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The impact of Home Office funded services for refugees: findings from an exploratory survey of clients

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Home Office Online Report 45/04

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Through the European Refugee Fund (ERF) and the Challenge Fund, the Home Office provides funding on an annual basis for projects aimed at helping refugees and asylum seekers to settle and integrate into the UK. One goal of these funding streams is to improve our level of knowledge about 'what works' in refugee settlement and integration. In moving towards this goal the Home Office has undertaken a full evaluation with funded projects, of which the study reported here is part. Through interviews with clients at ten funded projects, it has aimed to provide information on the experiences and needs of the refugee population, and to examine the impact on refugees of projects funded through the two schemes.

Main points

- The survey highlights that the clients of ERF and Challenge Fund services in 2002-2003 were an extremely disadvantaged group – more disadvantaged than residents in even the most deprived areas in Britain.
- 'Housing' was the main area that service clients felt needed improving in their lives. Similarly, feeling 'satisfied' with various aspects of housing was the factor most strongly associated with a 'good quality of life'. Very few respondents were working either full or part time (8%), though 33 per cent said that 'employment' was something that they felt needed improvement in their lives, suggesting that there is considerable scope to engage higher numbers of refugees in the job market.
- The circumstances of refugees appear to improve a little after two or three years of residence in Britain (in terms of English skills, satisfaction with housing, income). However, even after this time, refugees remain severely disadvantaged (especially when compared with the rest of the UK population). It is clear that interventions such as those delivered by the projects funded by ERF and Challenge Fund are needed to tackle these problems.
- The projects funded through the ERF and Challenge Fund that were involved in this research had delivered real benefits to project clients and were operating effectively. The great majority of clients interviewed rated the service they received as good (75%), and many had experienced improvements in aspects of their lives as a result of using services:
 - Among clients of housing services, 66 per cent were currently living in a home provided or found by an ERF or Challenge Fund project
 - Among clients of employment help, 14 per cent (5/36 respondents) had accessed employment and a further 28 per cent (10/36 respondents) felt more confident about getting a job in the future;
 - Among those who attended language classes, 55 per cent (26/47 respondents) said that their English skills had improved.
- In general, housing emerged as the top concern for project clients (among all clients interviewed, 64% identified housing as a key priority for improvement).

Characteristics of project clients

Respondents to the survey held a range of different immigration statuses, as the following table shows:

Immigration status	% base (404)
British citizen	6
Indefinite leave to remain	33
Exceptional leave to remain	18
Temporary admission/awaiting initial decision	26
Appealing initial refusal	12
Refused asylum	1
Other/no answer	4
Total	100

As would be expected, the profile of clients differed markedly depending on whether the project was classified as 'integration' or 'settlement' focused. At integration projects, between 70 per cent and 100 per cent of clients were British citizens, or had leave to remain. At the one settlement project covered by the survey (the British Red Cross) 84 per cent of clients were still awaiting asylum decisions.

In addition to immigration status, the project clients interviewed for this research had distinctive socio-demographic characteristics that need to be taken into account when interpreting the findings.

In particular, compared with the national population, project clients had a much younger age profile. A quarter of respondents (26%) were aged 16-24, compared with 11 per cent of the population of England and Wales¹ - and only a third (34%) were aged 35+ compared with 55 per cent among the population of England and Wales.

There were greater numbers of both smaller and larger households amongst our sample than exist in the wider population. Over a third (36%) lived in one-person households compared with 30 per cent in Great Britain as a whole, whilst five per cent lived in households of greater than six (compared with 2% in GB as a whole).²

The survey collected a range of demographic details about project clients (gender, age, location, country of origin etc.). Perhaps in part due to the limited sample size, these factors were seldom significantly associated with outcomes for respondents. Where differences are apparent these have been mentioned in the text.

¹ Census 2001 (England and Wales)

² Census 2001 (Great Britain)

Quality of life for project clients of case study projects

Initially, the research focused upon 'quality of life'. It was found that project clients were much more likely to report a "bad" quality of life³ (24%) than is generally found among adults nationally (3%)⁴ or even among residents in 'Britain's New Deal for Communities' regeneration areas who are among the most disadvantaged in the country (10%)⁵. Conversely, 56 per cent of clients reported a 'good' quality of life, compared with 83 per cent nationally.⁶

The factors most associated with a good quality of life for project clients were primarily *housing related*: in particular; satisfaction with 'your right to remain living in your home, if you want to', with the 'number of rooms' and 'the general state of repair'. Broadly 70 per cent of respondents who were satisfied on these scores reported a 'good' quality of life, and 77 per cent of those who were 'satisfied' on all three counts.

