylum policy.<sup>78</sup> The asylum systems of member states within the European Union (EU) can vary considerably.

In September 2000, the European Commission tried to address these differences by drafting a Council Directive on minimum standards on procedures in member states for granting and withdrawing refugee status (the 'Asylum Procedures Directive'). The Directive has been discussed by the European Parliament and has undergone numerous amendments.

At the end of April 2004, the Council of the European Union agreed on a general approach to the Directive and it will be adopted after the European Parliament has given a further opinion and it has been re-examined by the Council. The [European Council for Refugees and Exiles](#) (ECRE) as well as others concerned to protect the rights of asylum seekers in Europe, have voiced concern that these amendments have been watered down and have lowered the high standards that the Council of Ministers agreed to in 1999 in Tampere, Finland.<sup>79</sup>

The original Directive contained a number of safeguards that were particularly pertinent for women asylum seekers. These placed an obligation on member states on a number of issues.

For example, one of the rights referred to in the original included the obligation to inform dependants, in private, of their right to make a separate asylum claim. It also included the right for all dependants to be

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<sup>75</sup> Heaven Crawley (2001) *Refugees and gender: law and process*. London: Jordans and Refugee Women Legal Group.

<sup>76</sup> Heaven Crawley and Trine Lester (2004) *Comparative analysis of gender related persecution in national asylum legislation and practice in Europe*. Geneva: UNHCR. Available at <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opedoc.pdf?tbl=RESEARCH&id=40c071354&page=research> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>77</sup> Immigration and Nationality Directorate (March 2004) *Asylum policy instructions: gender issues in the asylum claim*. Available at [http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/ind/en/home/laws\\_policy/policy\\_instructions/apis/gender\\_issues\\_in\\_the.html?](http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/ind/en/home/laws_policy/policy_instructions/apis/gender_issues_in_the.html?) [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>78</sup> See also UNHCR (1991) *Guidelines on the protection of refugee women*. UNHCR: Geneva.

<sup>79</sup> Visit <http://www.ecre.org> for more information.

interviewed in private. In an attempt to address national particularities, the amended version merely states that member states need to ensure that each adult person has the right to make a separate application.

Advocates for refugees and asylum seekers believe this wording may diminish a fundamental right that should be implemented as a matter of course.<sup>80</sup> Many women asylum seekers come from societies where their rights as wives are limited. It could be seen as a hostile act on their part to ask to be interviewed separately from their husbands.

The original proposals also committed states to inform each applicant, in a **language which they understand**, about the asylum procedure and their rights within this. The amended version inserts a cautionary clause committing states to providing information in a language which they **may be reasonably supposed to understand**. Many asylum-seeking women may not have received formal education and may not fluently speak the dominant language of the country. There is no safeguard in the amended Directives to protect women from being part of a process that they do not understand.

As has previously been mentioned, the RWRP research<sup>81</sup> revealed that many women asylum seekers do not know of their right to make their own asylum claim. In addition, the research highlighted the emotional and social pressures put on them not to claim.

'Husbands can often put pressure on their wife to not make their own claim as he is the man and is taking responsibility. I recently had a client and when I met his wife, she had a much stronger claim than her husband. He hadn't wanted her to make her own claim though as he was controlling things.'

Asylum advice worker quoted in Sophia Ceneda, Refugee Women's Resource Project (February 2003: 134) *Women asylum seekers in the UK – some facts and figures*. London: Asylum Aid. Available at <http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/Publications/RWRP%20Women%20asylum%20seekers%20Feb%2003.doc> [accessed 30 November 2004].

#### Useful resources

Europa Justice and Home Affairs Documentation Centre website section on protection of women in the EU. Available at [http://europa.eu.int/comm/justice\\_home/doc\\_centre/asylum/women/wai/doc\\_asylum\\_women\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/justice_home/doc_centre/asylum/women/wai/doc_asylum_women_en.htm).

European campaign on women asylum seekers  
<http://www.womenlobby.org/asylumcampaign>

European Council for Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)  
<http://www.ecre.org>

<sup>80</sup> See ECRE's summary of its comments on the amended proposals for minimum standards at <http://www.ecre.org>.

<sup>81</sup> Sophia Ceneda, Refugee Women's Resource Project (February 2003) *Women asylum seekers in the UK – some facts and figures*. London: Asylum Aid. Available at <http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/Publications/RWRP%20Women%20asylum%20seekers%20Feb%2003.doc> [accessed 30 November 2004].

**European Women Lawyers Association**

<http://www.ewla.org>

Heaven Crawley and Trine Lester (2004) *Comparative analysis of gender related persecution in national asylum legislation and practice in Europe*. Geneva: UNHCR. Available at <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opedoc.pdf?tbl=RESEARCH&id=40c071354&page=research>.

All urls accessed and correct at 30 November 2004.

## Statistics

Information on refugee and asylum-seeking women is limited due to the continued failure of industrialised countries to respond to the need for greater gender awareness within their asylum systems.

UNHCR reports that information on gender is more widely available from developing countries, where the agency is directly involved in registration and data collection, than in industrialised countries, where this function is usually undertaken by national governments. In 2002, twenty-seven countries, virtually all industrialised countries, were unable to provide UNHCR with data on gender.<sup>82</sup> Figures from the end of 2002 suggest that women and female children made up approximately 49% of the 17 million persons of concern to UNHCR worldwide. However, in Western Europe and North America, where refugee movements tend to be of an individual nature, the proportion fell to less than 41%.<sup>83</sup>

The Home Office began recording the gender of main asylum applicants in the early 1990s. However these were not included in Home Office statistical publications till 2001. Prior to the publication of the 2001 asylum statistics, the only information on gender included in the annual asylum statistics was a gender breakdown of the overall number of asylum applicants in detention.

Since 2001, the annual statistics have included a breakdown of applications and decisions by nationality, age and sex, and from 2002, they also included a gender and age breakdown of those who applied as dependants of the principal applicant or who arrived subsequently but before the initial decision on the principal applicant was made. Recent Home Office data also provides a breakdown of breakdown of initial decisions outcomes by sex and nationality. However, there is no such information published relating to appeals, removals, NASS support, or other key aspects of the asylum process.

There are still no published figures on the sex of those arriving as dependants of asylum seekers after the initial decision stage (i.e. during the appeals process), many of whom it can be assumed will be women.<sup>84</sup> Figures on the numbers of dependants arriving to join those with refugee status are also not available.

This means that information on the total number of women coming into the country as refugees is incomplete. This is important as it has implications for women who have successfully gone through the asylum process, as either asylum claimants or dependants, and are looking for support for the next stage of their settlement in the UK. Since there is no systematic collection of data on gender-based claims, this has to be gleaned from studies such as those undertaken by Asylum Aid, Refugee Action and other refugee agencies.

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<sup>82</sup> UNHCR (July 2004) *Statistical yearbook 2002: trends in displacement, protection and solutions*. Geneva: UNHCR. Available at

<http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/template/+GwLFqYrdMneUh5cTPeUzknwBoqeRzknwBo5Boqwce6lxxwGxddAeRyBDX+eRDImq+elybnM> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>83</sup> UNHCR (July 2004) 'Demographic characteristics and location', Chapter 4 in *Statistical yearbook 2002: trends in displacement, protection and solutions*. Geneva: UNHCR. Available at <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendoc.pdf?id=41206f7a0&tbl=STATISTICS> [accessed 26 August 2003].

<sup>84</sup> UNHCR notes that in industrialised countries, once refugee status has been obtained, the gender distribution of the refugee population becomes more equal as a result of family reunion: UNHCR (2002) 'Gender, age, location', Chapter 2 in *UNHCR Statistical Yearbook 2001*. Geneva: UNHCR. Available at <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/+kwwBme7++j8wwwnwwwwwwwhFqAIRERfIRfglIFqA5BwBo5Boq5AFqAIRERfIRfglCFqD+XXWajnwGxddADzmxwwwwww1FqmRbZ/opendoc.pdf> [accessed 30 November 2004].

Please note that in the Home Office statistics cited below, figures other than percentages are rounded to the nearest 5, unless otherwise stated.

## Principal female asylum applicants

In 2003, just over one third (15,320 or 31%) of principal asylum applicants were female.<sup>85</sup>

## Women applying for asylum as dependants

In 2003, 55% of applications for asylum made by dependants were female (5,860 out of 10,640).

## Women recognised as refugees

In 2003, of the total initial decisions, 9% of female applicants (1,660) were recognised as refugees.<sup>86</sup> This is about 42-43% of the total number of principal applicants granted refugee status at the initial decision stage.<sup>87</sup>

## Women granted exceptional leave or other forms of protection

In 2003, 10% (1,844) of principal female applicants receiving an initial decision on their case were granted exceptional leave to remain (ELR), humanitarian protection (HP), or discretionary leave (DL) at the initial decision stage.<sup>88</sup> This represents 26% of the total number of principal applicants granted ELR, HP or DL.

