

Survey of Refugee and Asylum Seeker Skills and Aspirations in Oxford

Refugee Resource

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Abbreviations

EOA	East Oxford Action
ELR	Exceptional Leave to Remain
ILR	Indefinite Leave to Remain

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Contents

Summary	2
Recommendations	4
Introduction	6
Methodology	8
Findings	9
Conclusions	16
How Access First works to overcome the barriers	17
Barriers outside our remit	19
Reading	20
Appendix 1 - Tables	21
Appendix 2 - The Questionnaire	28

Summary

This survey has confirmed the findings of other studies conducted in the area of refugee employment and training¹. Refugees and asylum seekers bring a wealth of skills and experience to Britain and are keen to contribute to the economy, to be valued for their abilities and to be able to live independently². However, very many face difficulties finding work, and when they do work they are often in jobs beneath their capacity or working part time when they would prefer to work full time. At the same time there is a well documented skills shortage in the Oxford area, with many employers finding it difficult to recruit. With the right support, refugees and asylum seekers can benefit the local economy, the local community and themselves.

The scope of the survey

This report documents the results of a survey, funded by the government's Single Regeneration Budget through East Oxford Action/SEEDA, of the skills and aspirations of 95 refugees and asylum seekers in the Oxford area. The survey was undertaken as part of the Access First partnership project co-ordinated by Refugee Resource, which aims to facilitate access to employment, training and business opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers in Oxfordshire.

Background - The survey had two goals:

- as research to inform planning and policy (finding out more about the skills available in Oxford, what needs to be done to enable their use, and what is creating barriers);
- as a basis for intervention, so that individual refugees and asylum seekers can be supported in meeting their aspirations.

Methodology - We collected data between November 2001 and June 2002 in face to face interviews using a specifically designed questionnaire, and during advice interviews in the office.

Interviewees – The 95 were not a random sample, but were contacts of the refugee interviewers or were self-selected from the Community English School and as users of our services. We guaranteed confidentiality to all participants.

Makeup of respondents – Most respondents were from Afghanistan, Kosovo, Iran, Kenya, Chad, Algeria, Albania, Kurdistan/Turkey and Kurdistan/ Iraq. There were 12 women respondents and 83 men, reflecting the gender imbalance of asylum applicants nationally. 45 per cent were asylum seekers, 22 per cent had full refugee status (Indefinite Leave to Remain or ILR) and 21 per cent had Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR). Ages ranged from 18 to 48. 65 per cent were living or studying in East Oxford. Of these 23 per cent had ELR, 21 per cent had ILR and 50 per cent (31) were asylum seekers of whom 23 had permission to work. Overall 71 per cent of respondents were unemployed and seeking work, and almost all of those in work had jobs that did not match their skills.

Findings

Skills - Most respondents could offer skills at intermediate or advanced level, and many had considerable experience in areas in demand in the Oxford area, including the building trades, retail, catering, driving, accountancy, business skills, marketing, computer programming and

¹ Refugee Skills-Net, *The employment and training of skilled and qualified refugees*, Peabody Trust 1999
Demessew Shiferaw and Dr Hailu Hagos, *Refugees and progression routes to employment*, Refugee Council 2002

² Vaughan Robinson and Jeremy Segrott, *Understanding the decision-making of asylum seekers*, Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, 2002

teaching. There were also medical staff - one doctor and two nurses. Most of these interviewees had been to courses in general IT and could offer Microsoft Office skills, some at an intermediate or advanced level. There was also, obviously, a very high level of foreign language skills, and many offered interpreting or translation. With the 71 per cent unemployment rate this survey supported the conclusions of a 1995 Home Office study: *'The majority of asylum seekers come with substantial work and educational qualifications the bulk of which are under-utilised, to their chagrin and the country's general loss.'*³

Aspirations - Almost all were highly motivated, and very keen to contribute their skills and enthusiasm to the economy, to be valued for their abilities and to stop being dependent on handouts. Respondents were realistic about the time it takes to be able to move into skilled or high-level work and most were looking for unskilled or manual work in the short term. Respondents were equally realistic in their education/training goals, identifying the initial need for English language, often alongside basic IT training. Many were aiming for undergraduate or postgraduate level qualifications in the medium or long term.

Barriers - The main barrier to both work and study was English language. Lack of UK work experience, not having work references and not having permission to work were major barriers to work. Finding the right course and paying fees were the major obstacles to study. Amongst those coming to the office for advice and guidance the most common request was for help with finding appropriate jobs and completing application forms.

Confidence levels in the short, medium and long term varied greatly amongst individuals, and in general people felt the possibility of success increases over time.

Rachel Wiggans
Access First Project Co-ordinator, Refugee Resource
December 2002

³ Home Office, *The Settlement of Refugees in Britain*, 1995

Recommendations

Analysis of the findings of this survey lead us to propose the following recommendations:

	Responsibility
<i>Employment</i>	
1. Awareness raising amongst employers about <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the level of skills available to them if they can overcome certain existing conventions, e.g. the need for employers' references, • the need to recognise experience outside Britain, • the potential for relatively rapid progress of an asylum seeker or refugee once employed. 	Home Office in collaboration with employers
<i>Permission to work</i>	
2. Clearer documentation, and communication of this documentation, from the Home Office when someone has permission to work, so that employers are not so afraid of running foul of either immigration or race discrimination legislation.	Home Office
3. Increased access to work for asylum seekers by reversing the July 2002 decision denying them the right to seek permission to work, and granting automatic right to work after an agreed period – say six months from asylum application.	Home Office
<i>English language</i>	
4. Continued provision of broad community-based English language classes at different levels. The waiting lists for classes in Oxford of two years ago have declined, but demand should continue to be monitored. More part time advanced classes are required.	Oxfordshire County Council, Oxford College of Further Education
<i>Integration</i>	
5. Increased opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers to meet native English speakers before they find work. Specialist refugee services need to work closely with mainstream services and wherever possible provision should be integrated. Information about services for all, such as sports groups and clubs, should be more readily available to refugees and asylum seekers, including a directory of where to look, and information in languages other than English.	Service providers
<i>Study</i>	
6. Easier access for those with ELR to higher education, by waiving the current three-year residency requirement for funding.	Department for Education and Skills

	Responsibility
<i>Support and guidance</i>	
7. More information and one-to-one support and guidance for refugees and asylum seekers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to raise awareness of and access to available services to support entry into work and training opportunities • to build confidence and assist in making choices about employment and training opportunities. 	Service providers, (e.g. Jobcentre Plus, Refugee Resource)
8. More jobsearch skills and work preparation courses that are flexible to the wide range of needs of refugees and asylum seekers.	Service providers as above
9. Specifically targeted work experience schemes enabling refugees and asylum seekers to gain relevant UK work experience and overcome the barrier of lack of UK references.	Professional organisations and employers
10. More initiatives for underemployed refugees and asylum seekers who are often not eligible for services that could assist them as they are not unemployed.	Service providers
11. Increased childcare provision and access to information about availability.	Service providers
12. Realistic expectations about the time it takes to secure employment at an appropriate level and the pathways to employment.	Refugees and asylum seekers
<i>Coordination of services</i>	
13. Better coordination of information, advice and guidance in the area of employment and training both within and between statutory and voluntary sector agencies.	Service providers
14. Stronger links between employers, training providers and information, advice and guidance agencies.	Service providers
<i>Housing and welfare</i>	
15. Coherent provision for housing and other welfare benefit needs.	NASS/ Local authorities/ Jobcentre Plus

Introduction

In 2001-2002 the Access First partnership project co-ordinated by Refugee Resource was funded by the government's Single Regeneration Budget, through East Oxford Action, to survey (in the pre-boundary-change East Oxford wards of *St Clements* and *East*) refugee and asylum seeker skills and aspirations, their employment status, and the barriers to employment. This survey fell under East Oxford Action's remit to increase economic activity in the area. Additional funding was then secured to extend this to other areas of the city. This report documents the results of a survey of 95 refugees and asylum seekers in the Oxford area.