Other factors associated with a 'good' quality of life were:

- immigration status (65% of those with full citizenship or leave to remain felt that they had a 'good' quality of life);
- proximity to relatives (68% of those who had visited relatives in the previous month); and
- household income (69% of those whose income was greater than £100 per week).

All the above factors tended to be particularly important, but analysis also suggests that others had an important impact on quality of life *in certain circumstances*. These additional factors included the level of involvement with the local community, not feeling isolated, not feeling financially dependent upon friends or family, the level of qualifications held upon arrival and - it seems - living outside London.

For example, those who are satisfied with their housing and who did not need family reunion and who felt involved in their local community were very likely to report a 'good' quality of life (91% - on a par with the UK population as a whole). Alternatively, those dissatisfied with their housing, living in London, and who arrived in the UK with previous qualifications, were very unlikely to report a 'good' quality of life (just 26%).

Loneliness and isolation

The data suggests that the feeling of 'isolation and loneliness', though only a concern for a small number of project clients (15%), is strongly associated with a poor quality of life; just 38 per cent of people who said that this aspect of their lives needed improving said that their quality of life was 'good'.

³ Quality of life was defined as: "how you feel overall about your life, including your standard of living, your surroundings, friendships and how you feel day-to-day"

⁴ Source: Public Attitudes to Quality of Life and the Environment 2001 (England only)

⁵ Source: New Deal for Communities Household Survey Baseline, MORI/NOP Neighbourhood Renewal Unit October 2002 (England only).

⁶ When looking at these comparisons it is important to bear in mind that refugees have a different socio-demographic profile to the rest of the population. It may be that these socio-demographic differences, as well as their experience as refugees, are both factors in determining differences between project clients and the wider population.

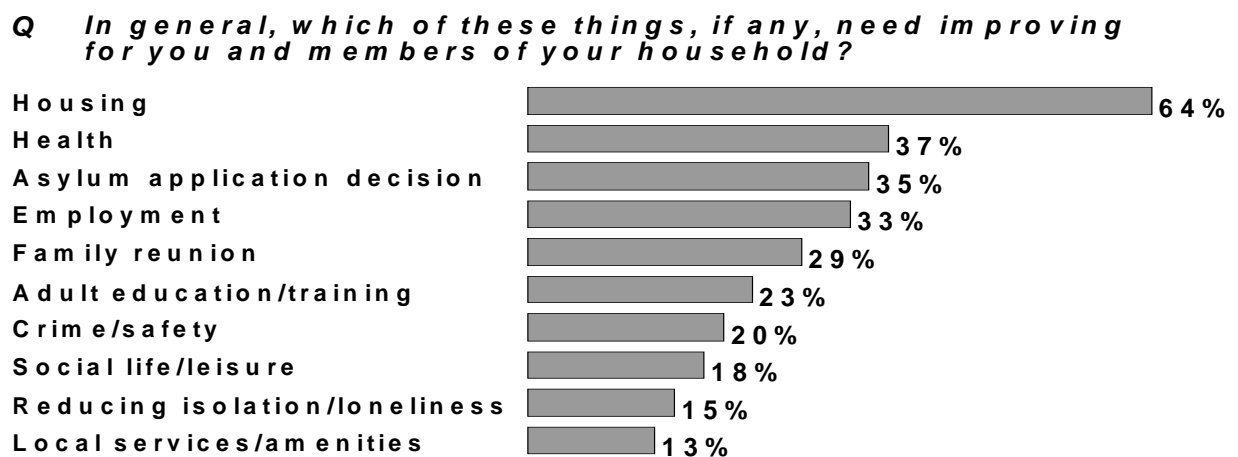
The impact of employment

The number of respondents in our sample in employment was so low (8%) that any analysis of the impact of employment on peoples' lives through this survey has been impossible. However, a notable proportion of respondents (33%) selected 'employment' to be something that they felt needed improving in their lives, and these respondents were less likely to report a 'good' quality of life (47%). This suggests that employment was *seen* by the refugee community as something that *could* improve things, particularly amongst those who are felt that they had a 'bad' quality of life at the time of interview. Unfortunately, we cannot yet test whether employment has the positive impact that many of our respondents anticipated.