## Women refused asylum

In 2003, 81% of the initial decisions made on the asylum applications made by women were rejections. This represents 14,936 female principal applicant cases.<sup>89</sup> This is 28% of all those who had their claims for asylum rejected.

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<sup>85</sup> Tina Heath, Richard Jeffries and James Purcell (August 2004) *Asylum statistics United Kingdom 2003*. Issue 11/04. London: Home Office. Available at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/hosb1104.pdf> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>86</sup> Tina Heath, Richard Jeffries and James Purcell (August 2004) *Asylum statistics United Kingdom 2003*. Issue 11/04. London: Home Office. Available at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/hosb1104.pdf> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>87</sup> This percentage differs depending on whether one uses the figure of 3,865 of asylum grants at the initial decision stage (from table 4.2) or whether one uses the figure of 3,985, generated by adding the numbers given for female and male asylum grants at initial decision stage in table 5.4. (Tina Heath, Richard Jeffries and James Purcell (August 2004) *Asylum statistics United Kingdom 2003*. Issue 11/04. London: Home Office. Available at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/hosb1104.pdf> [accessed 30 November 2004]).

<sup>88</sup> Tina Heath, Richard Jeffries and James Purcell (August 2004) *Asylum statistics United Kingdom 2003*. Issue 11/04. London: Home Office. Available at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/hosb1104.pdf> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>89</sup> Tina Heath, Richard Jeffries and James Purcell (August 2004) *Asylum statistics United Kingdom 2003*. Issue 11/04. London: Home Office. Available at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/hosb1104.pdf> [accessed 30 November 2004].

## Numbers of women receiving NASS support

Figures from June 2003 show that 37% of those asylum applicants receiving subsistence only support from NASS were female. The same figures indicate that 30% of those asylum applicants supported through NASS accommodation were female.<sup>90</sup>

## Female asylum seekers detained

At the end of September 2004, 13% (140) of those asylum seekers in detention were female and a further 40 women who had *not* sought asylum at some point in the UK were also being detained under Immigration Act powers.<sup>91</sup> Of these female Immigration Act detainees (total 180), 15 were minors.

At the end of March 2004, 135 of those asylum seekers in detention were women. 50 of these were being held at Oakington, 25 at Tinsley House, 10 at Dungavel, and 40 at Yarlswood. 5 were being held at unspecified prison establishments.<sup>92</sup>

54% of all women immigration detainees (asylum and non-asylum) had been detained for less than 14 days. 16% had been detained for 15 to 29 days, 13% had been detained for one month to less than two months, 5% had been detained for two months to less than three months, 6% had been detained for three months to less than six months, 3% had been detained for six months to less than an year, and 3% had been detained for a year or more.<sup>93</sup>

55 of the women asylum detainees were from Africa, 40 were from Europe, 25 were from Asia, and 15 were from Jamaica.<sup>94</sup>

## Voluntary departures and removals of female asylum seekers

Published figures relating to removal and voluntary departures are broken down by nationality, but not by gender. Choices, a Refugee Action project providing advice to those wishing to return to their countries of origin, identified just under 20% of their clients from March 2003 to February 2004 as being female.

## Countries of origin

In 2003, the five countries whose female nationals made the greatest number of asylum applications as principal applicants (i.e. excluding women who were dependant on the claim of a male partner or relative)

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<sup>90</sup> Inter-Agency Partnership data.

<sup>91</sup> Home Office (2004) *Asylum statistics: 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter 2004 United Kingdom*. London: Home Office. Available at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/asylumq304.pdf> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>92</sup> Data supplied by the Home Office for S. Cutler and S. Ceneda (August 2004) *'They took me away': women's experiences of immigration detention in the UK*. London: Bail for Immigration Detainees and Asylum Aid. Available at [http://www.biduk.org/pdf/women/women\\_in\\_detention\\_in\\_word\\_%2002Sep04.doc](http://www.biduk.org/pdf/women/women_in_detention_in_word_%2002Sep04.doc) [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>93</sup> Data supplied by the Home Office for S. Cutler and S. Ceneda (August 2004) *'They took me away': women's experiences of immigration detention in the UK*. London: Bail for Immigration Detainees and Asylum Aid. Available at [http://www.biduk.org/pdf/women/women\\_in\\_detention\\_in\\_word\\_%2002Sep04.doc](http://www.biduk.org/pdf/women/women_in_detention_in_word_%2002Sep04.doc) [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>94</sup> Data supplied by the Home Office for S. Cutler and S. Ceneda (August 2004) *'They took me away': women's experiences of immigration detention in the UK*. London: Bail for Immigration Detainees and Asylum Aid. Available at [http://www.biduk.org/pdf/women/women\\_in\\_detention\\_in\\_word\\_%2002Sep04.doc](http://www.biduk.org/pdf/women/women_in_detention_in_word_%2002Sep04.doc) [accessed 30 November 2004].

were Somalia, Zimbabwe, China, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Pakistan. The top five nationalities of all principal applicants for asylum were Somalia, Iraq, China, Zimbabwe, and Iran.<sup>95</sup>

Countries with the highest number of principal female asylum applicants in the UK (2003)				
	Number of female applicants for each country	Percentage of total female applicants in the UK (n=15,320)*	Country total	Percentage of female applicants of total from country of origin*
1 Somalia	2,645	17.3	5,090	52.0
2 Zimbabwe	1,640	10.7	3,295	49.8
3 China	1,110	7.2	3,450	32.2
4 Democratic Republic Congo	800	5.2	1,540	51.9
5 Pakistan	610	4.0	1,915	31.9
6 Turkey	600	3.9	2,390	25.1
7 Eritrea	530	3.5	950	55.8
8 Iran	525	3.4	2,875	18.3
9 Vietnam	520	3.4	1,125	46.2
10 Uganda	415	2.7	705	58.9
11 Burundi	355	2.3	650	54.6
12 Angola	350	2.3	850	41.2
13 Ethiopia	340	2.2	640	53.1
14 Nigeria	315	2.1	1,010	31.2
15 Jamaica	300	2.0	965	31.1
16 Afghanistan	275	1.8	2,280	12.1
17 Iraq	255	1.7	4,015	6.4
Serbia and Montenegro	255	1.7	815	31.3
18 Cameroon	235	1.5	505	46.5
19 Sri Lanka	200	1.3	705	28.4
Other former USSR	200	1.3	625	32.0
20 Liberia	195	1.3	740	26.4
Other countries	2,650	17.3	n/a	n/a
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>15,320</b>		<b>49,405</b>	

(Adapted from RWRP [2003] using new Home Office figures for 2003).<sup>96</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Tina Heath, Richard Jeffries and James Purcell (August 2004) *Asylum statistics United Kingdom 2003*. Issue 11/04. London: Home Office. Available at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/hosb1104.pdf> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>96</sup> Sophia Ceneda, Refugee Women's Resource Project (February 2003) *Women asylum seekers in the UK – some facts and figures*. London: Asylum Aid. Available at

\*Percentages rounded up to first decimal point.

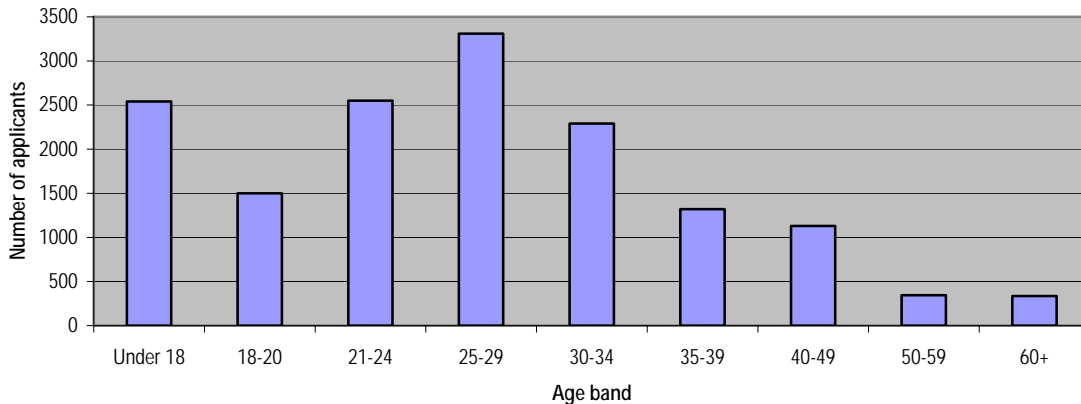
In looking at the table above, it is possible to observe that the proportion of women asylum seekers is higher for countries where civil unrest and war are widespread, whilst it is lower in countries where women's rights are repressed and where the primary focus of human rights violations is political and civil rights abuses.<sup>97</sup>

## Profile of female asylum seekers

### Age

Home Office figures show that in 2003, 79.6% (12,190) of female applicants in 2003 were less than 35 years old with the largest group being aged between 25 and 29 years old. However, the age profile of dependants was generally younger, with 51.1% (2,995) being aged under 10.<sup>98</sup>