Background to Access First project

The Access First project was developed with the involvement of refugees and asylum seekers, along with partner organisations and other service providers in Oxfordshire. The project started in April 2001 and aims to facilitate access to employment, training and business opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers in Oxfordshire and to remove obstacles to work. The project builds links between refugees, advisory and training services, and employers in order to

- develop the skills and capacities of refugees to enhance their training and employment opportunities
- develop the capacity of employers and training providers to respond effectively to training and employment needs
- raise awareness of refugee issues.

As a result of the early findings from the survey, Access First developed a work preparation course, using funding from the European Social Fund. This provides training in work-related English (job applications, interviewing skills, reading and writing at work, etc.), working in Britain (health and safety, equal opportunities, contracts etc.) and offers an unpaid work placement which is designed to develop relevant skills and provide references. Access First also provides a self-access resource area about local job and training opportunities, and advice and guidance about work and training are available to individuals and the project.

Ethos

All Refugee Resource's work is driven by views and needs expressed by refugees and asylum seekers themselves. The project's advisory group, consisting entirely of refugees and asylum seekers, was integrally involved in the design and implementation of the survey, and decided that the survey needed to achieve two goals: first as research to inform planning and strategy (finding out more about the skills available in East Oxford, what needs to be done to enable their use, and what is creating barriers); second as a basis for intervention, so that individual refugees and asylum seekers can be supported in meeting their aspirations and contributing their skills and experience.

Who is a refugee, who is an asylum seeker?

When refugees first arrive in Britain they are not immediately granted refugee status under the 1951 *United Nations Convention related to the Status of Refugees*. They have to apply for asylum and, while waiting, are known as 'asylum seekers'. While their case is being considered, which the government has said should take less than six months, they are given 70 per cent of income support (at the time of the survey £37.70 per week for a single adult) to live on and are allocated basic accommodation.⁴ Since in practice asylum claims can take

⁴ Since August 2000 accommodation is provided only to asylum seekers who live in 'dispersal' areas, all of which are outside Oxfordshire. Employment considerations were not taken into account when the dispersal areas were decided, and asylum seekers who move to Oxfordshire, either for work opportunities or to be closer to relatives or friends, lose their right to accommodation.

three or more years, asylum seekers whose case had not been heard could, at the time of the survey, apply for permission to work (not always granted) after being in the country for six months. This right was withdrawn in July 2002.

Asylum decisions at a tribunal can result in

- full refugee status under the Convention - known in Britain as *indefinite leave to remain* (ILR). In these cases the British government acknowledges its international responsibility to protect individuals who are in danger of persecution in their home country. Those with ILR have full rights and are entitled to Jobseekers allowance until they find work.
- humanitarian refugee status - known as *exceptional leave to remain* (ELR). This status is granted when the asylum application does not fit the narrow definition of 'refugee' in the 1951 Convention, but does fall under human rights legislation, whereby the British government acknowledges that it is too dangerous for an individual to return to their home country for the time being. ELR is currently normally granted for four years. Those with ELR have full rights except that their spouse and children are not allowed to join them, and they have fewer rights to funding for education.
- refusal. The applicant is allowed to appeal, and remains an asylum seeker, but if they have not already received permission to work, it will not be granted after refusal.

Methodology

Data collection

We collected data between November 2001 and June 2002 in two different ways. In order to reach refugees and asylum seekers who might otherwise be excluded, either because of limited English language skills or for reasons of trust, we initially trained a group of eight multilingual people (originating from Afghanistan, Algeria, Congo (DR), Iran, Kenya, Kosovo, Romania and Zimbabwe) in interviewing skills for conducting the survey. They collected information from 44 refugees and asylum seekers through detailed face to face interviews in English (16), Pashto (8), Albanian (5), Arabic (4), Farsi (4), Romanian (3), Dari (2), Italian (1) and French (1). Many interviews took place at the interviewees' homes.

From November 2001, after Access First had secured funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) to run a work preparation course and offer advice and guidance sessions, information from 51 other refugees and asylum seekers was collected in the office as part of the advice and guidance interviews. The ESF funding covers the county of Oxfordshire, so some data comes from outside the East Oxford area.

The questionnaire

The survey questionnaire was based partly on questions from previous research in London⁵ and partly on issues raised by refugees and asylum seekers in a series of workshops about barriers to work and education that we co-ordinated in June 2001 independently of the survey. The questionnaire was designed to collect information about the skills and experience potentially available to the local labour market and to help Access First to provide relevant practical support to the people involved, if they wanted it. The office-based questionnaire is less detailed and asks only questions needed to support someone into work and training. However, where further background has been given by these interviewees we have included it in the analysis.

Interviewees

We made no attempt to find a random sample of refugees and asylum seekers. Our aim was to survey the level and range of untapped skills and frustrated aspirations which local refugees and asylum seekers had themselves expressed as a problem, and to identify where intervention might be useful.

The eight interviewers invited refugees and asylum seekers whom they knew to participate in the survey. The survey was also publicised through the Community English School, where some interviews took place, Asylum Welcome, Open Door and Oxford College of Further Education.

Those questioned at the office were a self-selecting group, coming for support into work or training. We assume that those who were more established in the UK, and in jobs or training acceptable to them, were less likely to participate in the survey.

Confidentiality

We guaranteed confidentiality to all participants, and made it clear that no-one had to answer any question they did not want to. For some people certain data is not known, either because they chose not to give it to us, or because at the time of the interview it was not appropriate to request it. Wherever breakdowns do not match the total it is because data for the breakdown was not provided by everyone.

⁵ Refugee Skills-Net, *The employment and training of skilled and qualified refugees*, Peabody Trust 1999

Findings

(NB - Some interviewees did not give certain information. Where percentages do not total 100 per cent, the missing percentage is for 'not known'.)

