

## **INTERVENTION STUDY**

# **Supporting asylum seeker and refugee children within the education system in England (SPARC project)**

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University**

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## Abbreviations and acronyms

<b>ASAR</b>	Asylum seekers and refugees
<b>ARC</b>	Asylum seeker and refugee children
<b>ASST</b>	Asylum seeker support team
<b>BME</b>	Black and minority ethnic
<b>DDC</b>	Disaster and Development Centre
<b>EAL</b>	English as an additional language
<b>ESOL</b>	English for speakers of other languages
<b>PSG</b>	Project Steering Group
<b>IPPR</b>	Institute for Public Policy Research
<b>LA</b>	Local authority (formerly local education authority, LEA)
<b>NASS</b>	National Asylum Support Service
<b>NECARS</b>	North East Consortium for Asylum and Refugee Services
<b>NERS</b>	North of England Refugee Service
<b>NFER</b>	National Foundation for Educational Research
<b>PLA</b>	Participatory learning and action
<b>RCO</b>	Refugee community organisation
<b>RSO</b>	Refugee service organisation
<b>SPARC</b>	Supporting asylum seeker and refugee children within the education system in England (SPARC project)
<b>SPSS</b>	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
<b>NIA Act</b>	National Immigration and Asylum Act
<b>RA</b>	Research assistant
<b>RRF</b>	Refugee Regional Forum

## Section 1: Executive Summary

This is the final report of the SPARC project conducted by Northumbria University Disaster and Development Centre (DDC), April 2005 to April 2006. The project was established as a response to the high influx of asylum seekers and refugees to north-east England following the Immigration and Asylum Act of 1999, which introduced the dispersal system operated by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS). Local integration of asylum seeker and refugee children has since then posed a challenge to refugee service providers, policymakers and the north-east England host community at large. This study seeks to contribute towards improvement and sustainable delivery of services regarding the local integration of asylum seeker and refugee children into the education system in north-east England.

The fieldwork for the SPARC project has been divided into four phases. The first phase involved relationship building with our partner the North of England Refugee Service (NERS), refugee service organisations (RSOs) and refugee community organisations (RCOs). The second and third phases involved focus group discussions with local authorities (LAs), RCOs and RSOs, as well as children and host and refugee communities. The fourth phase involved interviews with Manchester City LAs, RCOs, service providers and the general public.

This report highlights the progress of the SPARC project since its inception in April 2005 and consists of five sections:

1. Executive summary
2. Outline of the SPARC project
3. Support for asylum seekers and refugees in north-east England
4. Research findings
5. Support models for asylum seekers and refugees, and future research.

The following is the summary of outputs.

- Partnerships have been developed and strengthened with participating agencies such as NERS, Refugee Regional Forum (RRF), ESOL Westgate School, School of Education, Northumbria University, RSOs and refugee community-based organisations.
- The research team has been built and strengthened. It comprises six people: two DDC researchers, two NERS employees and two research assistants.
- Data has been collected and analysed throughout all phases.

Findings are as follows:

- Refugee communities, LAs and asylum seeker and refugee service providers generally see issues relating to education as being important and have actively chosen to meet with the research team in the five locations.
- Immigration status has a profound impact on the education of asylum seeker and refugee children. This includes prolonged waiting for a decision from the Home Office, which can take up to 4–5 years, detention of failed cases and high poverty

levels due to employment restrictions imposed on asylum seekers. Quick determination of cases would alleviate some of the problems.