Project clients' priorities

Project clients were asked to select their own priorities for improving quality of life. The most frequently selected issues were housing (64%), health (37%), the asylum application decision (35%), employment (33%) and family reunion (28%).

Figure 1: Improvements to quality of life



Base: 404 service

Looking separately at the priorities of project clients who had been in the UK for three years or more, housing (68%) and health (47%) continued to be important priorities for improvement. However, other issues had risen in importance for this group, including: employment (41%), crime and safety (35%) and a range of issues around local services; for example social life and leisure (22%). From this we could conclude that although the granting of 'Leave to Remain' may open up greater opportunities for accessing a better quality of life for refugees, they can still have very basic needs for housing and health – even two or three years after their arrival.

Comparing project clients with the rest of society

Looking specifically at the factors that can be linked to integration – housing, health, qualifications, involvement in and treatment by the local community, income and employment - and comparing these with the wider population, highlights the disadvantage of many refugees.

For example, gross average weekly income for project clients was found to be just £75, compared with £466 nationally,⁷ and the proportion unemployed or seeking work was 26 per cent, compared with three per cent nationally.⁸ In addition, on most measures, the circumstances of project clients were found to be much worse than those of residents in Britain's New Deal for Communities (NDC) areas and/or among black/ethnic minority residents.

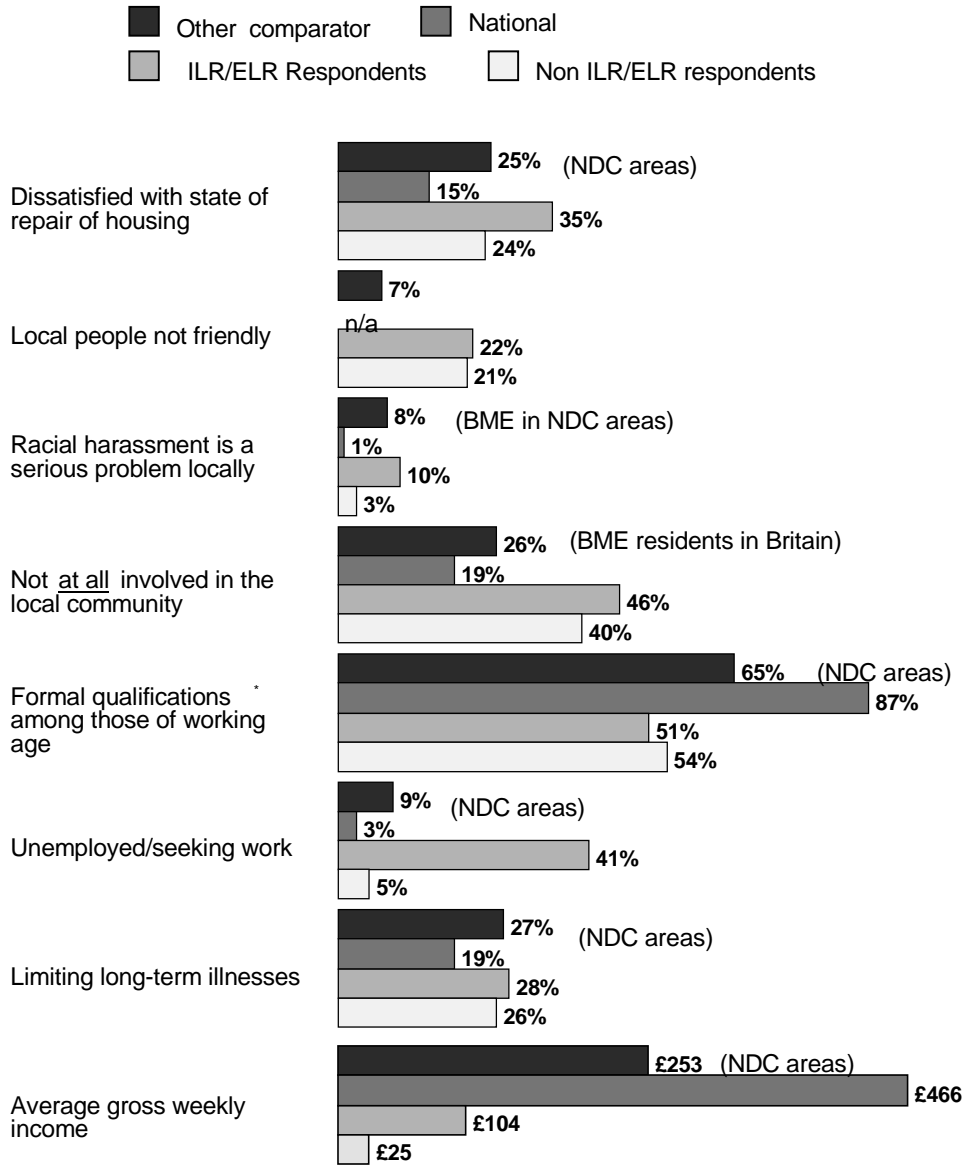
Figure 2 highlights the circumstances of project clients interviewed and how these compare with residents nationally or with residents in Britain's New Deal for Communities areas, which are among the most deprived in the country.