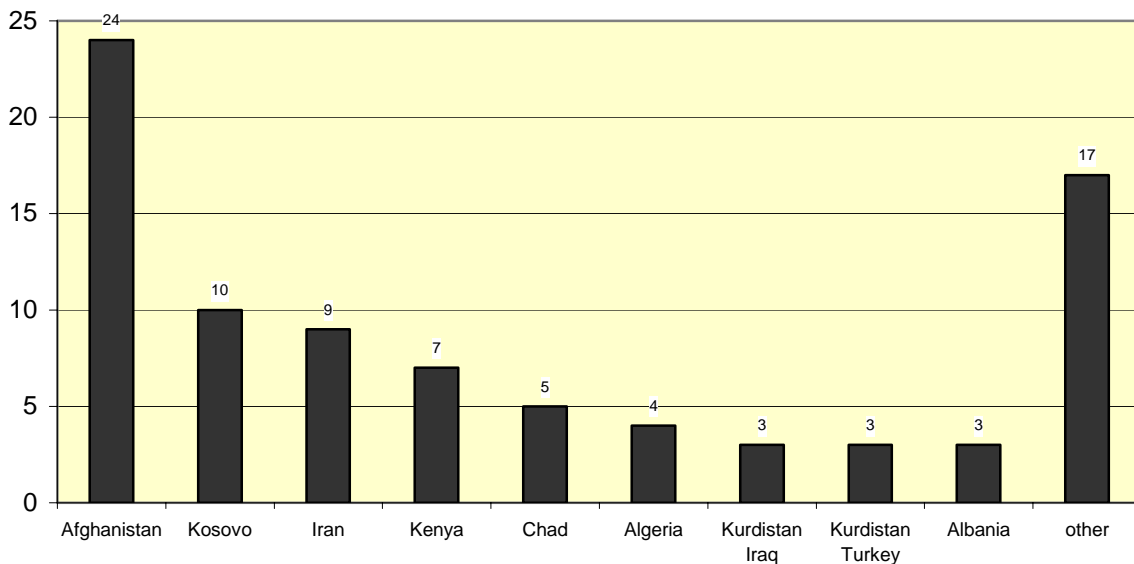
Interviewees

By the end of June 2002, information about 95 refugees and asylum seekers had been collected. All had arrived within the last seven years⁶ and the most recent arrival was in December 2001. Ages ranged from 18 to 48. As 75 per cent of all UK asylum applications are from people under 35⁷, there are far fewer older people amongst refugees than in the population as a whole.

There were 12 women respondents and 83 men, a slightly higher proportion of men than in the refugee population as a whole, where 78 per cent of UK applications in 2001 were from men (81 per cent in 2000)⁸.

Using the accepted ethnicity classification system the interviewees were Asian other - 40, Black African - 29, White other - 21, Other or not stated - 5.

Interviewees by country



As 'Asian other' includes people from very different backgrounds we find it more useful to record the countries people have left. These are shown in the table above.

Where people are living

65 per cent were living or studying in East Oxford at the time they were interviewed. 28 per cent were outside this area, mostly in Temple Cowley, Rose Hill, Barton, Headington and Kidlington⁹.

⁶ Other surveys show that although unemployment rates are higher amongst refugees than amongst the UK population as a whole, the longer people have been here the more likely they are to be in employment

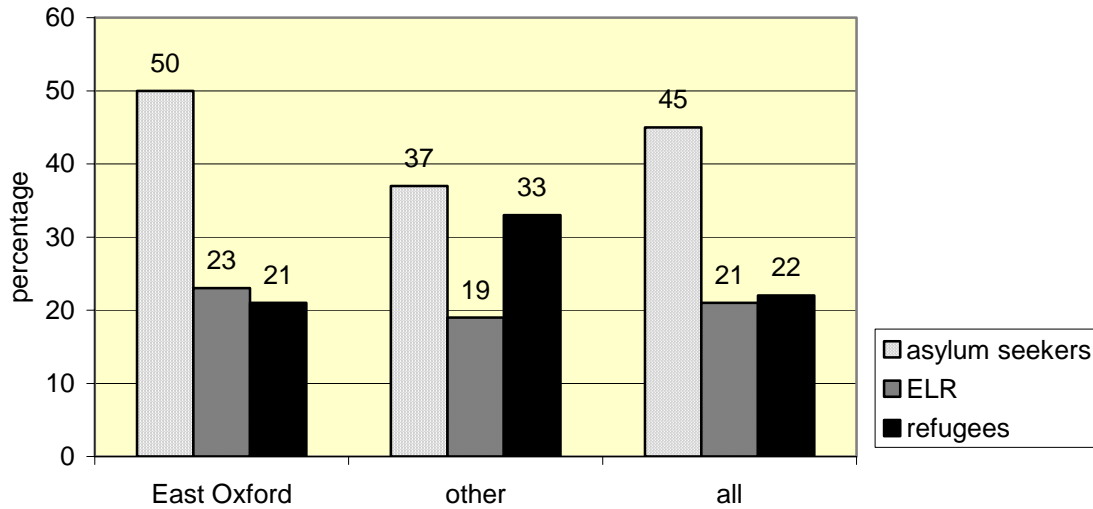
⁷ Home Office, *Asylum Statistics 2001*

⁸ Home Office, *Asylum Statistics 2001*

⁹ Appendix table 1

Refugee status

Refugee status of interviewees by area (percentages)

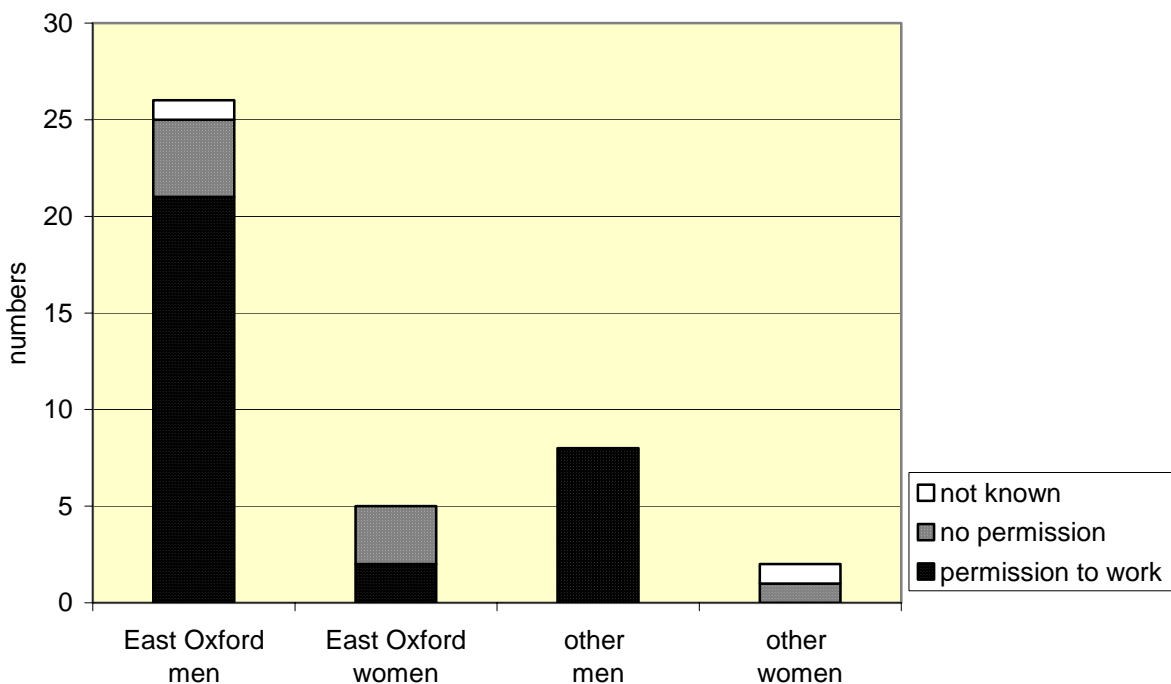


Overall 45 per cent were asylum seekers, 21 per cent had ELR and 22 per cent had ILR. The percentages in East Oxford were not significantly different.¹⁰

