Refugee Community Based Organisations in the UK:
A Social Capital Analysis
R000239583
Research Report

Background
In a period of rapid legislative and policy change concerning refugees and asylum seekers, the research examines the impact of this changing environment on refugee community-based organisations (RCOs) in the UK.

The research argues that the analysis of RCOs and the role of social capital in their formation can only be conducted within the broader framework and context of government refugee, asylum and immigration policy, and the ambiguous characteristics of race relations policy and rhetoric. Transformed from a marginal recipient of refugees and asylum seekers to one of the most significant in the EU in the last decade, the UK has introduced largely restrictive policy and legislation which reinforces pre-entry controls and, as a deterrent to future asylum applications, has accelerated the withdrawal of asylum seekers from the mainstream benefits system. Following legislation in 1993 and 1996, the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act radically accentuated this policy. It introduced a centrally coordinated system of support for asylum seekers combined with their enforced dispersal from the southeast to less pressurised housing locations under the National Asylum Support Service (NASS). The impact on statutory, private and voluntary stakeholders, including RCOs, has been profound.

Objectives
Based upon fieldwork with RCOs in London, the West Midlands and the North-West, the objectives have been to:

- Understand how the national policy changes, principally the dispersal of asylum seekers, are impacting on the development of RCOs in established locations and new cluster areas.
- Demonstrate how well equipped RCOs are in exercising their role to support asylum seekers and refugees within the new framework.
- Outline the institutional, organisational and resource constraints to effective networking and collaboration.
- Examine the degree to which there is a conflict between the traditional settlement role of RCOs and the need to respond to new issues and demands raised by legislative change.
- Explore the problem of accountability and representation in refugee communities and the need to specify the internal differentiation within the RCO sector as a whole.

The research also addresses a range of theoretical questions: the integrative role of RCOs; the institutional constraints and opportunities for mobilisation affecting refugee communities; the role of networks, resources and social capital in the formation of refugee organisations.

Methods and Fieldwork
The data for the research were derived from a number of sources. First is the extensive academic literature and grey literature on RCOs, some of which is web-based. The second and primary data source was the sample of 40 RCOs. A third data source was semi-structured interviews with NGO personnel and representatives of statutory authorities involved with refugee community development. The choice of London, the North West and the West Midlands as fieldwork locations was determined by a number of factors, including the size of refugee communities; the scale of development of RCOs and the settlement history of refugee groups; previous research by the research team.
Results
The size, growth and date of arrival of refugee communities and the establishment of RCOs
London is, of course, well documented the primary location of refugee settlement in the UK, with refugees and asylum seekers concentrated in particular London boroughs. According to a variety of estimates, there are in excess of 300,000 refugees and asylum seekers in London. A central factor is the greater variety of nationalities and the size of refugee communities in London in comparison to the regions. In several cases in the nationalities covered in this research, specific groups such as the Somalis, Tamils and Iranians, numbered over ten thousand in specific localities and up to 20,000 across London as a whole. The development of RCOs in London has reflected this general situation. Refugee organisations began to mushroom in the mid-1980s. Current estimates are that there are between 500-600 refugee organisations, although again there are no reliable statistics on how many of these organisations are viable and functioning.

Although many asylum seekers have chosen to remain in London and the south east on subsistence only arrangements, both the West Midlands and North West consortia have significant numbers of new asylum seekers, at around 19% each of the total dispersed under the NASS arrangements. Despite clustering dispersal policies, the mixed nationality and ethnicity of the asylum seeker and refugee population in the regions is also significant. They comprise earlier programme refugees – Vietnamese and Kosovans for example – and asylum seekers arriving during the 1980s, such as the Iraqi Kurds in Manchester, ad more recent Francophone and other nationalities. In Liverpool, Somalis have arrived as migrants in the last 50 years and throughout the 1990s as asylum seekers as civil war intensified in country. Asylum seekers in the regions consist therefore of these earlier groups, individuals dispersed by London boroughs prior to the NASS arrangements, asylum seekers under the interim arrangements and, from April 2000, the new NASS arrivals.