- Immigration policies were not synchronised with education and other social policies: this has confused some of the implementing agencies.
- Additional funding to support asylum seeker and refugee children is through Vulnerable Children Grant (VCG) and Ethnic Minorities Achievement Grant (EMAG). These funding streams cater for vulnerable children in general and those with English as an additional language (EAL). Asylum seeker and refugee children are among these. There is no specific funding for them apart from NASS weekly entitlements of £43.88. There is a general feeling that the current funding mechanisms are likely to increase vulnerability. In addition, there is a gap between immigration and education policies: education policies are lagging behind in meeting emerging community needs. Staff development programmes for teachers to meet the emerging needs require the mobilisation of funds from the Government. Funding streams do exist but schools are not aware of how to access them.
- A number of good practice initiatives are being shared between and among service providers and LAs.
- The majority of schools were providing a significant level of support in meeting the needs of asylum seeker and refugee children. Even schools that were not being directly supported by LAs demonstrated good practice. This included art and craft displays from a variety of cultures and welcome messages in different languages.
- Most schools have basic induction policies to help newly admitted pupils settle into the school quickly. Information packs included the school curriculum, parental involvement, etc. However, there was a need to develop a holistic and comprehensive race equality policy framework which would inform other school subsidiary policies, programmes, responsibilities and activities. Such an approach would not only provide a holistic way of implementing the diversity and inclusion agenda but would also be an important step in sustaining race equality issues in the schools.
- Policymakers' support from school boards of governors was identified as an important ingredient for the sustainable support of asylum seeker and refugee children.
- Some schools are not getting support from the LAs because they have small numbers of minority children. However, if schools identified their needs, there was a possibility of having schools clustered to make a request to the LA for support. There was also a possibility for schools to pool their resources to form a network to support staff.
- All LAs involved had resources available for supporting teachers even if their schools were not supported by ethnic minority support services.
- It was found that the support system varies not only at LA level but at school level as well. It was reported that while some schools were developing policies to support asylum seeker and refugee children, other schools had left it up to individual teachers. The risk with the latter is that there is no sustainability – when teachers leave the activities are discontinued.
- Translation services emerged as one of the issues where teachers required support. Parents could be an important and inexpensive resource for this.

- While language support programmes such as English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and EAL are making a huge impact on asylum seeker and refugee parents and children, there is still a need to improve the process and use of education needs assessments. In addition, the children who arrive when they are aged 15 and above are facing problems in accessing language support at school level.
- Racism and bullying is a complex issue needing further exploration and this related to immigration policies, media, politics and language problems, and school policies. Most schools had race equality policies and action plans but these alone will do little to reduce racism and bullying.
- A need for 'holistic education needs assessment' was mooted, involving asylum seeker and refugee families in addition to the current language assessments. Such assessments would take into account the wider factors in integrating asylum seeker and refugee parents' capacity to contribute to school life.
- There exists a gap between asylum seeker and refugee parents and schools.
- Asylum seeker and refugee parents' knowledge of the education system emerged as a main issue. Some asylum seeker and refugee parents lacked information of the education system including how to access it, available support mechanisms, rights and entitlements and teaching and learning methodology.
- Placement in schools of asylum seeker and refugee children was seen as a complex issue, which cannot be approached separately but should rather be seen in the context of dispersal system, inter-agency and intra-agency coordination, education system and grants system. Asylum seeker and refugee children are often placed in schools with poor Ofsted reports, where you can find children rejected from other schools on the basis of indiscipline.
- Integration as defined by many asylum seekers and refugees is explained in terms of making contacts with people from their own countries of origin and not necessarily interacting with host communities.
- Children in primary schools made no distinction in their relationships between refugee and non-refugee children.

## Section 2: Outline of the SPARC project

The civil and armed conflicts taking place around the globe, especially in the Middle East, the Great Lakes region in Africa, some parts of Asia and southern Africa have resulted in internal or external population displacements. A number of people have requested refugee status in other states, usually on the grounds of a well founded fear of persecution in their home country or they feel their life or liberty is threatened by armed conflict or violence. According to UNHCR (2006), the total population of concern<sup>1</sup> increased by 6 per cent from 19.5 million in 2004 to 20.8 million in 2005.

The United Kingdom, one of the signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention held in Geneva, has received one of the highest influxes of asylum seekers and refugees. In 2003, the UK had the highest number of asylum applications lodged in industrialised countries (IPPR, 2005) while it was second in 2004 (UNHCR, 2005). This has prompted the UK Government to make policies that address issues relating to asylum seeker and refugee children. The current policy applicable to asylum seekers and refugees is the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act of 2004 (NIA Act 2004), which has brought about a number of changes in the structure, administration and management systems of refugee issues. The introduction of the dispersal policy throughout the UK to provide reception to asylum seekers is one of the significant changes of the system. This has resulted in areas that previously had low asylum seeker and refugee population experiencing a large influx of asylum seekers and refugees, which has a bearing on the services being provided by the Government and LAs.

North-east England is one such region facing challenges in supporting asylum seekers and refugees. Support for this population is one of the big issues posing a challenge to refugee service providers, policymakers and the north-east England host community at large. This study seeks to contribute towards improvement and sustainable delivery of services regarding the support of asylum seeker and refugee children into the education system in north-east England. Using qualitative methodology, information-rich data was generated from participants: asylum seekers and refugees, service providers, children and host and settled communities.