Permission to work

Everyone with ELR and ILR, 43 per cent of the total, has permission to work. 45 per cent of the total were asylum seekers, most of whom had permission to work.¹¹

Asylum seekers' right to work by gender and area



¹⁰ Appendix tables 2.1 and 2.2

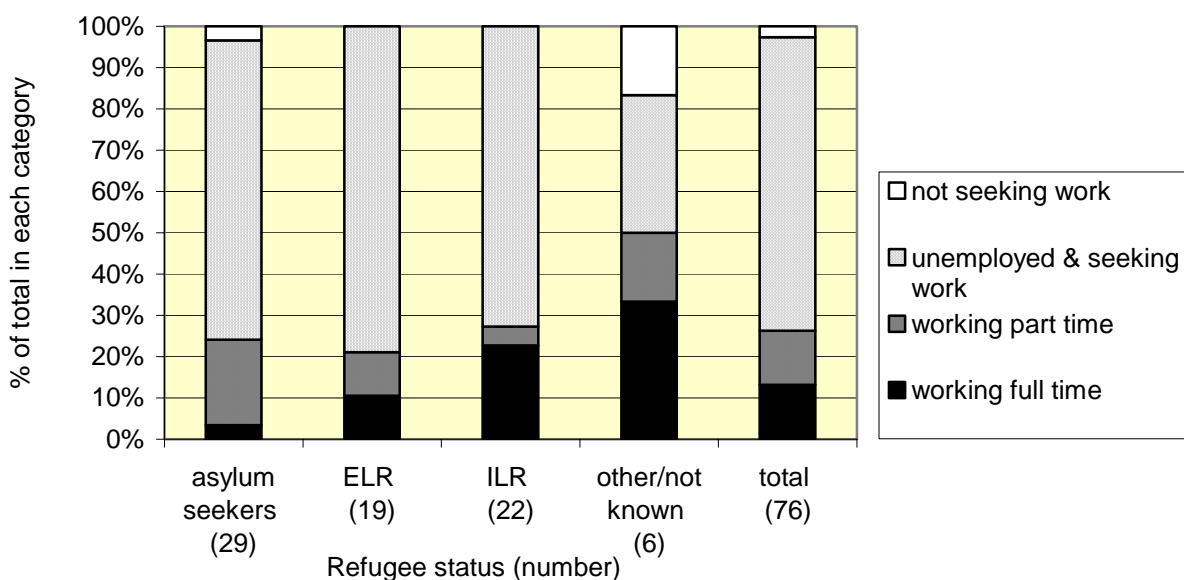
¹¹ Appendix tables 3.1 and 3.2

Of those without permission to work, two women and two men actively wanted to work, had applied and were waiting for permission. Two had been in the country since June/July 1999 and two since March 2000, so had been prevented from working for two to three years. We do not have data on their date of application for permission to work but we know many asylum seekers who wait two or more years for permission. This is a problem both for the individuals, who are frustrated at not being able to use their abilities and not having purposeful activity, and for the local economy which is suffering a labour shortage and paying them benefits. With the government decision in July 2002 preventing asylum seekers from applying for permission to work, this frustration and waste of resources will increase.

Work status

Refugees and asylum seekers are highly likely to be unemployed, despite considerable skills and work experience from their home countries.

Work status of all with permission to work



Of those participating in the survey 71 per cent were unemployed. Many of those who *had* found paid work were working part time or casually (often in warehouse or other unskilled work) when they would prefer to work full time. Our survey also confirmed the findings elsewhere in the country that most refugees and asylum seekers who are in work have jobs that do not match their skills¹². We did not find evidence of any significant changes to this situation despite the 1995 Home Office study that concluded *'The majority of asylum seekers come with substantial work and educational qualifications the bulk of which are under-utilised, to their chagrin and the country's general loss.'*¹³

Skills

65 of the 95 interviewees identified skills they felt they could offer, 58 of these offering skills at intermediate or advanced level.¹⁴ Many interviewees offered two or more skills. A range of abilities that are in demand by local employers are available:

- Nine people offered building skills, including three plumbers, two carpenters, and four who were experienced in odd jobs and repairs. There were also eight experienced

¹² Refugee Skills-Net, *The employment and training of skilled and qualified refugees*, Peabody Trust 1999

¹³ Home Office, *The Settlement of Refugees in Britain*, 1995

¹⁴ Appendix table 5

vehicle mechanics and two who had worked as drivers. Two had managed their own shops. Eight were experienced cooks.

- Ten people offered business skills, including organisational skills, project management and book-keeping. Two others had marketing experience and one other was an accountant with auditing experience. Six people offered a range of computer programming skills, three at an advanced level.
- In the medical field, our respondents included one highly qualified and experienced doctor and two very experienced nurses. (One of our interviewers was also a qualified refugee doctor.) There were also three teachers.
- In addition to their other skills thirteen offered Microsoft Office skills and most of these could offer Word, Excel and Access. Eighteen were confident about offering either translation or interpreting between other languages and English.

Although some have gained their work experience without formal qualifications, the more highly skilled tend to have qualifications from overseas (and in some cases UK) universities.

Aspirations

The 44 people who participated in the full survey were asked detailed questions about their aspirations in both work and training. These were the most difficult questions in the survey to answer - for someone who does not know whether they have one month or three years until the court hearing that threatens to deport them, it is very difficult to focus on planning coherently for the future. The replies are therefore impressionistic rather than statistical. We asked first about long term aspirations - dreams; then about the short term - the first step. Most people were able to comment on these. A significant number were unable to identify the intermediate step - the medium term. Some of the 51 who gave us information as part of the advice and guidance interviews also talked about long aspirations. These have been included in the results.

Work aspirations

The striking finding here is how realistic respondents were about the time it takes to be able to move into skilled or high-level work - more people identified long term goals than either short term or medium.¹⁵ Although many had ambitions that matched their skills and education, most were looking for training and/or unskilled or manual work in the short term and some did not see these steps as aspirations. Our analysis has 26 job classifications which are similar to those used by the careers guidance service. The most popular employment areas were

- computer programming, for which most people recognised they needed training, so not a short term goal
- technical work - mostly vehicle engineering. Most people in these fields already had considerable experience but recognised that it would take time to find work in their area of expertise.

Training/education aspirations

Respondents were equally realistic in their education/training goals, identifying the initial need for English language, often alongside basic IT training.¹⁶ The survey allowed them to identify as many subject areas as they liked for training, and many were aiming for undergraduate or postgraduate level qualifications in the medium or long term. Some recognised that they were in an employment world that is quite different from what they were familiar with, and asked for advice, but many were clear what education and training they needed to achieve their goals.

¹⁵ Appendix table 6

¹⁶ Appendix table 7

Barriers

We asked the 44 survey respondents what barriers they faced in accessing work (Table 8.1) and study (Table 8.2). Interviewees were shown a card with twenty-one barriers to work and seven barriers to study which had been identified by refugees and asylum seekers either in surveys elsewhere or in our preliminary workshops. All but one of these barriers were identified in our survey. People were also able to name barriers not included on our list.