Interestingly, despite strong evidence of secondary migration to London from the regions there is also evidence from our study that around 50% of asylum seekers were choosing to remain in the regions upon receipt of a positive decision. In addition, there is a high incidence of secondary migration to the West Midlands and Birmingham in particular, both from other regions in the country and also from other EU countries, notably in the case of Somalis coming from the Netherlands and Sweden. These factors suggest that there is a firm basis for the continued growth of refugee communities in the regions. At present, the estimated number of refugees in the West Midlands is around 50,000. In relation to the number of RCOs in the principal cities examined, Manchester and Liverpool have an estimated 40-60 RCOs each, while Birmingham has over thirty refugee organisations and a growing number in the neighbouring cities of Coventry and Wolverhampton (Phillimore and Goodson 2001). In both regions there has been a rapid growth in the number of RCOs since the advent of dispersal. The majority of RCOs interviewed in the regions had been established within the last 3-4 years. In London, by contrast, the sample reflected the settlement of refugees particularly from the 1980s onwards. The majority of the RCOs, some 60%, had been established between 1982 and 1989. A critical distinction is between the older established organisations, such as the Vietnamese, Somali, Tamil and Ethiopian which were founded from the early 1980s onwards and the emergence of recent organisations such as the Central African. This basic contrast provides useful pointers to the role of historical and contextual factors in the formation of RCOs.

The institutional framework
With the focus on the regions, according to Zetter et al’s (2003) typology of the consortia, the West Midlands can be characterised as ‘integrated’, with a coherent managerial structure, and clear relations between the different partner agencies. By contrast, the North-West is ‘multi-centred’ although with two integrated sub-regions based on the Manchester and Liverpool conurbations. In both cases however the regional consortia are defined by a series of conflicting relationships and often poor coordination and information flows between the actors and

---

1 It is important to note that our research was not focused on the refugee organisations formed throughout the earlier part of the twentieth century.
2 London is not one of the dispersal areas, although NASS asylum seekers on subsistence only arrangements continue to be supported in the city (Home Office 2002).
agencies involved in the dispersal arrangements which impact, of course, on RCOs. These are core concerns in both of the regions and the by-product of historical factors which pre-date the NASS.

Birmingham as the lead authority in the West Midlands has a strong commitment to refugee settlement and integration. This has been translated into a number of initiatives which involve the City Council, the main NGOs and the principal refugee groups in the city. At consortium level the progress in developing a coherent integration strategy for refugees has been more modest. The situation in relation to Manchester and Liverpool is considerably more mixed. Differences between asylum teams in local authorities and a lack of clear central direction have impeded the development of coordination and integration and settlement strategies for refugees in both cities. The situation here is characterised by a series of ad hoc initiatives from a variety of voluntary organisations and fora.

These institutional characteristics impact on the role and development of RCOs. The study found that in relation to RCOs in both regions, despite the different approaches of the main statutory agencies and while the RCOs are formally part of the consortium arrangements, there was little evidence of them occupying fully integrated roles within these. Lack of consultation and tokenism in partnership were the negative characteristics noted in both regions.

The resource base and organisational issues affecting RCOs
While not statistically representative, our the sample of RCOs can be regarded as illustrative and indicative of certain general trends and characteristics. The resource base of RCOs was one of the central issues addressed in the fieldwork - reflecting the questions raised by the research objectives. The research found that the organisations in the regions were ‘small’ with funding in most cases well below £50,000 (current year). Typically they were in the range of £10,000 to £20,000. In London, by contrast the sample of RCOs was mainly ‘medium’ sized with a current funding base between £50,000 to £250,000. The majority were in the region of £100,000, with a few large organisations with budgets in excess of £400,000.