Age of female principal asylum applicants in 2003



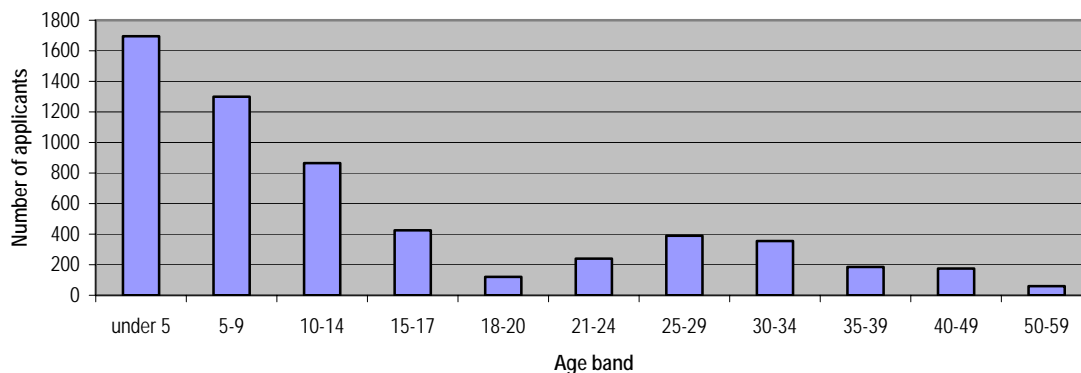
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<http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/Publications/RWRP%20Women%20asylum%20seekers%20Feb%202003.doc> [accessed 30 November 2004]; Tina Heath, Richard Jeffries and James Purcell (August 2004) *Asylum statistics United Kingdom 2003*. Issue 11/04. London: Home Office. Available at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/hosb1104.pdf> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>97</sup> Sophia Ceneda, Refugee Women's Resource Project (February 2003) *Women asylum seekers in the UK – some facts and figures*. London: Asylum Aid. Available at <http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/Publications/RWRP%20Women%20asylum%20seekers%20Feb%202003.doc> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>98</sup>Tina Heath, Richard Jeffries and James Purcell (August 2004) *Asylum statistics United Kingdom 2003*. Issue 11/04. London: Home Office. Available at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/hosb1104.pdf> [accessed 30 November 2004].

### Age of female dependants in 2003



## Marital status

A number of recent studies indicate that about half to two thirds of refugee and asylum-seeking women describe themselves as married.<sup>99</sup>

## Number of dependants

The Home Office does not release gender-disaggregated data on male and female asylum seekers with dependants. The figures on women with dependant children provided by other studies range from 37%<sup>100</sup> to 75%.<sup>101</sup> Both of these studies show that significant numbers of female asylum seekers had children living outside the UK (10% in the RWRP study and 37% in the Refugee Action study).

## Education

Levels of education among women asylum seekers and refugees vary depending on the country of origin and the educational facilities available, as well as the degree to which their education has been interrupted

<sup>99</sup> Sophia Ceneda, Refugee Women's Resource Project (February 2003) *Women asylum seekers in the UK – some facts and figures*. London: Asylum Aid Available at <http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/Publications/RWRP%20Women%20asylum%20seekers%20Feb%202003.doc> [accessed 30 November 2004]; Hildegard Dumper (December 2002) *Missed opportunities: A skills audit of refugee women in London from the teaching, nursing and medical professions*. London: The Mayor of London in association with Refugee Women's Association (RWA). Available at [http://www.london.gov.uk/approot/mayor/refugees/docs/skills\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.london.gov.uk/approot/mayor/refugees/docs/skills_rpt.pdf) [accessed 30 November 2004]; Hildegard Dumper (December 2002) *Is it safe here? Refugee women's experiences in the UK*. London: Refugee Action. Available at <http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/researchreport.pdf> [accessed 30 November 2004]; Maknun Ashami, Hildegard Dumper (November 2002) *Sudanese Community & Information Centre. Research report*. London: Sudanese Community & Information Centre.

<sup>100</sup> Sophia Ceneda, Refugee Women's Resource Project (February 2003) *Women asylum seekers in the UK – some facts and figures*. London: Asylum Aid Available at <http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/Publications/RWRP%20Women%20asylum%20seekers%20Feb%202003.doc> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>101</sup> Hildegard Dumper (December 2002) *Is it safe here? Refugee women's experiences in the UK*. London: Refugee Action. Available at <http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/researchreport.pdf> [accessed 30 November 2004].

by war and conflict. Small-scale studies suggest that over half of refugee and asylum-seeking women can be assumed to have received secondary education or above (52% according to a Refugee Action study<sup>102</sup>, 60% according to a RWRP study<sup>103</sup>).

## Occupation

More work needs to be done on making a comparative analysis of a range of reports on the occupational backgrounds of women refugees and asylum seekers before any firm conclusions can be drawn. A report for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)<sup>104</sup> found that 52% of the refugee and asylum-seeking women in the sample of 200 arrived in the UK with qualifications. 25% were identified as having been employed prior to coming to the UK, with 49% having been engaged in looking after the home and family. The Refugee Women's Association (RWA) skills audit<sup>105</sup> of women health and teaching professionals found that 68% were employed in their profession in their country of origin.

## English language

75% of women in the RWRP<sup>106</sup> sample were recorded as needing an interpreter by their caseworker. In the Refugee Action sample<sup>107</sup>, 85% said they needed an interpreter.

More information on refugee and asylum-seeking women's experiences could be obtained from the experiences of advice centres and support services around the country. However, these organisations have not always recognised the value of the information they hold nor had the resources to set up data systems that can readily capture this.

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<sup>102</sup> Hildegard Dumper (December 2002) *Is it safe here? Refugee women's experiences in the UK*. London: Refugee Action. Available at <http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/researchreport.pdf> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>103</sup> Sophia Ceneda, Refugee Women's Resource Project (February 2003) *Women asylum seekers in the UK – some facts and figures*. London: Asylum Aid Available at <http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/Publications/RWRP%20Women%20asylum%20seekers%20Feb%2003.doc> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>104</sup> A. Bloch (2002) *Refugees' opportunities and barriers in employment and training*. Department for Work and Pensions, Research Report No. 179. Available at <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrep179.asp> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>105</sup> Hildegard Dumper (December 2002) *Missed opportunities: A skills audit of refugee women in London from the teaching, nursing and medical professions*. London: The Mayor of London in association with Refugee Women's Association (RWA). Available at [http://www.london.gov.uk/approot/mayor/refugees/docs/skills\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.london.gov.uk/approot/mayor/refugees/docs/skills_rpt.pdf) [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>106</sup> Sophia Ceneda, Refugee Women's Resource Project (February 2003) *Women asylum seekers in the UK – some facts and figures*. London: Asylum Aid Available at <http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/Publications/RWRP%20Women%20asylum%20seekers%20Feb%2003.doc> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>107</sup> Hildegard Dumper (December 2002) *Is it safe here? Refugee women's experiences in the UK*. London: Refugee Action. Available at <http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/researchreport.pdf> [accessed 30 November 2004].

## Real lives

This section presents summaries of case studies from published research and interviews by the author. These studies seek to illustrate the different experiences of women refugees and asylum seekers in the UK.

### Flight and journey to the UK: Selima's story

Selima's family belonged to a minority ethnic group, which was being persecuted by a dominant tribe in Somalia's civil war. It is a conflict in which rape is routinely used as a form of terror.

'My father was taken away and murdered. I watched my auntie being raped in our home. My husband fled and he is now living in Ethiopia. I have two very young children. I lived in fear of being raped. My mum told me I had to escape because I was a young woman. She said it was better for her to die than for me.'

One day fierce fighting broke out in Selima's town and her people scattered.

'Everyone panicked and I was separated from my family. I fled to Kenya, where I spent three days with no water and nothing to eat. But the Kenyans were returning people to Somalia, so I went to Ethiopia, where I stayed with my uncle. He found the money to get me to the UK.'

(From Refugee Action 2002.<sup>108</sup>)

### Experience of NASS system: Antoinette's story

Antoinette is from Cameroon. After claiming asylum, she was given accommodation in a hostel in London. Because she was pregnant, a Refugee Council worker advised her to go to hospital. After leaving her bags at the hostel, she went to the hospital and ended up staying there for two weeks. Whilst there, her baby was delivered two months prematurely and had to stay in hospital a further month, whilst Antoinette was moved to another hostel.

'When the baby came out, it was hard. I did not have anything for the baby, no money, no clothes. One of the outreach staff gave me a kettle so that I could boil water for the baby. It was very difficult, as I had to leave the baby to queue for food. I was frightened it would choke. I often went without food. After three months I was dispersed to Redcar. We left the hostel at 8pm. And travelled in a coach overnight, arriving the next morning. The journey was terrible. We didn't get any food or water offered to us. Luckily I had some baby food with me. The baby was crying the whole time and I was in pain from my operation.