### 2.1 Aims of the project

The aims of the project were:

To make an appraisal of the current policy and practice on the support of asylum seeker and refugee children into the education system in north-east England and one other area in England

To determine the extent of involvement of asylum seeker and refugee parents in supporting their children into the education system in north-east England and one other area in England

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<sup>1</sup> including refugees, asylum seekers, returned refugees, internally displaced persons, returned internally displaced persons, and stateless persons

To consider the implications of these findings for the future involvement of refugee-related stakeholders and refugee children in integration programmes.

## **Expected impact**

Provide policy options on best practice on the involvement of refugee parents in the integration of their children into the education system.

Strengthen and build the capacity of refugee service providers in the light of experiences emerging from the study.

Recommend tools, including the media, which can be used in the integration of refugee children in the education system.

## **2.2. Refugee children**

A child means every human being under age 18 unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier<sup>2</sup>. However, since our views on what capacities children develop at what ages are culturally conditioned, different cultures assign different responsibilities to children for different actions at different ages. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child requires us to recognise that children are not merely recipients of adult protection, but holders of rights and importantly that those rights demand that children themselves are entitled to be heard in decisions relating to their protection, welfare and freedom. For the purpose of this project, only children between the ages of 5 and 18 have participated in the study.

Refugee children fall into two categories: accompanied and unaccompanied children. Accompanied refugee children are those living within a family unit. In the UK context, these children are supported by the NASS and are subject to the dispersal policy and procedures that affect their parents or guardians. Children in families supported by NASS have full rights to healthcare and education. They are also entitled to free school meals and school milk. An unaccompanied refugee minor is any person under the age of 18 who is separated from both parents and is not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, has a responsibility to do so and who is an asylum seeker, recognised refugee or other externally displaced person.

## **2.3 Methodology**

### **General design issues**

Appraising the nature and processes of the education support system for asylum seeker and refugee children requires methodology that enables the service providers, policymakers and beneficiaries themselves to reflect on their experiences, needs, aspirations and perceptions. To this end, this study adopted participatory approaches to research involving service providers, policymakers and beneficiary community (see appendices 3 and 4).

Participation is still a contested concept; its definition ranges from assisting people to exercise their democratic rights to a means of obtaining views from different stakeholders (Kanji and Greenwood, 2001). Participatory approach is a family of approaches, behaviours and methods for enabling people to do their own appraisal,

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<sup>2</sup> 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Part 1, Article 1

analysis and planning, take their own action, and do their own monitoring and evaluation (Chambers, 2002).

DDC collaborated with NERS, which has played a lead role in networking with stakeholders, gaining access to refugees, schools and the community in north-east England. The research team consisted of DDC and NERS staff. DDC and NERS each seconded a team who formed the core research team. In addition, there were two research assistants working on the project. The researchers attended a participatory learning and action (PLA) course to introduce them to participatory research tools. The project was overseen by a Project Steering Group (PSG) comprising DDC, NERS, ESOL Westgate, School of Education Northumbria University, EMAS Gateshead and Refugee Regional Forum (RRF).

## Data collection

The participants were members of the ten RCOs or five LAs, or were service users. The project drew 208 participants from Newcastle, Middlesbrough, Sunderland, Gateshead and Manchester. For details of the participants, see the tables in appendix 2. Of all participants, 55 per cent were female (table 1). About 30 per cent of the participants were children and young people with about 10 per cent aged 50 and above (table 2). Participants from the White ethnic origin had the highest number (38.6 per cent) followed by those from the Black ethnic origin (35.7 per cent) (table 3). About 14 per cent and 13 per cent of the participants identified themselves as asylum seekers and refugees respectively. However, 42 per cent did not disclose their immigration status, with the highest number coming from Sunderland (table 4).

Members of RCOs and LAs who participated in the study ranged from individual members to senior management. Although 30 per cent and 7 per cent of the participants belonged to an RCO and LA respectively, the majority of the participants (57 per cent) did not belong to either (table 5). Of those who belonged to organisations, 26 per cent were either in management or employee positions (table 6).

Focus group interviews were held with communities in the five areas involving both host and refugee communities, although the former proved to be difficult to interview. Participatory street work interviews were held to capture views from the host community. Interviews were conducted in Manchester, an area outside of the north-east. Manchester was selected because it has a long history of migration and provided examples of good practice for the north-east.

## Ethical considerations

Recognising that there were ethical issues concerning interviewing of vulnerable groups, especially children, the research team underwent criminal records bureau scrutiny before the start of the research in accordance with NERS regulations and the Northumbria University Ethics in Research and Consultancy policy. Prior to participation, and throughout the interviews, consent was sought (see appendix 1). Participants were informed that their identities would remain confidential and that they could withdraw their consent at any point. For the purpose of this report the

names of participants are not given and areas are identified by code except where a specific resource is highlighted.