This degree of variation, both between the regions and London and within London itself suggests that the RCO sector is not homogenous but increasingly marked by significant internal differentiation. There were significant inequalities between different sized RCOs on the one hand but also between RCOs and other voluntary agencies in addition to the principal NGOs in the field (Zetter and Pearl 2000). The RCO sector therefore appears to be marked by a high degree of structural instability, with a solid core of established organisations surrounded by a indeterminate periphery of semi-secure and insecure organisations. High turnover of organisations and general volatility appear to be important defining characteristics.

Funding was a fundamental organisational issue. Some of the key themes raised in interview were: the impacts of short-term funding on sustainability; increased competition for funding with a shrinking overall pot of money available; increased bureaucratisation of funding requirements; competition between small RCOs and other, larger agencies and difficulties in providing matched funding, for example under the terms of the European Refugee Fund. All the organisations 3, were affected by these factors to varying degrees. The smaller and more recently established RCOs in the regions were on the whole the most vulnerable.

Staffing levels, the availability of training and the degree of professionalism in organisations were also dependent upon the overall resources available. Some London based RCOs had significant staffing levels, in excess of 8 personnel, while between 2 to 4 individuals was more typical. In the regions, with their significantly smaller resource base, a smaller number of staff tended to perform a broad variety of functions. A high turnover of staff also appeared to be endemic to the RCOs sector as a whole. This was either due to volunteers gaining employment or trained staff leaving organisations in order to benefit from the higher salary levels outside the RCO and voluntary sector.

3 with the exception of the refugee women’s organisations in London which had substantial budgets in excess of £400,000.
In terms of the services provided by RCOs, these again reflected fundamental differences in the resource base of organisations. On the whole there was considerably more diversity in the services provided in London than in the regions. The basic activity of most RCOs was in providing advice on asylum claims and services, and signposting to the statutory authorities. Only the minority were able to offer more specialised services such as health advice in the case of one Department of Health funded organisation in Birmingham or assistance with education, training and employment, as in the case of several London based RCOs. On the whole these facilities were provided by the larger, better funded organisations which had built up expertise after running projects for several years.

Concerning organisational aims and rationales, meeting the needs of refugee communities and filling the gaps in service provision were the main reasons given for the development of organisations. Some important differences emerge between the newer organisations in the regions and the established organisations in London For the former, consolidating a name and organisational procedures, defining their community base and solidifying social capital were overriding concerns. The better-established organisations in London, by contrast, aspired to change from essentially informal ‘grassroots’ mobilisation, to the benefits and penalties of increased bureaucratisation. In some cases accountability to funders had taken precedence over maintaining contact with the needs of the refugee clients or ‘users’. Increased organisational diversification was one result of an ageing population and the development of the long-term settlement needs of refugee families.

**Defining RCOs and refugee communities**

Largely implicit in the West Midlands and London, the self-definition of refugee community organisations was explicitly raised in the case of the RCOs interviewed in the North-West. Inclusiveness of definition and plurality of organisational forms was the norm, with the provision of services on the basis of ethnicity to refugees and asylum seekers as the defining feature of an ‘RCO’. The term therefore embraced a variety of informal networks and more formalised, bureaucratic arrangements. The defining of RCOs was in turn related to the active constitution of source or founding communities: significantly, RCOs were substantially responsible for the delineation of community boundaries and characteristics, rather than merely reflecting pre-given social entities. By contrast, other aspects of the fracturing and dissolution of nationality-based community organisations were emphasised in the case of the RCOs in London. Politicisation of communities and the relationship of gendered identities to the communal basis of nationality-based organisations were the central themes here. In Birmingham also there was strong evidence from the emerging Central African organisations of incipient competition between the groups as they sought to define themselves in geographical, cultural, or linguistic terms. Competition over the material and symbolic resources offered by RCOs, and their facilitating role in relation to the formation of social capital, were suggested as one of the prime factors, alongside meeting the unmet welfare needs of their communities, behind the formation of the organisations.