When we got to Redcar, I was taken to a very nice flat, but I was all on my own. No one came to see me. I became depressed and found it hard to go out shopping. Whenever I went out everyone stared at me. I was too scared to stay in the house and became worried about whether I was capable of looking after my baby. After four months I couldn't stand it any more and begged to be accommodated back in London.'

(Interview undertaken as part of Refugee Action research in 2002.<sup>109</sup>)

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<sup>108</sup> Hildegard Dumper (December 2002) *Is it safe here? Refugee women's experiences in the UK*. London: Refugee Action. Available at <http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/researchreport.pdf> [accessed 30 November 2004].

## Experience of trying to start again: Amina's story

Amina is 38 years old and arrived in UK in 1989. She is a qualified General Nurse (her Diploma in Nursing was obtained in Somalia) and worked in Somalia for seven years in a hospital. Her duties involved the administration of drugs, injections, immunisations, assisting with operations, general patient care, etc. She tried to register with UKCC a few years after she arrived when she felt confident about her ability to communicate in English. However the UKCC required many documents and references that she could not possibly provide. For example, they asked for a reference from the doctor with whom she used to work in Somalia and reference from the teacher who taught her on her nursing course. However, both these men had already fled Somalia to escape the war. She heard from a friend back in Somalia that they may be in the UK. She could not register with UKCC and instead attended a number of different courses to help her further improve her English and communication skills. However she has not been able to get back into her profession.

Amina has now enrolled at the University of London College of Nursing and started her degree in nursing in January 2003. She believes that starting all over again is the only way to practice nursing again.

(From Dumper, GLA/RWA report, 2002.<sup>110</sup>)

## The option to return: Maria's story

Maria came asking for help to return to her country of origin, Colombia, even though it would be very dangerous to do so. Due to her specific circumstances, she had been 'ping-ponged' between the Homeless Persons Unit (HPU) and Social Services when she presented as being homeless. Her previous landlord had been harassing her for money and to work for him as a cleaner. She felt intimidated by him. She was staying now with friends who wanted her to cook and clean for them. She was suffering from depression. She had visited the HPU and Social Services at least six times that week with referral letters passing her back and forth. Maria was eventually dispersed to Ipswich after Choices started calling the two agencies on her behalf. She was very happy to be housed anywhere, to be independent, and have a base from which she could begin rebuilding her life. She no longer requested return.

(From Choices, Refugee Action's voluntary return project, 2002.)

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<sup>109</sup> Hildegard Dumper (December 2002) *Is it safe here? Refugee women's experiences in the UK*. London: Refugee Action. Available at <http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/researchreport.pdf> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>110</sup> Hildegard Dumper (December 2002) *Missed opportunities: A skills audit of refugee women in London from the teaching, nursing and medical professions*. London: The Mayor of London in association with Refugee Women's Association (RWA). Available at [http://www.london.gov.uk/approot/mayor/refugees/docs/skills\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.london.gov.uk/approot/mayor/refugees/docs/skills_rpt.pdf) [accessed 30 November 2004]

## Resources

This section contains references for useful resources on refugee and asylum-seeking women in the UK. It aims to highlight publications that may not be readily available in mainstream libraries and bookshops. It also includes details of the more general references used in this guide. If you would like to suggest a resource to be included in the list, please contact [esme.peach@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:esme.peach@kcl.ac.uk).

All urls were accessed and correct at 30 November 2004.

Organisational websites are listed in the [Contacts and links](#) section.

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## Online resources

See also the [Publications](#) section for publications that also have online availability.

**All Party Parliamentary Group on Population, Development and Reproductive Health**  
Provides news from parliament relating to these issues and also has an online newsletter.  
<http://www.appg-popdevrh.org.uk/>

## Forced Migration Online

FMO produces online resources on international forced migration and its website features a section on gender.

<http://www.forcedmigration.org/browse/thematic/gender.htm>

#### **FORWARD**

Provides news of events and initiatives relating to African's women's health.

<http://www.forwarduk.org.uk/>

#### **Health for Asylum Seekers and Refugees Portal (HarpWeb) – Women Information**

Provides information on the specific health needs and concerns of female asylum seekers and refugees.

<http://www.harpweb.org/content.php?section=women>

#### **Human Rights Watch – Women's Rights**

Provides access to news, publications and an extensive collection of international legal standards.

<http://www.hrw.org/women/index.php>

#### **Refugee Women's Association**

Provides information about training, research and partnership projects undertaken by this organisation

<http://www.refugeewomen.org/rwa.htm>

#### **Refugee Women's Legal Group**

This website aims to provide those working with refugee women access information and support that might assist in the presentation of individual cases.

<http://www.rwlq.org.uk>

#### **Refugee Women's Resource Project**

Provides information about the training, casework and outreach work undertaken by this project, set up by Asylum Aid. Also allows access to research undertaken by them and to the full text of their monthly newsletter, *Women's Asylum News*.

[http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/New%20RWRP/RWRP\\_About\\_RWRP.htm](http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/New%20RWRP/RWRP_About_RWRP.htm)

#### **Sexuality, Gender and Islam web pages**

These new web pages developed by the Safra Project provide discussion of issues relating to sexuality, gender and Islam, based on secondary research conducted by the organisation. The pages provide information on studies undertaken by reformist and feminist Muslim scholars and a comprehensive bibliography and links section relating to these issues.

<http://www.safraproject.org/sgi-intro.htm>

#### **WomenWarPeace.org**

This is a portal on women, peace and security developed by UNIFEM, the United Nations Development Fund for Women. It has various useful sources of information, including country profiles, issue briefs and links to NGOs around the world.

<http://www.womenwarpeace.org>

#### **WomenWatch**

An inter-agency UN website, with information on the promotion of gender equality.

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch>

### **Women and cultural diversity: a digest of cases**

This digest is part of a research project undertaken at the LSE Gender Institute and supported by the Nuffield Foundation. It contains summaries of some of the key cases in which gender and culture have coincided in the British courts, mainly since the 1970s, but including some that date back to the nineteenth century. The research project considered to what extent cultural and/or ethnic diversity is recognised in public policy and legal judgements, and whether the kind of recognition currently given to cultural diversity helps or hinders the equal treatment of women. The work on the digest was carried out by Moira Dustin, Oonagh Reitman and Anne Phillips. Please contact Moira Dustin, email [moira.dustin@talk21.com](mailto:moira.dustin@talk21.com), for further information. The digest was partly inspired by the bibliography on 'crimes of honour' compiled by the Centre of Islamic and Middle Eastern Laws (CIMEL) at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London which can be accessed at <http://www.soas.ac.uk/honourcrimes>.  
<http://webdb.lse.ac.uk/gender>

## **Audio visual resources**

### **Film**

#### ***Another long road***

Country of production: UK  
Distributor: Refugee Action

This is a video made as part of the organisation's 'Standing up for women's safety' campaign and gives an insight into why women flee to the UK.

Refugee Action  
240a Clapham Road  
London  
SW9 OPZ  
Telephone 020 7735 5361  
Fax 020 7587 3676

<http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/women.asp>  
<http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/takeaction.asp>

#### ***Last Resort***

Director: Pawel Pawlikovsky  
Language: English  
Country of production: UK  
Year: 2000  
Running time: 73 minutes  
Certificate: 15

'A Russian woman, Tanya, arrives in England with her young son hoping to see the English fiancé she met in Moscow. When he fails to turn up at the airport, Tanya and Artiom are virtually imprisoned in an asylum camp in a deserted seaside resort. Tanya gradually develops a relationship with an amusement arcade manager (Paddy Considine) who helps them escape. Fortified by great performances from the three lead characters, this is an amusing and fresh look at life on the fringe of modern British society.'

[Description from <http://www.bfi.org.uk/collections/catalogues/newdvds/details.php?id=59>]

Title: **Mrika**

Director: Blerina Bujupi  
Language: English  
Country of production: UK  
Year: 2004

Running time: 30 minutes

Available for hire from: [b\\_bujupi@hotmail.com](mailto:b_bujupi@hotmail.com)

'Imagine fleeing from home, having seen friends and family killed in a war, to arrive in a strange, new country with the awesome task of beginning your life again as a refugee. This is what happened to a student from Kosovo, now living in Barrow, whose story is being told in a new 30-minute documentary. The film follows Mrika as she fulfils her dream of putting on a fashion show.'

[Description from [http://www.bbc.co.uk/cumbria/my\\_space/mrika/index.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/cumbria/my_space/mrika/index.shtml)]

Title: **Who am I?**

Director: Afrique and Sam Bakhurst  
Year: 2003  
Country of production: UK  
Distributor: [Living Archive](#), t: 01908 322 568

'Afrique is a group of five young African women aged between thirteen and sixteen who are pupils at the Sir Frank Markham Community School in Milton Keynes. This film was inspired by poems that were written by one of the girls in the group. It relates some of their childhood memories and experiences in moving, and sometimes amusing, scenes. *Who am I?* was made during weekly after school sessions in June and July 2003. It was created from their original ideas and was performed, filmed and edited by Afrique under guidance of professional film-maker, Sam Bakhurst.'