- The main barrier to both work and study is English language. This is something of a vicious circle; we have observed that an individual's ability in English improves dramatically once they start work since this is often the first time they have been able to move outside relatively isolated communities and use English regularly with native speakers.
- Major barriers to work were
 - lack of UK work experience
 - overseas qualifications and experience not being recognised
 - not having work references
- Major barriers to study were
 - finding the right course
 - paying fees

Although everyone identified English as the main barrier, there were differences between groups.

- 'Lack of work experience in Britain' and 'experience or qualifications from another country not recognised here' were identified as bigger barriers by those with ILR than either those with ELR or asylum seekers. Possibly a background that is recognised in Britain becomes a more pressing need for those who are able to see their future securely in the UK.
- Not having permission to work ranked highly, clearly, for those without permission to work.
- Paying fees for study did not rank at all as a barrier for those with ILR (who are entitled to student loans for undergraduate courses from the date refugee status is granted) but was a serious barrier for those with ELR (who have to have had ELR for three years before they are entitled to student loans).
- Living expenses while studying was a pressing problem for those with ILR, but less so for those with ELR who, since they could not pay the fees, may not have got that far.

Our employment advisers have identified another important barrier to employment as lack of a driving licence. Much of the unskilled work that refugees and asylum seekers seek is in places or at times not served by public transport. In addition many jobs assume or require driving ability. Although many people have driven in their home country, some working as taxi drivers, only four of our respondents told us they had a full UK driving licence, and several had not been able to bring their home country licences with them.

Support with overcoming barriers

Those participating in the survey were asked whether they would be interested in a course preparing them for work. Of the 39 people answering this question, 34 said they would be interested. A few respondents said which of several topics most interested them; workplace English, the work culture in Britain, interview skills, how to apply for jobs, basic employment law, tax and national insurance, equal opportunities, and health and safety were the most popular.¹⁷ Amongst those coming to the office for advice and guidance the most common requests were for help with finding appropriate jobs and completing application forms.¹⁸

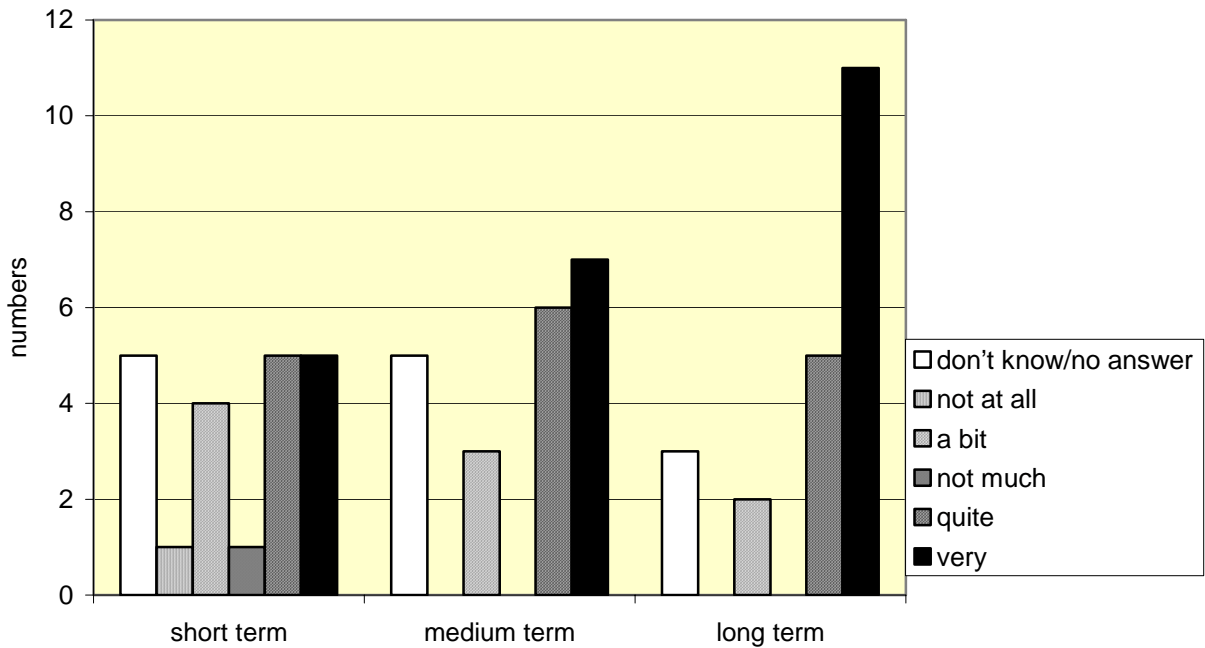
¹⁷ Appendix - table 9

¹⁸ Appendix - table 10

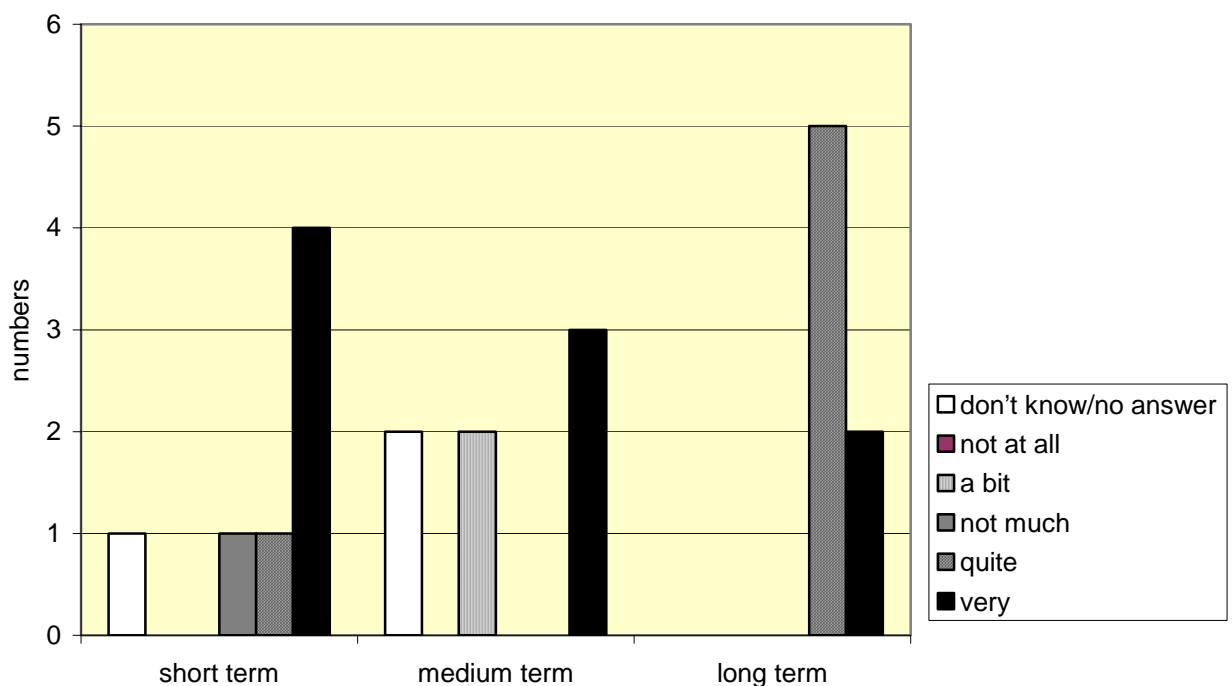
Confidence

The 44 survey participants were asked whether they were very, quite, a bit, not much or not at all confident about getting a job in line with their abilities in the short, medium and long term. In general people feel the possibility of success increases over time. The level of confidence at any stage does not appear to be related to status, nor to whether the individual has permission to work.