**Building networks**

The concepts of bridging and linking social capital derived from Putnam were explored in connection with the capacity of refugee groups to forge links across communities and in relation to NGOs and statutory authorities. The importance of networks in terms of information sharing and pooling resources was repeatedly emphasised in all fieldwork locations. This was particularly the case in relation to the newly emerging refugee communities in the regions. Here there were pronounced difficulties in organising these networks, largely due to resource and time constraints. The peculiar character of these relationships is emphasised in the case of the West Midlands where a discernible RCO/NGO nexus has been established. As in the other fieldwork locations, NGOs have a constitutive role in the formation of refugee community organisations, providing training and assistance and the back up and know how involved in setting up organisations. But, the regulatory and normative character of NGO interventions in assisting and promoting the formation of RCOs is illustrative of the opportunity structures and the forms of migrant incorporation which refugee groups encountered. In some cases RCOs, as in the North-West, have opted to build their networks outside the existing channels. Dependence upon own-community resources was however necessarily problematic and limited in scope.
In contrast to the regions, given its longer history of settlement London exhibits considerably more developed networking practices, both in relation to the formation of borough-based refugee consortia and forms of cross-borough collaboration. The emerging organisations interviewed in the regions typically looked to partnerships in order to gain a foothold in the local policy environment. The better established organisations interviewed in London on the other hand reported a variety of experiences in relation to networking practices with both the key NGOs and statutory authorities. The case of the RCO development project stands out as particularly illustrative of the power-imbalance which affect even the established RCOs in their relations with their strategically more powerful partners. From a refugee community based initiative which involved the development of important networks between RCOs based in London and the regions, the RCO development project appears to have been absorbed into the organisational agendas of the principal NGOs involved in dispersal. The dependency of RCOs upon Home Office funding, channelled in this case through the NGOs, had set definite limits to their room for manoeuvre and control.

The impacts of dispersal
Concerning the potential role conflict in RCOs between aiding settlement or responding to the growing needs of asylum seekers in the dispersal areas, we report not so much a conflict as a case of admitting defeat at the outset. RCOs in the regions did not have the capacity or resources to respond, in other than an ad hoc and uncoordinated ways, to the exigencies brought about by dispersal. Increasing numbers of asylum seekers had inevitably increased workloads and strained organisational capacity. In many cases RCOs reported that they were unable to respond effectively to the needs of asylum seekers in the dispersal areas. Yet, more positively, new organisations had clearly also risen to the challenge – London-based organisations had responded in a number of ways. Several RCOs had been involved in the RCO development project which aimed to provide assistance to RCOs in the regions. Individual initiatives had also been developed, between for example Tamils in south London and Tamil groups in Liverpool. An Iraqi Kurdish organisation in London had similarly sponsored support and assistance programmes for Kurds in the regions, not only based upon ethnic solidarity but also changing organisational requirements as the number of Iraqi asylum applications dropped in the aftermath of the 2003 Iraqi war.

The response to other legislative changes – the introduction of Section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, and the withdrawal of the right to seek permission to work – was marked by disquiet in those organisations interviewed but also a general sense of impotence concerning their ability to respond effectively to the changes. Individuals prohibited from receiving benefits under Section 55 cannot be effectively helped by RCOs as this would automatically disentitle them from assistance. In other cases, asylum seekers returning from the regions, in particular when their appeals’ procedures had been exhausted, were often supported by community members. This necessarily placed additional strains on the coping capacity of relatives and friends providing support. Destitution and the inexorable push down into the informal labour market were recorded by RCOs in London and the regions as one of the principal effects of these legislative changes.