[Description from video]

See ICAR's [signpost on films](#) for more information on films about refugee women in other settlement contexts or countries of origin.

Available at <http://www.icar.org.uk/pdf/sign006.pdf>.

## Theatre

### *The Bogus Woman*

Written by Kay Adshead, produced by Mama Quillo and the Red Room

A play about a female African asylum seeker's experience of detention and the UK asylum system. The play was first shown at the Waterman's Art Centre in April 2000 and received its world premiere during the Edinburgh festival 2000. Its London premiere was at the Bush Theatre in February 2001.

Mama Quillo

Email [mamaquillo@riskassessor.com](mailto:mamaquillo@riskassessor.com)

The Red Room  
5a South End Road  
London  
NW3 2PT

Telephone 020 7435 5389

Email [lisagoldman@theredroom.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:lisagoldman@theredroom.fsnet.co.uk)

### *A Woman's Place*

Written and directed by Sarah Sansom and Louise Keyworth, Pillion Productions

Navigation guide to women refugees and asylum seekers

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*the* INFORMATION CENTRE *about* asylum *and* refugees IN THE UK

This is a community theatre production devised and performed by women from different ethnic backgrounds who have settled in Hackney as political refugees. The production premiered at Oh!Art (Oxford House) in July 2003.

Pillion Productions  
Unit 10  
244 Evering Road  
London  
E5 8AJ  
Telephone 020 8806 1428

## Photography

*Refugee women: a pictorial gallery*

UNHCR

A collection of photographs of refugee women all over the world. Available at <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/womengallery>.

## Projects and initiatives

This section aims to provide basic information relating to a number of current or recently completed projects and initiatives relating to women refugees and asylum seekers.

This list will be updated as other projects and initiatives are identified and ICAR would like to develop this into as comprehensive a list as possible. In the meantime, ICAR would suggest that those seeking a complete list of projects consult Refugee Council's CD-ROM of organisations working on asylum and refugee issues, Radar, which contains over 100 entries on women's groups and projects across the UK.

If you would like your project to feature in the list and ICAR's projects database, then please contact us at [esme.peach@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:esme.peach@kcl.ac.uk).

Please note that all these contacts are UK-based. If you are calling from outside the UK, please prefix the number with country code 44 and omit the 0 at the beginning of the number.

## Research

### Directory on services for refugee and asylum-seeking women in Liverpool

Refugee Action

Refugee Action is researching a directory on services for refugee and asylum-seeking women in the Liverpool area to help them access everyday and specialist services. The directory will cover healthcare, female support groups, education, childcare services, and specialist support services for women only for issues such as domestic violence and refuge services.

Refugee Action

34 Princes Road

Liverpool

L8 1TH

Telephone 0151 702 6308

Fax 0151 709 6684

<http://www.refugee-action.org.uk>

### Experiences of Somali women refugees in London and Toronto

Gail Hopkins, University of Sussex

PhD research looking at the experiences of Somali women refugees in London and Toronto with a focus on issues of settlement and adaptation. The methodology comprises of oral histories, semi-structured interviews with Somali women and discussions with community organisations. The research aims to provide an inside account of what it is like to be a Somali women displaced in these cities, and provide insights into Somali women refugees' relationships with the state, the local Somali community, other migrant groups, the indigenous population and overseas Somalis.

Gail Hopkins

University of Sussex

Falmer

Brighton

East Sussex

BN1 9SJ

Email [G.Hopkins@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:G.Hopkins@sussex.ac.uk)

**Female asylum seekers and refugees in West Yorkshire: opportunities, constraints and the role of agency**

Lisa Hunt, University of Leeds

This DPhil research is about the experiences of female asylum seekers and refugees in the host society, focusing in particular on how far they act, either individually or collectively in order to secure basic rights and services. It will look at women's 'agency' in relation to the welfare of their own, their children's and their group or communities lives as refugees and asylum seekers. The research focuses on West Yorkshire, one of the 'dispersal' areas and the fieldwork involves coming out up to 40 interviews over a 6-month period. Up to 20 interviews will be carried out with members of organisations that represent asylum seekers, and the other 20 will be carried out with female asylum seekers. The women's sample will be divided between those who have been in the UK for 0-6 months, and those who have been here longer, for example 1-2 years.

Email [lisahunt85@hotmail.com](mailto:lisahunt85@hotmail.com)

**Gender based persecution and experiences of refugee women**

Joseph Nibizi, University of East London

This MA research looks into the experiences of refugee women and gender bias in international refugee law. Research also includes investigation of collective measures.

Email [josephnibizi@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:josephnibizi@yahoo.co.uk)

**Gender, policy and asylum adjudication: assessment of gender guidelines**

Tanya Keusen, University of Essex

This research is being undertaken as part of an MA in the Theory and Practice of Human Rights.

Email [tkeuse@essex.ac.uk](mailto:tkeuse@essex.ac.uk)

**Invisibility of women asylum seekers in UK**

Gail Williams, Oxford Brookes University

This research is being undertaken as part of an MSc in Development Practice.

Email [haydnandgail@hotmail.com](mailto:haydnandgail@hotmail.com)

**Refugee mothers and social networks and support**

Anna Gaudion

This MA research project includes interviewing refugee women in West Peckham about prenatal, perinatal, and postnatal pregnancy, as well as women's healthcare issues.

Email [annagaudion@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:annagaudion@yahoo.co.uk)

**Refugee women: the reception and integration regimes in Europe**

Professors Danièle Joly, Giovanna Campani, Luigia Sommo and Nathalie Schlenzka

Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations, University of Warwick; Department for Education, University of Florence, Italy; The Berlin Institute of Comparative Social Research, Germany

This ongoing research project aims to describe European reception and integration regimes in relation to their reference to women, to analyse women's integration needs and to evaluate the procedures in place for meeting these needs.

Email [crer@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:crer@warwick.ac.uk) or [campani@unifi.it](mailto:campani@unifi.it)

[http://www.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/CRER\\_RC/research/RefWom.html](http://www.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/CRER_RC/research/RefWom.html)

### **Refugee women and women in situations of armed conflict**

Asha Dhillon, University of Warwick  
Masters degree research.

Email [ashadhil@hotmail.com](mailto:ashadhil@hotmail.com)

### **Researching the needs, presenting and representing women in the community: training for African women and National Network for African Women**

Africa Educational Trust

The training aims to enable African women involved in community or refugee organisations across the UK to conduct action research into the needs of the women in their community. It will train them to articulate and present their findings and use them to advocate on behalf of African and refugee women at the community, local, regional and national level. 30 African women will be trained to conduct community based action research on education, training and employment needs of the women in their communities; prepare written and oral reports, and conduct workshops and presentations to effectively present these needs to a range of individuals and organisations; and to use their research results, reports and presentations to advocate at community, local, regional and national level for changes to education, training and employment practices and services so that they more accurately reflect and meet the needs of women in their communities. A national network of and networking procedures amongst African refugee women workers will also be established to share best practice and the success of their peers.

38 King Street

London

WC2E 8JR

Telephone 020 7836 5075, 020 7836 7940

Fax 020 7379 0090

Email May Omona at [m.omon@afrikaeducationaltrust.org](mailto:m.omon@afrikaeducationaltrust.org) and [info@AfricaEd.org](mailto:info@AfricaEd.org)

<http://www.africaEd.org>

### **The well-being of Kurdish women experiencing the clash of cultures**

Choman Hardi, University of Kent

Through in depth interviews with Kurdish women, this PhD research aims to identify some of the problems they face and the opportunities they have, as a result of immigrating to Britain. The targeted group are between 16 to 70 years of age. The participants include women who have settled in London for a long time as well as asylum seekers who live in Hull. The issues that are explored are: culture and identity; mother-daughter relationships/ intergenerational conflict; freedom and traditions; support network; marriage and divorce; and generally how immigration has changed the lives of these women socially, practically, physically and psychologically.

Email [choman@choman.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:choman@choman.fsnet.co.uk)

### **Women refugees - from volunteers to employees**

Working Lives Research Institute and Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit, at London Metropolitan University

This research project seeks to examine refugee women's paid and unpaid work in the voluntary sector and the role of volunteering as a pathway into employment. The research set out to hear about the experience of refugee women as volunteers; identify the barriers faced by refugee women in making the transition from voluntary to paid work and the resources used to overcome them; recommend good practice to voluntary sector organisations working with refugee women as volunteers: or recommend good practice for voluntary sector organisations in the recruitment of refugee women into paid employment and for the inclusion of refugee women's concerns into good equal opportunities practice. The final report will be released in December 2004 and findings will be presented at a workshop open to refugee community organisations, women's organisations, policy makers and funders, advisers, volunteers, academics and those in the voluntary sector concerned with volunteer and employee recruitment.