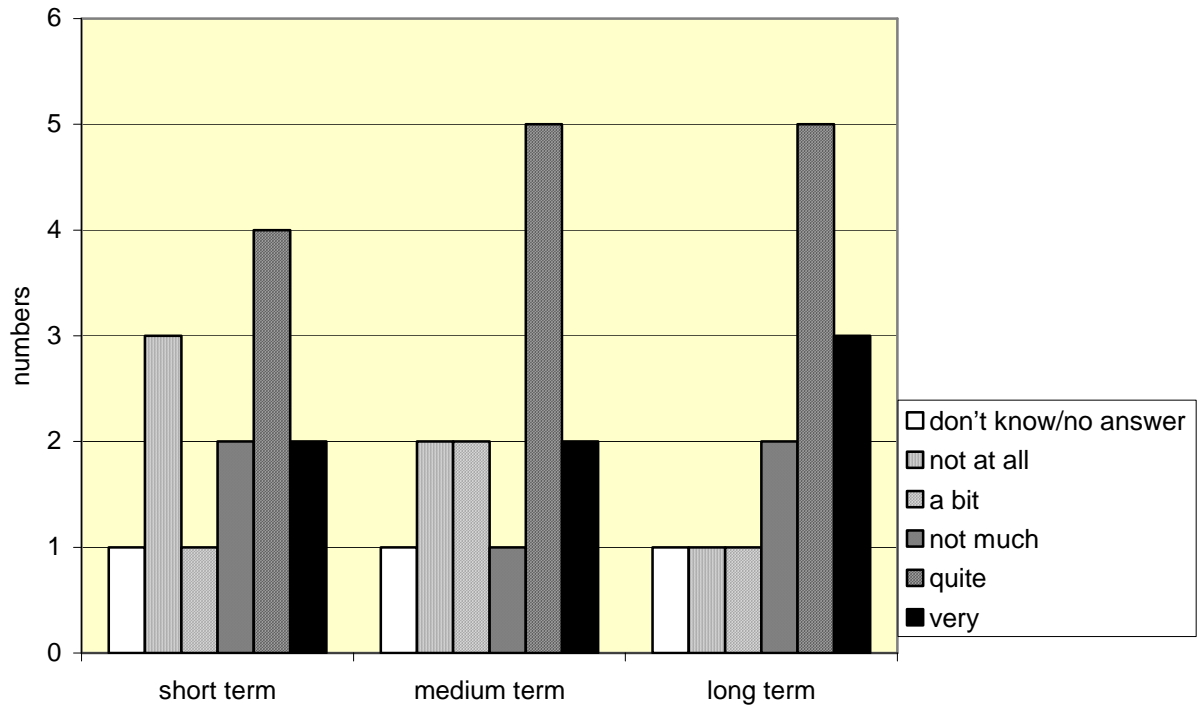
Confidence over time - asylum seekers



Confidence over time - ELR



Confidence over time - ILR



Conclusions

Almost all refugees and asylum seekers we meet are very keen to contribute their skills, experience and enthusiasm to the economy, to be valued for their abilities and to stop being dependent on handouts. However, 71 per cent of refugees and asylum seekers participating in the survey were unemployed and seeking work. Those in work were sometimes working part time when they would prefer to work full time; almost all who were in work had jobs beneath their abilities.

The refugees and asylum seekers we interviewed felt that having their previous experience and qualifications valued, despite lack of references, would make a large difference to the work that they could do in Britain.

The greatest barrier to employment and study is language, which almost all are very keen to overcome. We have observed that an individual's ability in English improves dramatically once they start work, because this is often the first time they have been able to move outside relatively isolated communities and use English regularly with native speakers.

Many refugees and asylum seekers feel the need for more information, about both employment and training. Funding for courses is also a problem.

How Access First works to overcome the barriers

The survey findings have directly fed into the development of the Access First project, in the work preparation course design, our work with refugees and asylum seekers and with employers, and setting up a bursary fund.

Barriers to work

English language, lack of work experience

Work preparation course

After analysing the early findings of this survey in January 2002 we have been running the work preparation course which proved popular in the survey. The course, taught at the Community English School lasts 60 hours: 30 hours of work-related English and 30 hours of information and skills development related to working in Britain. Through Refugee Resource, for about two days a week over eight weeks, trainees are offered an unpaid work placement with an employer, carefully chosen so that the work builds on existing skills and experience and is appropriate for future job applications. This placement provides UK work references.

We have realised that we initially underestimated the time it would take for people to prepare for and find work. Both before and after the course it is important to spend time with individuals.

No references, no proof of experience or qualifications from another country, experience or qualifications not recognised here

References

We send covering letters with application forms to employers about an individual's background, explaining why UK work experience and a UK reference are unavailable. Some employers are happy to accept this. We refer individuals to New Start Adult Guidance or Compass for an official (NARIC) equivalence for overseas qualifications.

Lack of information about jobs, little work available

Resource area

Refugee Resource has been developing a self-access resource area with general information of interest to refugees and asylum seekers, information about jobs, current local newspapers, information about courses and funding, and an open access computer for research and, for example, working on CVs.

Advice and guidance

Since August 2001 we have provided advice and guidance, usually one-to-one or sometimes in groups, based on each individual's expressed needs in employment or training or both. Needs vary greatly. For those from cultures where there is minimal choice in employment, we help with opportunities and choice, or refer people to New Start Adult Guidance or Compass. For those who are clear what they want to do, we provide information about pathways.

Which job?

We provide general information about local opportunities, help people find what they want from the material available, and look out for appropriate jobs for particular individuals.

Lack of self confidence, out of work for a long time

Application forms and CVs

Individual development is key to the way we work so when we help with application forms and CVs we ensure that people learn, sometimes over several application forms, the best way to present themselves.

Interviews

Once someone has been offered a job interview we offer a practice interview.

Lack of relevant skills

We refer individuals to appropriate courses, often in English and IT, and to more detailed guidance about training opportunities. Between January and June 2002 at least five people enrolled in Ethnic Minority Business Service computer courses as a result of our referrals (this number is likely to be higher - we do not always know whether a referral has been taken up). We liaised with Community Education to set up a course with English language support for the driving theory test. We also inform many of those who are receiving Jobseekers Allowance about the opportunities under the Jobcentre Plus New Deal scheme.

Racial discrimination by employers, employer attitudes

We contact individual employers who might have appropriate opportunities and visit them to address their concerns about employing refugees and asylum seekers. In most cases the difficulties are caused by lack of information. Employers are often unclear who is an asylum seeker and who is a refugee which makes them uncertain about legal issues associated with employing refugees and asylum seekers. Sometimes refugees and asylum seekers misinterpret decisions made by an employer (e.g. to do with leave or training) because they do not understand the reasons for the decision. We have encountered prejudice and racism amongst employers and once a refugee or asylum seeker starts work there are sometimes problems with the attitudes of colleagues.