Theoretical questions
The Integrative role of RCOs
One of our research concerns is to raise questions about the role of RCOs in the integration process for refugees. The positive role of RCOs is a dominant assumption in the literature, but one which is more often asserted than fully demonstrated. There is strong anecdotal evidence suggesting that RCOs make a vital contribution in meeting the welfare needs of their communities. In some cases they also provide training and routes into paid employment. By assisting asylum seekers and refugees to understand the welfare system they are also acting, in a sense, to integrate them into the patterned relationships of the receiving society. These arguments have a general validity. What is problematic in many of these accounts is the lack of precision over the term ‘integration’, which is very often used to describe the process of

---

4 The 2002 legislation introduced the withdrawal of benefits for asylum seekers who did not make their claim for asylum within a reasonably practicable time limit.
settlement, i.e. ‘getting used to’ the new environment, or forms of individual adaptation amongst refugees. Integration, conceived as a long-term, two way process between refugees and the receiving society (Castles et al 2003) which occurs in a number of different social, economic and political arenas, is not on the whole a central factor in these accounts.

Gamelidin-Ashami et al (2002) and Zetter and Pearl (2000) have convincingly noted that RCOs do not have the resources which would enable them to contribute to the long-term integration of refugees. Their role is essentially ‘defensive’ – gap filling and meeting essential needs – rather than being actively engaged in the development of individual and community resources. Our research corroborates these findings and the continued fragility of many RCOs: only a minority had the resources to run the education, training and employment programmes which would promote long-term integration into the labour market.

Additional reasons cast further doubt on the privileged role which RCOs have come to assume in the literature. Our fieldwork suggested an important distinction between formal and informal networking in refugee communities. There was, for example, a notable resistance on the part of some groups to formalise networks. Not wishing to be part of formal channels or to participate in the funding-driven political economy of refugee organisation were the primary reasons given. As Rex (1987) had long ago pointed out, formal organisations are only one part of a vast network of informal, transient, unnamed and unofficial forms of social organisation.

The degree to which formally constituted RCOs are at the centre of refugee networks or peripheral to the main sources of community activity is a vital question. Korac (2001) contrasting the cases of Italy and the Netherlands has argued that informal networks and the ability to participate freely in the social life of the receiving society may be more effective in promoting integration than state-directed integration programmes, or other formal community-based organisational means. Our research similarly confirms that we cannot assume that RCOs are automatically the hub of community activity and the prime movers in fostering integration in community members. O the contrary, far from being central to the integration of refugees, RCOs may perpetuate marginality from within their designated roles on the edges of their communities. Anecdotal evidence from our study suggests that, for example, informal economic networks amongst Somalis have been instrumental in promoting business activity in specific areas of Birmingham and London. Individuals come together to pool resources and typically set up businesses on a joint basis. Currently small scale and subject to rapid turnover in ownership, the potential for the economic integration of refugees may be equal if not greater to that offered by RCOs, or by using RCOs themselves as a form of self-employment.

The value of the integrative role of RCOs in comparison to other forms of networking thus needs further examination in the current asylum and policy environment. While it is clear that RCOs provide vital welfare services it is not clear how far they act to promote the long-term integration of refugees, given their increasing short termism of their activity. RCOs may play a part in the integration of refugees but this is quite likely not as central as is commonly assumed in the literature.

Opportunity structures and modes of migrant incorporation

The role of opportunity structures and forms of migrant incorporation was another of the theoretical themes raised at the outset. Opportunity structures can be defined as institutional settings which set the parameters for effective political mobilisation. They have a normative and regulatory character in setting the boundaries of what is permissible and possible. The term ‘incorporation’, borrowed from Soysal (1994), describes the ways in which the membership

---

5 It is worth pointing out that Gamelidin-Ashami’s sample of 22 London based RCOs is again very small. It is certainly difficult to generalise conclusively from this sample in the way perhaps that they are inclined to do. More large scale, quantitative research is required in order to draw firmer conclusions in relation to the organisational capacity and characteristics of RCOs.

6 It is of course precisely the elements of freedom of choice in relation to settlement location and the right to work which have been withdrawn under the dispersal programmes initiated by a spectrum of EU Member States.