Working Lives Research Institute  
London Metropolitan University  
Stapleton House  
277-281 Holloway Road  
London  
N7 8HN

Telephone 0207 133 3148

Email Umut Erel at [u.ere@londonmet.ac.uk](mailto:u.ere@londonmet.ac.uk) or Frances Tomlinson at [f.tomlinson@londonmet.ac.uk](mailto:f.tomlinson@londonmet.ac.uk)

<http://www.workinglives.org/volunteers.html>

## Service provision

### **African Refugee Women's Access to Education and Training Project**

Africa Educational Trust

This project enables the Africa Educational Trust to provide free educational and vocational training advice for unemployed African women refugees and asylum seekers. The project provides advice on how the new legislation on the Immigration and Asylum Act affects refugees and asylum seekers in the UK, particularly changes in education and training entitlements. The project has also established a computer information database with details of courses and programmes in the London area that offer special incentives for women.

<http://www.aet.refugeewomen.care4free.net/>

### **Black Women's Health and Family Support (BWHAFS)**

BWHAFS works with black and ethnic minority women in the UK, particularly with members of the Somali community. Their main activities include health, education, training, youth and children's programmes. In the UK, the organisation has a number of activities related to female circumcision and other health related issues. It has also set up a female genital mutilation (FGM) clinic in Somalia.

For further information contact:

Ahmed Dirir, Operations Manager

82 Russia Lane

London

E2 9LU

Telephone 020 8980 3503

Fax 020 8980 6314

Email [bwhafs@btconnect.com](mailto:bwhafs@btconnect.com)

<http://www.bwhafs.co.uk/HTML/bwhafs.html>

### **Capacity building programme for refugee women's organisations**

Refugee Women's Association

This programme runs training courses on issues such as management, fundraising and recruitment as well as offering a one-on-one advice service and providing an information dissemination service for refugee women's organisations.

Print House

18 Ashwin Street

London E8 3DL

Telephone 020 7923 2412

Fax 020 7923 3929

Email [info@refugeewomen.org](mailto:info@refugeewomen.org)

<http://www.refugeewomen.org/rwa.htm>

### **Islington Turkish and Kurdish Women's Welfare Project**

This project offers advice and support on a number of welfare issues and runs training and skills development courses.

Durham Road Community Rooms

Islington

London

N7

Telephone 020 7272 1195

Email [groupgul@hotmail.com](mailto:groupgul@hotmail.com)

### **La Visita**

Latin American Women's Rights Services (LAWRS)

This is a service provided by LAWRS that offers outreach advice and assistance to housebound Latin American women living in London.

52-54 Featherstone Street

London

EC1Y 8RT

Telephone 020 7336 0888

Email [lawrs@lawrs.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:lawrs@lawrs.fsnet.co.uk)

### **MAMA project**

Mental Health Foundation

This project works with East African and Somali women and children who are survivors of civil wars and now living in Sheffield. The programme comprised of different types of training that the women decided they needed to restore their self-esteem and confidence. The children's programme included study support, Somali language classes, arts, drama and swimming. Mental health support was integrated into ordinary activities and the project also provides advocacy to women dealing with statutory services. A story telling group has been set up in a local school. Somali women met to tell traditional tales and these stories were written in Somali and English by a professional writer and then told in school assemblies. The stories have now been published in a book.

<http://www.mhf.org.uk/page.cfm?pagecode=PIBFPSSD#The%20projects>

#### **Refugee Council strategy for female asylum seekers and refugees**

The Refugee Council is developing a strategy to improve its services for female asylum seekers and refugees. It is intended that an external version of this will be available in spring 2005.

Elaheh Rambarzini  
Refugee Council  
240-250 Ferndale Road  
London  
SW9 8BB  
Email [Elaheh.Rambarzini@RefugeeCouncil.org.uk](mailto:Elaheh.Rambarzini@RefugeeCouncil.org.uk)

#### **Refugee Wellbeing Partnership Project**

Iranian Community Centre, IMECE (Turkish Speaking Women's Group), Yemeni Community Association, African Women's Welfare Group, Refugee Women's Association.

This project aims to create a network of integrated health and support services for refugee women to enable them to improve their mental health and general well being and to facilitate access to mainstream health and social care services. The partner organisations provide outreach and drop-in services; facilitate a network of user support groups; provide advice and support services in the areas of health and social care; provide culturally sensitive, accessible and appropriate face-to-face advice on mental health related issues; produce information leaflets on health provision with particular focus on mental health; and organise conferences and training programmes.

Feride Baycan  
Print House  
18 Ashwin Street  
London E8 3DL  
Telephone 020 7923 2412  
Fax 020 7923 3929  
Email [info@refugeewomen.org](mailto:info@refugeewomen.org)

<http://www.refugeewomen.org/partner/pshipm.htm>

#### **Refugee Women's Empowerment Project**

Refugee Women's Association

This is a capacity building project whose principal outcome is to secure jobs for refugees, including setting up a community business which can provide sustainable employment for 24 refugee women. The capacity building includes training on health and social care, outreach work, business set up, ESOL and job search. The work of the project links in with other urban initiative projects, the City and East London Health Action Zones, government initiatives on healthy living centres and the recognition of health, and local authorities' services for refugees. The project is jointly funded by the European Regional Development Fund and the Focus Central London TEC.

Print House  
18 Ashwin Street  
London E8 3DL

Telephone 020 7923 2412

Fax 020 7923 3929

Email [info@refugeewomen.org](mailto:info@refugeewomen.org)

<http://www.refugeewomen.org/rwa.htm>

### **Refugee Women's Resource Project**

Asylum Aid

This project provides training, casework and outreach work to female asylum seekers and refugees, as well as conducting research into issues affecting refugee women in the UK and their countries of origin. The project also publishes a monthly newsletter, *Women's Asylum News*.

Asylum Aid

28 Commercial Street

London

E1 6LS

Telephone 020 7377 5123

Fax 020 7247 7789

Email [deboras@asylumaid.org.uk](mailto:deboras@asylumaid.org.uk)

[http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/New%20RWRP/RWRP\\_About\\_RWRP.htm](http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/New%20RWRP/RWRP_About_RWRP.htm)

### **Safra Project**

The Safra Project is a resource project on issues relating to lesbian, bisexual and transgender women who identify as Muslim culturally and/or religiously, including refugee women. Their website contains useful links for Muslim LBT women and service providers, including information on issues around gender, sexuality and Islam. The Safra Project also published a *Report of Initial Findings* identifying the difficulties experienced by Muslim LBT women in accessing social and legal services. The report covers issues such as mental health, domestic violence, housing and forced marriage and includes a chapter on asylum (chapter 8). The report is available on the website.

P.O. Box 35929

London

N17 OWB

Email [info@safraproject.org](mailto:info@safraproject.org)

<http://www.safraproject.org>

### **Scottish Refugee Council Women's Group**

This group meets on Mondays at the Quaker Meeting House, 38 Elmbank Crescent. The group aims to provide practical and emotional support to refugee women. It encourages women to come to terms with past experiences, to make sense of their present situations and to build for the future. Issues raised by the Women's Group were fed into a planning conference for Amnesty International in a campaigning consultation.

5 Cadogan Square (170 Blythwood Court)

Cadogan Street

Glasgow

G2 7PH

Telephone 0141 248 9799

Fax 0141 243 2499

### **Somali Community Health Project**

This project was established in response to health needs identified by the community and by health workers who recognised that the health services in Sheffield were not accessible or appropriate for Somalis in the city. Its work is based on a community development approach to improving health and reducing health inequalities. Its activities include health workshops and courses for women and children, a mother and toddler group, a men's health day, arranging recreation and health activities, a health and social support Sunday group and counselling courses and a targeted health information campaign. The project aims to improve the health and well-being of Somalis through enabling them to participate in the identification of their health and social needs, to influence the planning of health and social services, to work directly with service providers to make services appropriate and responsive to needs of the communities.

Ivy Lodge Clinic  
Rutland Road  
Sheffield  
S3 3QH  
Telephone 0114 271 6971  
Fax 0114 271 6973

### **Women's Integration and advice project**

Refugee Action

This integration and advice project for refugee women in the East Midlands is funded by the Big Lottery Fund, Lloyds TSB, and Accenture and will run female-only drop-in centres in Leicester and Nottingham, offering confidential advice to over 400 asylum seekers and refugees each year. The centres will be managed by a women's project officer and staffed by 18 volunteers, and will offer advice on a range of issues from education and employment to finding a GP. There will be a crèche and interpreters at both centres. Refugee Action will also offer training to other agencies, such as health professionals, midwives and education providers, as well as voluntary organisations such as Rape Crisis, so that refugee women find it easier to use their services.