Disability, ill health

We are in contact with services providing support and information on routes into work for disabled people.

Other support

Starting work

When someone is offered a job we can provide help though some aspects of the early stages (e.g. form filling, providing information about tax and national insurance and opening a bank account) and can direct people to other support (e.g. help with the transition from housing benefit to independent renting, advice on employment contracts).

General queries

When another agency is better able to deal with a query than Access First we refer a person on, unless we feel that the individual is unlikely to take up the referral (Table 11). In these cases we liaise with the agency, usually by phone, to deal with the query.

Barriers to study

Paying fees, paying living expenses while studying

Information

We provide information about bursaries available to refugees and asylum seekers, and can refer people to information about other sources of funding.

Funding

We have raised a small amount of money for a Refugee Resource Bursary Fund which has made some grants, and we are working to raise more money.

Immigration status preventing access to study, finding the right course

Information

We can provide some information about courses and training but most people are aware of the more comprehensive education advice service offered by Asylum Welcome. With more complex queries we refer people there.

Getting previous qualifications recognised

We refer people to New Start Adult Guidance or Compass for access to the NARIC database. For some professionals we can provide details about who to contact for recognition.

Barriers outside our remit

Do not have permission to work

The survey identified several cases where the government had failed to grant permission to work to those whose asylum cases had not been heard within six months. We know of several asylum seekers, able to work and desperate to be independent, who have been waiting over two years for permission. Apart from the unnecessary public expense, these people's skills go to waste, and they lose confidence and become depressed. In our opinion, the public, the economy and asylum seekers would gain from a reversal of the government decision in July 2002 that asylum seekers could not longer apply for permission to work. The decision was allegedly taken on the grounds that very few cases are outstanding after six months. If this is indeed the case, why withdraw the right from the 'minority who are still waiting? We would like to see the government addressing this issue in a concerted manner.

Immigration status prevents access to study

It is counter-productive to prevent people studying. Even if they eventually return to their home country, it is far better to return them with skills and qualifications than with issues related to loss of confidence through long periods of inactivity.

There is no-one else to look after my children

We are sometimes able to liaise with crèches, but there is a serious shortage of affordable childcare for working parents in the Oxford area, whether they are refugees or not. Provision of community crèches would aid integration of both children and parents, as well as benefit the local economy.

Housing

In our experience inappropriate housing, particularly for families, is a barrier to employment. Two people who could obtain jobs have had to interrupt their job search to deal with pressing housing problems, and one has had to defer starting a job.

When refugees and asylum seekers start work and lose benefits, they face considerable housing problems. Subsidised housing is taken away, which means that they often have to find a new home. The low wages paid to those in unskilled work, and the high cost of housing in the Oxford area mean that some people wanting to work are caught in the poverty trap and cannot take a job.

Successes

With Access First support, 19 people obtained employment during 2002. Of these, five are in work that matches their skills and aspirations, and two are in jobs that are an appropriate step towards what they want to do. The rest have entered the labour market in unskilled or semi-skilled work in order to become independent. With this increased opportunity to improve their English language and work skills they should later be able to find more relevant work.

Reading

Refugee Skills-Net, *The employment and training of skilled and qualified refugees*, Peabody Trust 1999

Demessew Shiferaw and Dr Hailu Hagos, *Refugees and progression routes to employment*, Refugee Council 2002

Vaughan Robinson and Jeremy Segrott, *Understanding the decision-making of asylum seekers*, Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, 2002

Home Office, *The Settlement of Refugees in Britain*, 1995

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

Home Office, Asylum Statistics 2001 available as a pdf document on:
<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/hosb902.pdf>

Appendix 1 - Tables

Table 1 Residence by gender

	in EOA area*	rest of Oxford area	not known	total
men	54	23	6	83
women	8	4	0	12
total	62	27	6	95

* this includes all clients either living or studying in the East Oxford Action area.

Table 2.1 Immigration status by gender - EOA area

	asylum seeker	ELR	ILR	other*	not known	total
men	26	13	12	0	3	54
women	5	1	1	1	0	8
total	31	14	13	1	3	62

*other can include family reunion and temporary protection

Table 2.2 Immigration status by gender - non-EOA area

	asylum seeker	ELR	ILR	other*	not known	total
men	8	5	8	1	1	23
women	2	0	1	1	0	4
total	10	5	9	2	1	27

*other can include family reunion and temporary protection

Table 3.1 Asylum seekers with permission to work by gender - EOA area

	permission to work	no permission	not known	totals
men	21	4	1	26
women	2	3	0	5
total	23	7	1	31

Table 3.2 Asylum seekers with permission to work by gender - non-EOA area

	permission to work	no permission	not known	totals
men	8	0	0	8
women	0	1	1	2
total	8	1	1	10

Table 4.1 Work status of all (refugees and asylum seekers) with permission to work - EOA area

		working full time	working part time	unemployed & seeking work	not seeking work	totals
asylum seekers	men	0	5	15	1	21
	women	0	0	1	1	2
ELR	men	1	2	10	0	13
	women	0	0	1	0	1
ILR	men	3	0	9	0	12
	women	0	0	1	0	1
other or not known	men	0	1	2	0	3
	women	0	0	0	1	1
total	men	4	8	36	1	49
	women	0	0	3	2	5
GRAND TOTAL		4	8	39	3	54

Table 4.2 Work status of all (refugees and asylum seekers) with permission to work - all areas including EOA

		working full time		working part time		unemployed & seeking work		not seeking work		totals	
		nos	%	nos	%	nos	%	nos	%	nos	%
asylum seekers	men	1	4%	6	22%	20	74%	0	0%	27	100%
	women	0		0		1		1		2	
ELR	men	2	11%	2	11%	14	78%	0	0%	18	100%
	women	0		0		1		0		1	
ILR	men	4	20%	1	5%	15	75%	0	0%	20	100%
	women	1		0		1		0		2	
other or not known	men	1		1		2		0		4	
	women	1		0		0		1		2	
total	men	8	12%	10	14%	51	74%	0	0%	69	100%
	women	2	29%	0	0%	3	43%	2	29%	7	100%
GRAND TOTAL		10	13%	10	13%	54	71%	2	3%	76	100%

NB - percentages are not given where the sample size makes them meaningless, except in the totals (total percentage figure for women is not reliable).