7 This is based around a proliferating number of internet cafes, the hawliad system of transfer of remittances to Somalia, and a variety of small shops and restaurants. The Hawliad system and its role in economic reconstruction in Somalia has been investigated by de Monclos (2000). See also Griffiths (2003). There is currently no extant research on the economic activity of Somalis in the UK.
model of a receiving state affects how migrants are enabled to participate in the new social setting 8.

Our research shows how the dominant form of migrant incorporation, predicated upon the race relations framework, continues to impact upon the organisational activities of refugee groups. We confirm in particular that statutory authorities and NGOs continue actively to foster the development of RCOs as the legitimate channel for refugee organisation and representation. However, rather than treat RCOs and their proliferation as a naturally occurring and enduring feature, as is typically the case in the literature, it is necessary to contextualise their role and function within the radically different landscape of contemporary policies. Thus the multicultural model prevalent in the UK (Wahlbeck 1997) 9, which stimulated the process of organisational proliferation in RCOs in the past, has been supplanted by the countervailing tendency of dispersal and social exclusion as the main stimulus to RCO formation.

Further, the organisational proliferation of RCOs in the UK found in our study, may be less a case of ‘vibrancy’ in civil society (as in Putnam) than of the efficacy of state sponsored forms of migrant incorporation and the limited options open to refugees to participate on an equal footing in other social spheres. Werbner (1991) 10 points to a three stage process of mobilisation in migrant communities, from associational empowerment, to ideological convergence and finally mobilisation. The first stage is marked by associational proliferation and the competition for state-allocated resources. Local level processes of segmentation, and the accentuation of class and ideological differences within ethnic communities are the defining feature of this first stage. Our research clearly suggests that RCOs are perhaps following this cycle, placed at a ‘first stage’ in their organisational development. For Werbner, this first stage of organisational proliferation and competition for state allocated resources is by no means entirely negative. In this sense the partnership model informing RCO development under dispersal arrangements is a two way process, specifically as it opens up the possibility for developing networks and organisational forms which more adequately articulate the emerging needs of refugee groups. Yet the growth of informal networks suggests that refugee communities are increasingly circumspect and suspicious, under current conditions, of an essentially rejectionist policy and host environment. Processes of state incorporation depend upon using the ‘inside knowledge’ of hard-to-reach groups and these groups appear to resist the implied control.

We cannot be sure, though if, differences in size, demographic composition, legal status and the character of forced migration, draw a firm dividing line between the broader category of migrants and refugees.

**Networks, resources and social capital**

Turning to the question of networks, it would appear that the effectiveness of any emerging organisational forms depends upon the character of the networks and the relations between the actors involved in those networks. In addition to linking people and organisations, it is clear that the operation of networks also involves the circulation of resources and power. Our research points to significant conclusions in this context. The networks formed by RCOs in relation to statutory authorities and NGOs, in the dispersal regions studied, are characterised by continuing imbalances in the decision-making capacity of agents and by the more general agenda-setting inherent in the institutional arrangements. As regards the notion of resources, these are central to this research. Often used in a descriptive sense to refer to the financial assets of organisations, we suggest the meaning of the term, certainly in the current policy

---

8 For Soysal ‘incorporation’ goes beyond the individual question of integration to investigate the modes in which the state ‘handles’ its outsiders. What are the terms on which they are allowed to participate in the social, economic and political spheres of the receiving state? The basic assumption is that the ‘terms’ set the limits to migrant activity and mobilisation, with direct results for the specific organisational forms they adopt. The use of incorporation is also to be distinguished from Portes and Rumbaut’s notion (1990) of ‘modes of incorporation’ which refers to the complex formed by the policies of the host government, the values and prejudices of the receiving society, and the characteristics of the co-ethnic community. Portes uses this to develop a typology of different ‘assimilation’ outcomes for ethnic groups depending on the specific configuration of these variables. This concept is closely linked to that of ‘segmented assimilation’ which has come to dominate migration discourse in the North American context.