The findings are broken down by immigration status so that the results for those with leave to remain (including British citizens) are shown separately from those still awaiting asylum decisions. When looking at the comparisons with the wider UK population it is important to bear in mind that refugees also have a different socio-demographic profile to the rest of the population. It may be that these socio-demographic differences, as well as their experience as refugees, are both factors in determining differences between project clients and the wider population.

⁷ Survey of English Housing, 2000/2001 (England only).

⁸ Labour Force Survey 2002 (UK).

Figure 2: Key integration measures



Base: 404 refugee clients, aged 16+, interviewed face-to-face, Nov 2002 - Jan 2003

* Formal qualifications refers to qualifications from school, college, university, through work or from government schemes

Comparative data: see footnote 6

Source: MORI

⁹ Sources of comparative data:

New Deal for Community area figures: NDC Household Survey, MORI/Neighbourhood Renewal Unit Jul-Oct 2002 (England only)

National figures: Health: General Household Survey 2000 (Great Britain)

Employment and qualifications: Labour Force Survey 2002 (UK)

Community Involvement: MORI/Cabinet Office People's Panel 1998 (UK)

Other aspects: Survey of English Housing 2000/2001 (England only)

Black/Minority ethnic nationally: MORI/Cabinet Office, People's Panel BME Booster, 2000 (UK)

The impact of immigration status and length time in the UK

Circumstances of project clients did seem to have improved with the granting of Leave to Remain (ILR/ELR) and with length of residence but only in a limited number of ways, and to a limited degree. On the positive side, 50 per cent of respondents who had lived in the UK for three years or more said that they could communicate all or most things verbally in English. This was more than for the 36 per cent of respondents who had arrived in the last year. Those who have lived in the UK for three or more years were also more likely to be satisfied with their security of tenure: 50 per cent compared with 33 per cent among those who had lived in the UK under a year. They were also more likely to feel *a great deal more* involved in the local community, or in the activities of their ethnic group, than more recent arrivals.

However, progress towards integration had not extended far, even among refugees who had lived in the UK for three years or more. The written English skills of this group were found to be no better than those of recent arrivals, and they still featured levels of disadvantage well above the national average on many integration measures. For example, average gross household income among those resident for three years or over was still only £93.40 per week – more than the average for all clients (£75) but less than a quarter of that found nationally, and less than half of that found among residents in Britain's NDC areas. Only 14 per cent of this group were working, and 32 per cent were unemployed. In addition, the proportion feeling *not at all* involved in the local community, at 39 per cent, was twice the proportion nationally (19%).

How did project clients regard the quality and usefulness of the case-study funded projects?

Whilst even those respondents who had spent the most time in the UK remained disadvantaged in many ways when compared with the rest of the population, the survey suggests that services provided by the ERF and Challenge Fund have been well regarded by this group and had had some impact on aspects of individuals' quality of life.

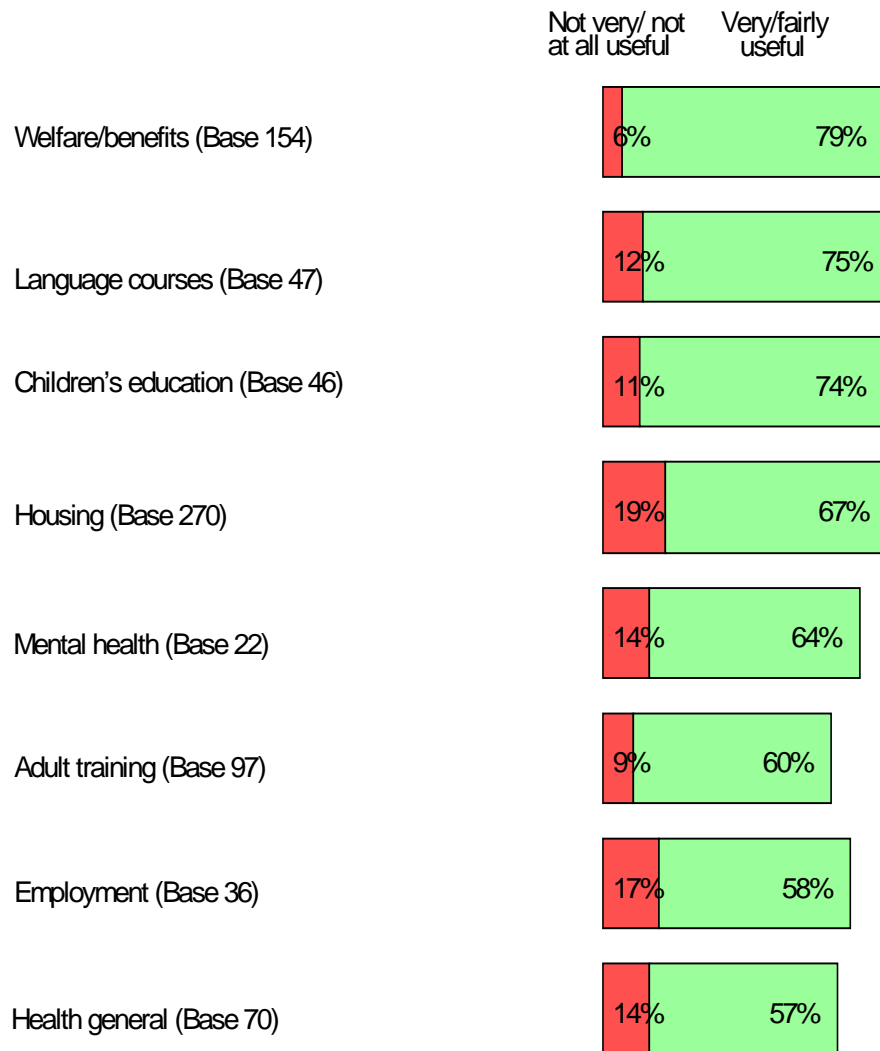
Overall, three-quarters (75%) of all project clients interviewed found the service they received from the funded project to be good and only 12 per cent found it to be poor (the remainder were neutral or said that they didn't know).

Within projects, the majority of clients found all types of the services provided to have been useful. The services rated as most useful by clients¹⁰ were: welfare benefits advice (79%) and English classes (75%). Services with the highest proportions saying services had *not* been very useful were housing (19%) and employment (17%). To a large extent this will reflect the fact that what clients would ideally like to have received from projects (provision of accommodation, or access to a job) were more difficult to achieve than the outcomes of other services (such as good advice).

¹⁰ Figures for usefulness of each type of advice are based only on those who had used that specific type of advice.

The following chart shows how the 'usefulness' of different services compares.

Figure 3: Perceived usefulness of funded projects



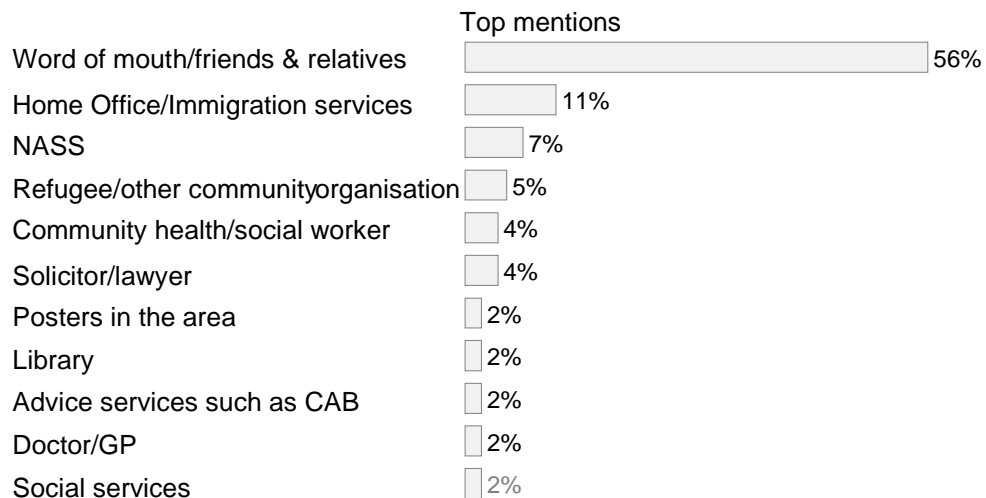
Base: All users of help or advice from funded projects

Awareness of projects

An overwhelming majority of clients had heard about the services they used through word of mouth. Projects may need to be encouraged to make greater use of other channels of communication if they are to ensure that all groups of refugees and asylum seekers are aware of services that could potentially help them.