Head Office  
The Old Fire Station  
150 Waterloo Road  
London  
SE1 8SB  
Telephone 020 7654 0673 for Susie Renshaw, Press Officer, or 0161 233 1956 for Julia Ravenscroft, Press Officer

<http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/contentsup/Press/5hcj4v55jojwkquntzblvsuv1013200421828.doc>  
<http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/women.asp>

### **Yemeni Women's Project**

Yemeni Refugee Organisation

Some of the main aims of the project include unifying the refugee family and increasing cultural activities amongst the refugee population in order to ease the way for integration with the wider community. The project offers training and educational and social care projects including sewing, English as a second language, IT skills, and leisure, recreation and cultural activities. The project also provides childcare facilities (toys, games, tables and chairs, stereo, refreshments).

*the* INFORMATION CENTRE *about* asylum *and* refugees IN THE UK

Faiza Shaibi or Margaret Gibson  
17 Burngreave Road  
Sheffield  
South Yorkshire  
S3 9DA  
Telephone 0114 2797993  
Email [m.gibson@yemenirefugee.org](mailto:m.gibson@yemenirefugee.org)

[http://www.yemenirefugee.org/women\\_proj.htm](http://www.yemenirefugee.org/women_proj.htm)

## Contacts and links

The following organisations have been identified for the specialist work they are doing on refugee women's issues. In addition, they can provide signposting to other relevant organisations.

This list will be updated as other useful links and contacts are identified and ICAR would like to develop this into as comprehensive a list of organisations as possible. In the meantime, ICAR would suggest that those seeking a complete list of organisations consult Refugee Council's CD-ROM of organisations working on asylum and refugee issues, Radar, which contains over 100 entries on women's groups and projects across the UK.

If you would like to add details of your organisation to these pages then please email [esme.peach@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:esme.peach@kcl.ac.uk).

Links to publications are incorporated in the [Resources](#) section.

### UK

#### **Action for Refugee Women (AFRW)**

This is a network made up of refugee women as users and providers of services as well as non-refugee women who provide services to refugee women. Its aims include the monitoring and lobbying for changes in government policies and services.

C/o Refugee Action  
240a Clapham Road  
London  
SW9 OPZ  
Telephone 020 7735 5361  
Fax 020 7587 3676

#### **All Party Parliamentary Group on Population, Development and Reproductive Health**

This is a group of MPs and peers who meet to debate and raise awareness around these issues. The group aims to encourage initiatives to increase access to, and improve reproductive and sexual health programmes worldwide. Meetings are held regularly and information is disseminated through a newsletter.

Room 563  
Portcullis House  
London  
SW1A 2LW  
Telephone 020 7219 2492  
Fax 020 7219 2641  
Email [kjaerbym@parliament.uk](mailto:kjaerbym@parliament.uk)

<http://www.appg-popdevrh.org.uk/>

### **Arab Women's Group**

The group conducts a number of social and community projects. These include information and advice services for refugees and asylum seekers, a mobile roadshow, training courses such as IT and ESOL, skills workshops, social gatherings for women, a supplementary school for children and production of a newsletter entitled *Arab Women's Voice*.

123 King's Street  
London W6 9JG  
Telephone 020 8563 0850  
Email [awg@fsmail.net](mailto:awg@fsmail.net)

### **Cardiff Refugee Women's Group**

This group runs a monthly programme of activities developed in response to the expressed needs of participating women. Activities may include social drop ins, day trips, and talks and presentations by other organisations.

Tracey Sherlock  
Displaced People in Action  
CSV House  
Williams Way  
Cardiff  
CF10 5DY  
Telephone 0292 041 5743  
Email [traceypia\\_uk@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:traceypia_uk@yahoo.co.uk)

### **Congolese Refugee Women's Association**

This organisation provides advice and support for women refugees from the Congolese region.

728 Romford Road  
Newham  
London  
E12 6BT  
Telephone 020 8478 2839  
Fax 020 8478 2839  
Email [crwa65@hotmail.com](mailto:crwa65@hotmail.com)

### **Exiled Writers Ink!**

This group of exiled writers aim to facilitate the wider dissemination of work by writers in exile and raise awareness of literature by writers in exile by organising events. It also aims to facilitate the publication of work by writers in exile. The group includes a number of refugee women, and many of the writers involved contributed to the publication *Crossing the border: voices of refugee and exiled women writers* edited by Jennifer Langer.

31 Hallswelle Road  
London  
NW11 0DH  
Telephone 020 8458 1910  
Email [jennifer@exiledwriters.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:jennifer@exiledwriters.fsnet.co.uk)

<http://www.exiledwriters.co.uk/writers.shtml>

**Granby Somali Women's Group**

This group organises activities and training for women.

12 Beaconsfield Street  
Liverpool  
L8 2UU  
Telephone 0151 726 0267  
Fax 0151 726 0267

**Health for Asylum Seekers and Refugees Portal (HarpWeb)**

This portal on the health needs of asylum seekers and refugees includes a section on the health needs of women and girls.

<http://www.harpweb.org/content.php?section=women>

**Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Department**

The immigration and asylum unit of the Home Office's Research, Development and Statistics department produces statistical information on female asylum seekers and refugees.

Room 1308  
Apollo House  
36 Wellesley Road  
Croydon  
CR9 3RR

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html>

**IMECE (Turkish Speaking Women's Group)**

This group provides advice and support and organises seminars, workshops and social events. It also runs a support group for mothers.

2 Newington Green Road  
Islington  
London  
N1 4RX  
Telephone 020 7354 1359  
Fax 020 7226 7599  
Email [imece@dial.pipex.com](mailto:imece@dial.pipex.com)

**Islington Turkish and Kurdish Women's Welfare Project**

This project offers advice and support on a number of welfare issues and runs training and skills development courses.

Durham Road Community Rooms  
Islington  
London  
N7  
Telephone 020 7272 1195  
Email [groupgul@hotmail.com](mailto:groupgul@hotmail.com)

**Kurdish Refugee Women's Organisation**

This organisation provides advice and information on immigration and asylum issues and organises cultural and social events.

Caxton House  
Islington  
London  
N19 3RQ  
Telephone 020 7272 9499/4450  
Fax 020 7281 9466  
Email [kiac@ikurd.com](mailto:kiac@ikurd.com)

**Latin American Women's Rights Services (LAWRS)**

Offers advice, help and counselling services to Latin American women.

Coordinator: Erika Rojas  
52-54 Featherstone Street  
London  
EC1Y 8RT  
Telephone 020 7336 0888  
Email [lawrs@lawrs.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:lawrs@lawrs.fsnet.co.uk)

**Latin American Women's Aid**

Helps Latin American women affected by domestic violence.

The Print House  
Hackney  
London  
Telephone 020 7275 0321 / 07958 536 242

**Maternity Alliance**

The Maternity Alliance works to improve rights and services for all pregnant women, new mothers and their families. They have done several studies on asylum and refugee related issues.

Third Floor West 2-6  
Northburgh Street  
London  
EC1V 0AY  
Office 020 7490 7639  
Information line 020 7490 7638  
Fax 020 7014 1350  
Email [info@maternityalliance.org.uk](mailto:info@maternityalliance.org.uk)

<http://www.maternityalliance.org.uk>

**Muslim women's group**

For information on this group please contact:

Emma Gray  
Northern Refugee Centre  
Carver House  
2 Carver Street  
Sheffield  
S1 4FS  
Telephone 0114 281 5719

**Refugee Action**

This national refugee agency has a specific area of work dedicated to female asylum seekers and refugees and facilitates the Action For Refugee Women Group. The organisation runs a campaign relating to the safety of refugee women in the UK and has conducted and commissioned research on refugee women in the UK.

Asther Hagos, Women's Development and Policy Specialist  
240a Clapham Road  
London  
SW9 OPZ  
Telephone 020 7735 5361  
Fax 020 7587 3676

<http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/women.asp>

<http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/takeaction.asp>

**Refugee Council**

This national refugee agency has a woman's worker and runs a women's group at its one stop service in Brixton. The organisation is also in the process of developing a gender strategy.

Head Office  
3 Bondway  
London SW8 1SJ  
Telephone 020 7820 3000  
Fax 020 7582 9929

One Stop Service  
240-250 Ferndale Road  
London SW9 8BB  
Telephone 020 7346 6700  
Fax 020 7346 6778

<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk>

### **Refugee Education and Training Advice Service (RETAS)**

This division of Education Action International works to facilitate access among asylum seekers and refugees in the EU to education, employment and training.

14 Dufferin Street  
London  
EC1Y 8PD  
General line 020 7426 5800  
Advice line 020 7426 5801 (Tue/Thu 14:30 - 17:00)  
Email [retas@education-action.org](mailto:retas@education-action.org)

[http://www.education-action.org/retas.asp\\_ai=advice.htm](http://www.education-action.org/retas.asp_ai=advice.htm)

### **Refugee Women's Action Group, Cardiff**

This is a group of women involved in challenging negative media, raising awareness of refugee issues in local communities, contributing to policy development (public and organisational) in areas which affect them and participating in European asylum policy development via the Refugee Council's SHARE project.