Table 5 Skills (numbers offering each skill at what level)

Skills Area	Skill	advanced	intermediate
arts	calligraphy	1	0
	music	2	6
building	odd jobs and repairs/general building	1	3
	plumbing	1	2
	painting	0	3
	carpentry	1	1
business	logistics/planning	0	2
	book-keeping	0	1
	project management	0	1
	import-export	1	0
	organising	4	2
	general business	1	0
finance	auditing	0	1
care work	childcare	0	1
catering	cooking	6	2

	general catering	2	1
communication		2	4
computing	web design/Dreamweaver	3	0
	Pascal	1	1
	Delphi	2	0
	C+	1	0
	C++	1	1
	Visual Basic	1	0
	Java	1	0
	Cobol	0	1
	hardware maintenance, system analysis	1	0
	LAN integration	1	0
	database design	1	0
	other computing	0	1
conservation		1	0
driving	van driver	2	0
gardening/farming	farming	0	1
	gardening	2	2
hairdressing	hairdressing	0	1
IT-office	Access	3	7
	Word	6	6
	Excel	6	5
translation/interpretation			
between English and	Albanian	3	2
	Arabic	2	3
	Croatian	0	1
	French	3	2
	Greek	0	1
	Pashto/Dari	0	3
	Persian/Farsi	0	3
	Swahili	0	1
	Twi	1	0
leadership		2	0
marketing	marketing	1	1
medical/nursing	doctor	1	0
	nurse	2	0
retail	managed own shop	2	0
sewing		0	1
sport	football	2	2
	karate	1	1
	motor racing	0	1
	swimming	1	0
	volleyball	0	1
	motor racing	0	1
	general sport	3	1
teaching	teacher	2	1
teamwork		3	2
technical	car mechanic (+ body work, electrical systems)	5	3
work with people		3	2
writing		3	1

Table 6 Work aspirations in the short, medium and long term

Job category	Job examples	all areas			East Oxford action area		
		short term	medium term	long term	short term	medium term	long term
catering	chef, baker, cook, waiter	4	1	3	3	1	1
transport	bus driver, taxi driver	6	2	2	5	2	2
manufacturing	factory work	3	1	1	2	0	1
warehouse &	labourer, warehouse picker, cleaner	5	0	0	3	0	0
retail	cashier, shop manager, sales assistant	5	2	4	4	1	3
office - junior	administration, reception, secretarial, clerical	3	0	1	3	0	1
office - senior	manager, supervisor, adviser	0	0	1	0	0	1
finance &	accountant, book keeper	0	0	1	0	0	0
housing	housing advice worker	0	0	0	0	0	0
community/social	social worker	0	0	0	0	0	0
charity/voluntary	charity worker, advice worker	0	0	0	0	0	0
health	doctor, nurse, midwife, health visitor	3	0	3	2	0	2
health ancillary	care assistant, nursing ancillary	0	1	0	0	1	0
law	solicitor, legal secretary	0	0	1	0	0	1
education	university/school teacher, classroom asst	3	1	1	3	0	1
technical -	civil engineer, architect	0	1	2	0	1	2
technical - other	laboratory technician, vehicle mechanic	2	4	8	2	3	7
construction	plumber, electrician, plasterer	2	1	4	2	0	3
other skilled	hairdresser, beautician	2	2	2	2	2	2
science	industrial researcher	0	0	0	0	0	0
IT	programmer, systems analyst,	1	3	8	0	2	5
cultural, creative,	librarian, museum work, publisher, designer	2	0	3	1	0	3
marketing	marketing manager, assistant	1	1	3	1	1	1
leisure and sports	sports trainer	1	1	1	1	1	0
animals/enviro	vet, farm worker, conservationist	0	0	0	0	0	0
other		1	5	6	0	3	3
	TOTALS	44	26	55	34	18	39

Table 7 Education aspirations in the short, medium and long term

	all areas			East Oxford Action area		
	short term	medium term	long term	short term	medium term	long term
administration	0	0	1	0	0	1
AutoCAD	1	0	0	1	0	0
business/commerce/marketing	1	2	6	1	0	3
catering/hospitality	1	1	3	0	1	2
childcare	0	0	1	0	0	1
computer engineering	0	0	1	0	0	1
computer programming	3	0	7	2	0	4
computing - web design	0	0	1	0	0	0
construction - electrician	1	0	1	1	0	1
construction - plumbing	1	0	4	1	0	3
construction - carpentry	0	1	0	0	1	0
driving test	4	1	0	3	0	0
engineering	0	2	2	0	2	1
engineering - electronic	0	0	1	0	0	1
English	30	7	3	25	6	2
finance - accountancy	0	0	3	0	0	1
hairdressing	0	0	1	0	0	1
health - nursing	1	0	2	1	0	2
health and safety	1	0	1	1	0	1
IT general	9	7	8	7	6	4
law and politics	0	0	1	0	0	1
media	0	1	2	0	1	2
medical re-qualification	0	1	0	0	0	0
photography & processing	0	0	1	0	0	1
retail	0	1	0	0	0	0
sports trainer	0	0	1	0	0	0
technical - vehicle mechanics	1	1	1	1	0	1
transport	0	1	1	0	1	0
access to university	3	3	1	1	2	1
needs advice	1	6	2	0	5	1
TOTALS	58	35	56	45	25	36

Table 8.1 Numbers identifying barriers to work (44 people asked)

Type of barrier	Numbers identifying this barrier
Need to learn more English	29
Lack of work experience in Britain	22
No proof of experience or qualifications from another country	15
No references	15
Lack of information about jobs	12
Lack of relevant skills	12
Experience or qualifications not recognised here	11
Do not have permission to work	7
Lack of self confidence	6
Racial discrimination by employers	4
I want to look after my children for the time being	4
Out of work for a long time	3
Employer attitudes	3
Wages available are too low	2
There is no-one else to look after my children	2
Little work available	2
Disability	1
Cultural or religious reasons e.g. days of work, religious festivals	1
Gender discrimination by employers	1
Ill health	1
Women's roles in my community restrict what I can do	0

(NB - individuals could identify up to five barriers, so may appear up to five times in the table.)

Table 8.2 Numbers identifying barriers to study (44 people asked)

Type of barrier	Numbers identifying this barrier
Need better English	21
Paying fees	14
Finding the right course	13
Paying living expenses while studying	12
Immigration status prevents access to study	9
Getting previous qualifications recognised	6
Being accepted on the course	5

(NB - individuals could identify up to five barriers, so may appear up to five times in the table.)

Table 9 What sort of support would be useful (44 people asked)

workplace English	10
the work culture in Britain	8
what to do at an interview	7
how to apply for jobs	5
basic employment law - your rights and your employer's rights	4
tax and National Insurance	4
equal opportunities at work	4
health and safety at work	4
a relevant work placement	3
how to decide what job to apply for	3
how to find jobs	2

Table 10 Reasons for visits to the Refugee Resource office (January-June 2002)

work	nos of interviews
help with application forms	39 (23 people)
general jobsearch	26
job advice/career options	16
placement – discuss or take up	13
information about specific jobs	12
reference letters	8
help with a CV	5
practice interviews	4
difficulties with Jobseekers Allowance	4
help with the formalities of starting work (contracts, pensions, housing benefit)	4
tax	3
permission to work	3
study/training	
advice about courses	11
driving courses	9
funding advice	8
requalifying	2

Table 11 Referrals by Refugee Resource to other services (January-June 2002)

Jobcentre Plus - New Deal	4
Jobcentre Plus - other services	2
Ethnic Minority Business Service (EMBS) for computer training	5
New Start/Compass	4
Asylum Welcome education adviser	3
Connexions	1

Appendix 2 - The Questionnaire

Available on request from Refugee Resource

Refugee Resource

Hooper House, 3 Collins Street, Oxford OX4 1XS

tel: 0845 458 0055

info@refugeeresource.org

Company 455854