9 Wahlbeck emphasises that this is also a question of the relative size of the refugee communities which are obviously fairly negligible in the case of Finland.

10 Werbner draws on the theory of urban movements, and referring to the post-war migrants from the Caribbean and South Asia,
environment, must embrace a variety of factors: the material and symbolic rewards derived from participation in networks involving RCOs; the skills and capacities of particular groups, including their degree of internal coherence, can also be considered as significant resources which may affect the groups’ capacity to develop effective community organisations and indeed their willingness, or not, to be part of formal agency structure 11. The issue of resources is also inherent in the possession, direction and allocation of funding streams and the superior organisational capacity, expertise and technical knowledge dominated by the large NGOs and Home Office institutions in their relationship with the weaker RCO sector. For these reasons, our research confirms that conflict over resource allocation remains endemic to RCO operation and also to their relations with the other agencies involved in the refugee field. Significantly, though, our research suggest that under current conditions, it appears that these constraints impel refugee communities towards more informal methods of networking, discussed above, in preference to more formal methods in the past.

One research questions the relative strengths and weaknesses of Putnam’s conception of social capital and the notion of bridging and linking social capital (Putnam 1993). We use the term critically to describe the material and symbolic benefits deriving from participation in networks and RCOs. Arguably, however, Putnam’s perspective as a whole suffers from a weak understanding of institutional constraints and the corrosive effects of structured inequalities which are the pervasive conditions in the currently unstable and largely rejectionist policy framework for refugees.

Firstly, as argued above, the state context of migrant incorporation provides the framework within which refugees are allowed and encouraged to organise. The state level is therefore one of the preconditions of the ‘efflorescence’ of associational activity which produces social capital, rather than simply its outcome as appears to be assumed in Putnam (Serra 1999). The operation of state power (exercised through a variety of agencies) is in this sense both productive and directive. The state, through the operation of NGOs and the considerable history of devolution to partner agencies in the reception and settlement of refugees, sets the parameters within which refugee groups may legitimately organise to represent their interests. The significant point here is the impact of dispersal upon refugee communities. While this has partially disrupted the networks which would be formed by allowing asylum seekers freedom of movement – the dispersal of asylum seekers to areas where there are no existing refugee communities is a particularly damaging feature of this process – it has also created new opportunities for the development of refugee communities in the regions. Many of these, as we have noted, have been set up from scratch.

Second, we conclude that blocked labour market opportunities, and the deficiencies of public service provision are two of the primary spurs to RCO formation. Counter to the romanticism of Putnam’s perspective, the formation of social capital in refugee communities is a product of crisis and social breakdown. As Molyneux (2001) has suggested, recourse to social networks occurs typically as a ‘coping strategy’ in situations of social collapse. The analysis of social capital in refugee communities should not therefore seek to celebrate and reinforce what arises, in large part, from desperation. Again, the broader institutional and structural level needs to be brought back into focus.

Whilst there has been a discernible move towards more rational debate about instigating a system of managed migration which could also ease the flow of asylum seekers, profound ambiguities in the asylum and refugee policy framework remain. Asylum condenses a number of anxieties and perceived threats: to national and cultural identity; to enlarged welfare spending and to security issues. Governmental response has tended to restrictionism, prompted by media generated panic about abuse of the asylum system and political manipulation of the asylum issue 12. An overriding assumption is one of by unfounded

---

11 The case of the Somalis, for example, illustrated the organisational proliferation and competition which appeared to stem from the politics of an internally divided community.