Vanessa Bucolli  
c/o Cardiff University  
Bute building  
King Edward VII Avenue  
Cardiff  
CF10 3NB  
Telephone 0292 087 4681  
Email [bucolliv@cf.ac.uk](mailto:bucolliv@cf.ac.uk)

### **Refugee Women's Association**

RWA provides advice and guidance on employment and training for refugee women and organises a range of training projects, including English language, childcare and mentoring. It also provides capacity building support and training to refugee women's groups around the UK and has launched a new small grants programme to assist refugee women who are unable to meet their educational expenses. RWA also produces a bimonthly publication entitled *Refugee Women's News* and its internet site hosts a discussion forum. The organisation has also been responsible for conducting and commissioning research on issues relating to refugee women in the UK.

Print House  
18 Ashwin Street  
London E8 3DL  
Telephone 020 7923 2412  
Fax 020 7923 3929  
Email [info@refugeewomen.org](mailto:info@refugeewomen.org)

<http://www.refugeewomen.org/rwa.htm>

### **Refugee Women's Legal Group**

RWLG is a group of individuals and organisations concerned about the impact of changes in immigration law on women seeking asylum in the UK. Central among its aims is the development of a gendered perspective on refugee law and policy. It has produced gender guidelines on the determination of asylum claims and its website aims to provide those working with refugee women with access to information and support that might assist in the presentation of individual cases. It no longer meets regularly, but has set up an email discussion network.

Lindsey House  
40-42 Charterhouse Street  
London  
EC1M 6JN  
Fax 020 7251 8384  
Email [info@rwlg.org](mailto:info@rwlg.org)

<http://www.rwlg.org.uk>

### **Refugee Women's Resource Project**

This project provides training, casework and outreach work to female asylum seekers and refugees, as well as conducting research and publishing a monthly newsletter, *Women's Asylum News*. RWRP also conducts gender awareness training for immigration law practitioners and other service providers as well as capacity building work with refugee women's organisations. The RWRP website includes useful links sections on domestic violence, HIV/AIDS and health, and women's human rights.

Asylum Aid  
28 Commercial Street  
London  
E1 6LS  
Telephone 020 7377 5123  
Fax 020 7247 7789  
Email [deboras@asylumaid.org.uk](mailto:deboras@asylumaid.org.uk)

<http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/RWRP/RWRP.htm>

### **Safra Project**

The Safra Project is a resource project on issues relating to lesbian, bisexual and transgender women who identify as Muslim culturally and/or religiously, including refugee women. Their website contains useful links for Muslim LBT women and service providers, including information on issues around gender, sexuality and Islam. The Safra Project also published a *Report of Initial Findings* identifying the difficulties experienced by Muslim LBT women in accessing social and legal services. The report covers issues such as mental health, domestic violence, housing and forced marriage and includes a chapter on asylum (chapter 8). The report is available on the website.

P.O. Box 35929  
London  
N17 0WB  
Email [info@safraproject.org](mailto:info@safraproject.org)

<http://www.safraproject.org>

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5 Cadogan Square (170 Blythswood Court)  
Cadogan Street  
Glasgow  
G2 7PH  
Telephone 0141 248 9799  
Fax 0141 243 2499

### **Sierra Leone Women's Forum UK**

This is a charity committed to improving the lives of Sierra Leonean women in the UK and in Sierra Leone. The organisation provides advice and information on immigration and welfare issues for refugees and asylum seekers; develops community based projects and coordinates seminars and conferences; studies and analyses the needs of vulnerable target groups within the Sierra Leonean community in the UK through research; coordinates social events and fundraising activities to support food and used clothing projects for beneficiaries in Sierra Leone; and facilitates of networks and partnerships within and outside the Sierra Leone community to raise awareness of issues around gender and development.

Email [info@slwf.org.uk](mailto:info@slwf.org.uk)

<http://www.slwf.org.uk>

### **Sudanese Women's Association**

This association provides services and support to Sudanese women and children living in Greater London to improve their quality of life. It organises training workshops, courses and seminars for adults as well as classes and homework support for children; provides crèche facilities; promotes Sudanese culture and produces a quarterly newsletter.

Abbey Community Centre  
222C Belsize Road  
London  
NW6 4DJ  
Telephone 020 7372 0944  
Fax 020 7372 8348

<http://www.refugeesonline.org.uk/swa>

### **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)**

Women form a significant focus of UNHCR's policy and outreach work. UNHCR produces reports and policy and good practice guidelines, as well as statistical data, research reports and other news and information on issues relating to refugee women around the world. See 'International' section for Geneva contact.

The Office of the Representative for the United Kingdom

21st Floor

Millbank Tower

Millbank

London

SW1P 4QP

Telephone 020 7828 9191

Fax 020 7630 5349

Email [info@unhcr.org.uk](mailto:info@unhcr.org.uk)

<http://unhcr.org.uk>

### **Women Managers' Support Group**

The Evelyn Oldfield Unit facilitates this group that explores the issues faced by women managers working in refugee community organisations. The group aims to research, document and place the experience of women managers at the centre of management development concerns and maintains a network of women managers to share resources, skills, experiences and promote professional and organisational growth.

Evelyn Oldfield Unit

London Voluntary Sector Resource Centre

356 Holloway Road

London

N7 6PA

Telephone 0207 700 0100

Fax 0207 700 8136

Email [administrator@evelynoldfield.co.uk](mailto:administrator@evelynoldfield.co.uk)

<http://www.evelynoldfield.co.uk>

## **Europe**

### **European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)**

This umbrella organisation represents agencies throughout Europe working with asylum seekers and refugees.

Clifton Centre, Unit 22

110 Clifton Street

London

EC2A 4HT

Telephone 020 7729 5152

Fax 020 7729 5141

Email [cmassey@ecre.org](mailto:cmassey@ecre.org)

<http://www.ecre.org>

### **European Women Lawyers' Association**

This professional association works to foster cooperation among female lawyers from EU member states and to monitor law and politics from the angle of gender. They have a working group on asylum and immigration law.

4, Drève des Renards, bos 16  
B-1180 Bruxelles  
Belgium  
Telephone + 32 2 373 0910  
Fax + 322 375 4525  
Email [info@ewla.org](mailto:info@ewla.org)

<http://www.ewla.org>

### **European campaign on women asylum seekers**

This campaign, which ended in 2001, aimed to highlight gender-based persecution as a legitimate cause for the granting of asylum to women in all of the EU member states. Detailed information about the issue and the campaign is maintained on their website.

<http://www.womenlobby.org/asylumcampaign>

## **International**

### **Amnesty International**

Amnesty campaigns on women's human rights issues around the world as well as refugee rights in the UK. It produces many materials on gender and women issues, in addition to detailed information on the countries from which women flee to the UK.

99 - 119 Rosebery Avenue  
London  
EC1R 4RE  
Telephone 020 7814 6200  
Email [info@amnesty.org.uk](mailto:info@amnesty.org.uk)

<http://www.amnesty.org.uk/index.shtml>

### **Anti-Slavery International**

Anti-Slavery campaigns for an end to slavery by lobbying governments, working with local organisations, educating the public and conducting research. Their work on women's issues includes a campaign to stop trafficking and work on domestic enslavement.

Thomas Clarkson House  
The Stableyard  
Broomgrove Road  
London, SW9 9TL

<http://www.antislavery.org>

### **Forced Migration Online**

FMO produces online resources on international forced migration and its website features a research guide on gender.

Queen Elizabeth House  
Oxford University  
21 St Giles  
Oxford OX1 3LA  
Email [fmo@geh.ox.ac.uk](mailto:fmo@geh.ox.ac.uk)

<http://www.forcedmigration.org/browse/thematic/gender.htm>

### **Human Rights Watch**

This human rights organisation reports on country of origin situations and the abuse of women's rights worldwide. Its website contains a section dedicated to resources on women's rights.

2nd Floor  
2-12 Pentonville Road  
London N1 9HF  
Telephone 020 7713 1995  
Fax 020 7713 1800  
Email [hrwuk@hrw.org](mailto:hrwuk@hrw.org)

<http://www.hrw.org/women/index.php>

### **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)**

Women form a significant focus of UNHCR's policy and outreach work. UNHCR produces reports and policy and good practice guidelines, as well as statistical data, research reports and other news and information on issues relating to refugee women around the world.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
Case Postale 2500  
CH-1211 Genève 2 Dépôt  
Switzerland  
Telephone +41 22 739 8111 (automatic switchboard)

<http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home?page=PROTECT&id=3b83a48d4&ID=3b83a48d4&PUBLISHER=TWO>

### **WomenWatch**

This is an inter-agency UN website, with information on the promotion of gender equality.

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch>