OPENING DOORS
training modules

training module 1: the challenge

What this module includes:

■ what the terms asylum seekers, refugees and new migrants mean
■ basic facts on asylum, refugees and migration
■ the challenge for housing organisations

[Refer to chapters 2 and 3 of the CIH/JRF guide]

What do the words mean?

Getting the language right is very important when talking about asylum seekers, refugees and new migrants. Unfortunately, the press and politicians – and hence the public at large – often get the terms mixed up or use them as terms of abuse.

For example, soon after the July bombings in London in 2006, the Daily Express ran the headline ‘Bombers were all spongeing asylum seekers’. Not only could the Express not spell ‘sponging’, but its facts were wrong. None of those thought to have been involved in the bombing were then thought to have been asylum seekers. They were not even immigrants.

Discussion: How do we use the term ‘asylum seeker’ and what does it mean?

■ what words do we use to describe people who are newcomers to country?
■ what effect do they have?
■ what does ‘asylum seeker’ mean?
■ what do people feel about being called ‘asylum seekers’ or ‘refugees’?

Defining the words

The best way to use the different terms is so that they mean what they are supposed to mean – the status that people have in immigration law.

Unfortunately, immigration law is very complex: there are different kinds of status for people who have a right to stay in Britain, peoples’ status can change, and the law is constantly altering.
Also, once a person is accepted as a 'refugee', it is really up to him or her how long he uses that label. People might prefer not to be known as refugees if they feel they have now made their home in Britain.

In these training modules we use the following terms. Some more terminology will be introduced in later modules. But these are the basic terms that apply throughout. They can also be safely used in most non-legal reports or papers on this subject.

**asylum**
is the protection under United Nations conventions, given by one country to people from another, who are often fleeing persecution, torture or war

**asylum seekers**
are people who have applied for asylum, but whose cases have not yet been decided or are subject to legal appeal

**point of decision**
is the point at which asylum seekers are notified of the outcome of their application, and the period (officially 28 days) after which the support they received as asylum seekers ends

**refugees**
are people who have been granted refugee status, or leave to stay in Britain - and who have rights to housing, to work, and many of the other rights of full citizens

**people refused asylum**
are those whose applications have been rejected, but are still living here either because they are awaiting return to their home country or have decided to stay without permission

**new migrants**
refers broadly to people who have come to live in Britain for whatever reason, including economic and social reasons, especially from countries which do not already have large, established communities here

**A8 nationals**
are people who come from the recent ‘accession states’ to the European Union and who have permission to enter Britain to work

**long-term residents**
people established in Britain and forming the ‘host’ communities for new migrants – who may themselves be from minority ethnic groups

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**Discussion: How much do we know about asylum seekers and refugees?**

- what proportion of people arriving in Britain every year are asylum seekers?
- how many asylum seekers come here in a typical year?
- do more asylum seekers come to Britain than to other countries?
- where do most refugees live?
| **Basic facts** | Each month more than 2m people come to Britain from overseas, the majority as tourists, visitors or students. The figures below show that those coming to seek asylum are a very small proportion of the total. |
| **How many migrants are asylum seekers or refugees?** | This question is not easy to answer. One way to look at it is to focus on the latest year’s figures (the ‘flow’) and another is to ask ‘of all the people here, how many originally came as asylum seekers or refugees?’ (the ‘stock’). No-one knows the answer to the second question, although we do know how many people here were born outside the UK, and the reasons why people are given the right to settle here (see below). |
| **How many new arrivals are asylum seekers?** | There are now about 25,000 asylum seekers arriving annually, down from 80,000 in 2002. |
| **Where do they come from?** | This fluctuates from year to year as wars and other political problems affect the need for people to seek asylum. Currently (2006), the largest numbers of asylum seekers are from Afghanistan, China, Eritrea, Iran, Somalia and Zimbabwe. |
| **Who are they?** | A typical asylum seeker is young, more likely to be male than female and unlikely to have family dependants with him or her. In 2005, the 25,000 applicants had only 5,000 family members with them. Some 70% of asylum seekers are male, and three-quarters are under 35 years old. (This picture may be different in the dispersal areas, where there is a greater proportion of families.) |
| **What about their children?** | Most have no children with them, although of course many have left families behind - who are likely to want them to join them if they get accepted as refugees. Some asylum seekers are children travelling independently. Since 2000, about 15,000 unaccompanied children have entered Britain to seek asylum, mainly 14-17 year olds. |
| **How many become accepted refugees?** | In 2005 just over 30% of asylum seekers were given the right to stay in Britain, either directly or on appeal. |
| **How many asylum seekers are here now?** | Currently (2006) there are about 43,000 asylum seekers in the UK supported by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS). More than two-thirds of these receive accommodation, and less than one-third receive subsistence without accommodation. We do not know the numbers of people still here who refused NASS help when they came. |
| **Where do asylum seekers live?** | The map on the next page shows where asylum seekers live who are currently supported by NASS. NASS generally accommodates people in ‘dispersal areas’. More than three-quarters of asylum seekers housed through NASS are in the Midlands, the north of England, Wales or Scotland. However, of those only receiving subsistence, three-quarters are living in London and the south-east. |
Total number of asylum seekers in NASS dispersal accommodation – 30,710
Total number of asylum seekers in receipt of subsistence only support – 12,020
Overall total of asylum seekers supported by NASS – 42,930

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>NASS dispersal accommodation</th>
<th>Subsistence only support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>4730</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>2925</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire &amp; Humberside</td>
<td>6610</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Region</td>
<td>490</td>
<td>473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>1190</td>
<td>8390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>995</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>2335</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>4655</td>
<td>665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>2055</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Region</td>
<td>490</td>
<td>473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>2335</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10 areas with most asylum seekers receiving accommodation & subsistence:
- Glasgow
- Gtr Manchester
- Leeds
- Birmingham
- Newcastle
- Cardiff
- Nottingham
- Sheffield
- Liverpool
- Swansea

10 areas with most asylum seekers receiving subsistence only:
- Newham
- Haringey
- Ealing
- Enfield
- Waltham Forest
- Brent
- Gtr Manchester
- Hackney
- Redbridge
- Southwark

10 areas with most asylum seekers receiving subsistence only (excl. London):
- Gtr Manchester
- Birmingham
- Leicester
- Luton
- Slough
- Leeds
- Bristol
- Coventry
- Liverpool
- Edinburgh
Are asylum seekers especially attracted to Britain?

World-wide, the vast majority of people moving to escape persecution go to neighbouring regions or countries. So, for example, there are many people who have escaped the repressive regime in Burma (Myanmar) who are living in refugee camps in Thailand. In Sudan, the controversy about the plight of refugees in Darfur is about people who have moved to camps there from elsewhere in the same country. Within the European Union, Britain receives a similar number of asylum applications as Germany does, and France receives twice as many as Britain.

Gateway – An Alternative Approach

As we will see later in the training modules, the government is promoting a direct means of helping people who have often lived for years in refugee camps in developing countries, by bringing them here as accepted refugees (missing out the ‘asylum seeker’ stage). This is called the Gateway programme.

Discussion: How much do we know about migration generally?

- how fast is Britain’s population growing?
- how much is this due to inward migration?
- what kind of people migrate to Britain?
- from which countries?
- what does ‘illegal immigrant’ mean?

Overall migration – more basic facts

Britain’s population is now about 60 million, and is expected to grow to about 64m by 2030, before stabilising. Migration is an important element: each year, between 150,000 and 200,000 extra people come to live in the UK, compared with natural population increases of little more than 50,000.

Is migration increasing?

Yes, in 2004 about 223,000 more people migrated into Britain than migrated out. This was a record since figures started to be collected in 1991. However, it may not be a long-term trend – it is probably strongly related to the expansion of the EU. In the past, the level of migration has fluctuated considerably. But for the moment, the gap between ‘inflow’ and ‘outflow’ is widening.

See the graph on the next page.

Who are the migrants?

Migrants are generally younger than existing residents, so they help to slow the shift towards an ageing population. Around three-quarters of migrants are young people (15-44 years old).
International migration into and out of the UK, 1995 to 2004

Where are they from?
One in twelve people now living in Britain was born overseas. More than half of these are from the US or ‘old Commonwealth’ countries like Canada and Australia, and the other major groups are people from the Indian sub-continent, Africa and the Caribbean.

Is this pattern constant?
No - in 1981, people from India, Pakistan and the Caribbean accounted for 63% of the BME population, now the proportion is down to just over half. Many thousands are now accepted as residents from places like Somalia, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and the former Yugoslavia. And in the last few years there have been many more people from EU countries.

Is migration from the EU a big factor?
Yes - about 400,000 people have come from the A8 countries to work in Britain since 2004. The number of other EU newcomers – for example, Somali people who move here having been residents of countries such as Holland or Sweden – is not known.

How many people who stay here are refugees?
Again, this varies from year to year. The chart below shows the reasons people gave for settlement in 2004. About 37% were refugees or their dependants.

![Reasons for Settlement in the UK, 2004](chart)
And how many people are ‘illegal immigrants’? This term is an umbrella term used irresponsibly by the press. If used to mean people who have been refused asylum but are still here, or have otherwise entered or ‘stayed on’ without permission, then the figure can only be estimated. One government study, based on comparisons with other countries, has estimated that the figure may be 430,000 – but it could be much more or much less.

What is an ‘illegal asylum seeker’? There is no such thing, and the Press Complaints Commission is trying to get the press to avoid using the term (see below).

From the Press Complaints Commission website:
The Commission is concerned that editors should ensure that their journalists covering these issues are mindful of the problems that can occur and take care to avoid misleading or distorted terminology. By way of example, as an ‘asylum seeker’ is someone currently seeking refugee status or humanitarian protection, there can be no such thing in law as an ‘illegal asylum seeker’. A ‘refugee’ is someone who has fled their country in fear of their life, and may have been granted asylum under the 1951 Refugee Convention or someone who otherwise qualifies for Humanitarian Protection, Discretionary Leave or has been granted Exceptional Leave to Remain in the country. An asylum seeker can only become an ‘illegal immigrant’ if he or she remains in the UK after having failed to respond to a removal notice.

What effect does this have on Britain’s economy? As we have seen migrants to Britain – for whatever reason – tend to be younger people, usually wanting to work, and often having skills needed here. For example, in 2004 there were an estimated 1,000 refugee doctors interested in working in the NHS. Below is one of many studies showing the effects on the economy of immigration.

Immigrants ‘help the economy grow by 3%’
Angela Balakrishnan, from The Guardian, Friday October 27, 2006

Large inflows of migrant workers in recent years have provided a significant boost to UK economic growth, a report by a leading thinktank said yesterday. The National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) weighed into the growing debate about the impact of immigration on Britain by saying the big influx of people in the past eight years had expanded the economy by a hefty 3%. In 2004-05, immigration contributed about one percentage point to growth of 5.3%.

The NIESR said immigration was providing "substantial benefits to the Treasury" since the tax system meant migrant workers were likely to be net contributors. Adult immigrants were also unlikely to require public funds and so would be more likely to make a net lifetime contribution to the economy. This effect was magnified if they returned to their country. Official data shows that since 1997, immigrants have made up 5% of the working population. This proportion was far higher among the young, with 7.5% of 18 to 24-year-olds and 11.6% of 25 to 34-year-olds being from other countries.
The Challenge!

What does all this mean for housing organisations? These changes at national level of course mean changes for the cities or towns where migrants settle (or, in the case of asylum seekers, to which they are 'dispersed').

Here are some of the kinds of change that we will be looking at in the later modules of the training programme:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population change</th>
<th>At local level this affects the need for services and the resource requirements of housing organisations.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People need accommodation</td>
<td>What is the demand for housing from new migrant groups? Do we know enough about the kinds of housing they need and their housing preferences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People need advice and support</td>
<td>What might the support needs of new migrants be? How do we go about finding out about them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People move into communities</td>
<td>What effects will that have? How can we work to ensure that newcomers are accepted in communities? How can we tackle tensions that might arise?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People form new local groups</td>
<td>Migrant and refugee community organisations (MRCOs) are an important resource for new migrants that can also be a resource for housing organisations. How do we make relations with MRCOs that are mutually beneficial?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Follow up to training module 1

- √ Do you know what information is available on asylum seekers, refugees and other new migrant groups in your area?
- √ How would you go about finding out?
- √ In the communities where you work, has the make up of the population changed in the last few years? If so, how?
- √ Does everyone in your organisation have a good idea what terms like ‘asylum seeker’ and ‘refugee’ mean?
- √ Are asylum seekers accommodated in your area? If so, where and who by?
- √ Do you know if asylum seekers, refugees or new migrants generally are already using your services?
- √ Are you collecting information in ways which would show if they were?