Figure 4: Sources of information

Q How did you first hear or find out about the services provided by Project X?



Base: 404 service users, 16+, face-to-face, Nov 2002-Jan 2003

Source: MORI

What benefits did clients gain from case-study projects?

In interpreting the findings in this section it should be remembered that the sample size interviewed at each project was low, and that the projects selected for the survey were themselves only a sample of the projects funded through the two funds. For this reason findings should be seen as *indicative of the kinds of impacts that funded projects can have*.

All types of services provided positive, concrete outcomes to many clients, although not the majority of clients in all cases.

Two-thirds (66%) of clients of housing services were living in homes provided or found by ERF or Challenge Fund projects. Over two-fifths of these (18/42 respondents) said that they had been provided with accommodation that was of a better quality than that in which they had previously lived in the UK by the funded project. However, a third (15/42 respondents) said it was worse. Dissatisfaction with the general state of housing repair was higher among those living in accommodation provided by funded projects than among project clients from case study projects as a whole. This highlights that there are clear limitations to the quality of housing that funded projects are able to provide. This may reflect the level of resources at their disposal.

Among recipients of employment help, one in seven (5/36 respondents) said the help they received directly contributed to them accessing employment, and this included three respondents

who said it had helped them to find a job that reflected their skills and qualifications. In addition, over a third (13 respondents) said that help had improved their chances of getting a job in the future, while just over a fifth (8/36 respondents) said it had improved their chances of accessing a job that reflected their skills and qualifications. Only 17 per cent (6/36 respondents) said the support received had not helped them to get a job or improved their chances of getting a job. Whilst the numbers reported here are low, it should be remembered that interviews took place with only a small proportion of all ERF and Challenge Fund clients.

Two-thirds (31/48 respondents) of those who had attended English language classes cited some type of activity involving English language skills that the classes had helped them to be able to do; just a quarter (12/48 respondents) said that there was none. The most common activities that classes had helped clients to do were:

- asking for something in a shop (43%, 20/48 respondents);
- writing a letter (38%, 18/48 respondents); and
- filling in a form (36%, 17/48 respondents).

In addition, almost a quarter (11/48 respondents) said that attending the classes had helped them to work.

Methodological note

The fieldwork for this study was undertaken by Market & Opinion International (MORI) between 18 November 2002 and 10 January 2003. Interviews were conducted with 404 clients from a sample of ten out of the 63 projects funded through the ERF or Challenge Fund in 2002-2003. These projects were;

- The West Midlands Refugee Council (13 respondents)
- Asylum Seeker Advice Project (52)
- Sierra Leone Refugee Welfare Association (10)
- Wakefield Council Refugee Services (31)
- St Pancras Refugee Centre (34)
- Tamil Relief Centre (10)
- East London Somali Association (81)
- RETAS (13)
- Praxis (4)
- British Refugee Council (156)

Interviews were undertaken face-to-face either on site at funded projects, or at respondents' homes (if contact details were made available by projects), respondents were approached initially through project managers. Interviews were conducted both in English and other languages using 'mother tongue interviewers' and both professional and 'household' interpreters. Research materials were translated into the main languages used by respondents.

The questionnaire was designed to gain feedback on the specific projects that respondents had used and as such, differed to some extent from project to project. More general questions about circumstances and quality of life etc. were asked of all respondents and were included to maximise the comparability with other surveys of the UK population. Comparisons to findings from other surveys are highlighted in this report. These should be treated with some caution

as methodological differences between surveys affects the level of comparability to a greater or lesser extent. Therefore, comparisons to other surveys should be seen as broadly indicative, rather than a precise measurement of the different circumstances of refugees to other groups.

It is also important to note that the findings in this report should not be thought of as representative of *all* clients of *all* projects funded through the ERF and Challenge Fund. Rather, the study provides indicative case study information about the circumstances and experiences of refugees and asylum seekers who have been supported by projects funded through the two schemes.

Some findings reported here are based on particularly small sub-groups of the sample; where this occurs the base size is reported in brackets.

Fifty-five percent of the sample were men and 45% women.

Full methodological details are available in a separate technical report available upon request.

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