12 Prime Minister Blair’s commitment to halve the number of asylum seekers applying to the UK by the Autumn of 2003 is a case in point. It may not be insignificant that this commitment was made at the outset of the war with Iraq. This was clearly likely to result in a reduction of Iraqi asylum applicants, as Iraq was one of the principal countries of origin of asylum applicants in that period.
applications. The framework in which both ‘unfounded’ and ‘genuine’ asylum seekers are deterred from entering the state and from enjoying freedom of movement and a range of other entitlements once inside it, establishes a policy norm of the non-integration of asylum seekers in a spectrum of EU states. By contrast, once accepted into the UK as recognised refugees, many of these same individuals are invited to integrate as ‘full and equal citizens’. These ambiguities, we contend, are structural determinants of the ambiguous and precarious position of RCOs in contemporary Britain and the fragility of their social capital.

The shadow of the ‘race relations’ framework falls heavily upon the whole enterprise. Restrictive and racialised immigration control is complemented by the emphasis on promoting harmonious race relations through equal opportunities legislation and other forms of community involvement and representation (Solomos 1998). The often-repeated need to forestall the rise of the Far Right which underpins restrictive asylum policies echoes a long line of proselytisers for ‘harmonious race relations’ in the post-war period. Only by ‘acting tough on asylum’, so it is argued, will race relations be maintained. The effect, on the contrary, is to more deeply entrench negative public perceptions of migrants and asylum seekers (Schuster 2003). This broader framework therefore properly contextualises the analysis of RCOs and the role of social capital in their formation.

**Outputs**
Outlines of the research have been published in a number of practitioner outlets and publicised by a variety of NGOs. The research closely involved the growing number of refugee networks in the regions. We intend to develop these in future research and consultancy and an RCO workshop.

We are preparing two book proposals. One will be a monograph aimed at an academic audience, hopefully contracted by Palgrave-Macmillan for whom we are already contracted for a book on an EU funded research on refugee integration. The second will be a shorter policy-based report directed at NGOs and refugee community organisations, probably with Policy Press who published a policy focused research report of the team in 1999.

An RCO ‘user’ questionnaire deployed with a selection of RCOs in London and the regions has generated data for a separate publication.

We aim to publish journal papers based upon the theoretical chapters in the attached report, notably relating to discussions of social capital in relation to refugee communities and also based upon the fieldwork elements of the research. A third, general comparative paper is in the process of being completed. Specific papers on the situation in the regions are also being considered for publication.

**Impacts**
We will hold a workshop based upon the research the Spring of 2004 inviting the NGO sector and RCOs involved in our fieldwork, and a spectrum of stakeholders - including government and statutory agencies - to feedback findings and to discuss the changing role of RCOs identified in the research. The workshop will contribute to publications and will also be published on our website and other NGO/RCO outlets.

**Future Priorities**
Whilst the research has satisfied a number of the original objectives, inevitably it raises other questions and dimensions. A comparative study with other EU member states is one line we will peruse. Given the harmonisation of restrictive policies but the diversity of refugee and asylum communities and the different histories and patterns of RCO development in Europe, this will prove a fruitful line of investigation.

---

13 The high level of initial rejections of asylum claims is used as evidence that the vast majority of claims are unfounded. Yet over 40% of applicants currently (December 2003) receive positive decisions after appeals are taken into consideration.
The ascribed role of RCOs as agents of integration and the definition of integration remain illusive, the more so given the essentially hostile policy environment which feeds into and on local prejudice and concerns about new forms of immigration. We will follow up this question partly in our book on *The Reception and Integration of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Europe: Convergence or Divergence?* Zetter, Griffiths and Sigona with Macmillan/Palgrave 2004/5 using data from this research, but also in a future research proposal.

**References**


Gameledin-Ashami, M., Cooper, L. And Knight, B. (2002) *Refugee Settlement: Can Communities Cope?* London: Evelyn Oldfield Unit


Phillimore, J. and Goodson, L. (2001) *Exploring mechanisms for the integration of asylum seekers and refugees into the labour market in Wolverhampton*, report for Wolverhampton Connects by the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, the University of Birmingham, October 2001


(5055 words excluding references and footnotes)