## **Data entry and analysis**

As this study is grounded in applied research with the policymakers, refugee service providers, host community and refugees themselves as the primary target, the relevance, clarity, utility and applicability of the findings are important. Cognisant of the fact that this study generated large amounts of data, a database was prepared using a spreadsheet package where the exact words or description were entered and coded according to themes. Before the data was coded into the spreadsheets, the themes were identified based on the content, rather than by using pre-determined categories which had the danger of leaving out some of the content. With some obvious overlaps between themes in a study like this one, some themes were coded more than once. This showed how interlinked and connected the issues were. Using filters, each theme and the theme to which it was connected were brought to the surface. This enabled easy examination of the theme.

The demographic data of participants was captured in the SPSS statistical software package, which disaggregates participants according to age, sex, ethnic origin, LA and status (see appendix 2). Dates, places, respondents, and transcripts were checked for completeness to ensure data quality. The data was protected against loss by making backup copies. Overall analysis was inductive in that a variety of sources and types of information on asylum seeker and refugee children in education was brought together without confines of predetermined hypotheses.

## Section 3: Support for asylum seekers and refugees in north-east England

### 3.1 UK immigration and asylum policy

The increasing numbers of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK have attracted considerable media and political attention since early 1990s; however, the education of asylum seeker and refugee children has until recently not been a topical issue. Yet, among the 40 625 asylum applications in 2004, 2990 were unaccompanied asylum seeking children under 18 and of the 6665 dependants 82 per cent were children under 18 (Home Office, 2005). Although there are no accurate statistics of asylum seeker and refugee children it is estimated that there were 98 929 asylum seeker and refugee children in UK schools in 2003, out of which 65 734 were located in Greater London (Arnot and Pinson, 2005).

While efforts are being made by UK government and voluntary sectors in ensuring that asylum seeker and refugee children's right to education is met, the literature suggests that current immigration, dispersal and integration policies present enormous challenges for asylum seeker and refugee parents, teachers and schools to help asylum seeker and refugee children access an appropriate form of education and develop self-confidence (Arnot and Pinson, 2005).

### 3.2 North-east England regional context

The north-east is a distinct region in the north of England. The following are some of the characteristics of the region as obtained from North East Consortium for Asylum and Refugee Services (NECARS).

- There are 12 local government areas with a population of about 2.5 million in 2001.
- The region has varied geography, from rural to industrial, meaning large disparities in population density, income source and economic prosperity.
- At the beginning of 2002 there was an economic activity rate (the proportion of people of working age who are in work, and those seeking work) of 73, compared with 78.6 in the UK.
- Over one third of the population live in wards ranked among the ten most deprived in England. Over half of the population live in wards ranked within the 20 that are most deprived in the country. No other English region suffers from this scale and concentration of deprivation.
- Over 19 per cent of the working age population in the north-east has no formal qualifications; this is higher than in the UK as a whole (16.4 per cent) and in most other regions.

On the education front, most of the LAs in the north-east region in 2004 scored on or above average for England.

## **3.3 Agencies supporting asylum seeker and refugee children in north-east England**

With the introduction of the dispersal system, the north-east region started experiencing a relatively high influx of asylum seekers and refugees. This prompted the region to develop ways of supporting this population, particularly in accessing social, education and health services. Supporting agencies can be grouped into government, LA and voluntary sector organisations although not all of these provide specific support to children. The following are among the supporting agencies.

### **National Asylum Support Service (NASS)**

NASS is a department of the Home Office, established with the implementation of the Immigration and Asylum Act (1999). NASS is responsible for coordinating dispersal and facilitating accommodation and welfare support of all destitute asylum seekers.

### **North East Consortium for Asylum and Refugee Services (NECARS)**

NECARS is regional umbrella organisation funded via NASS. The primary role of NECARS is to negotiate and coordinate the accommodation of dispersed asylum seekers with LA and private housing providers across the ten LAs in the north-east. NECARS also actively encourages the development of services and partnership working among agencies that work with asylum seekers across the region. NECARS' aim is to coordinate the development of a regional refugee integration strategy.

### **North of England Refugee Service (NERS)**

A voluntary organisation contracted by NASS to provide one-stop support of asylum seekers and refugees. NERS helps with emergency accommodation, issues relating to welfare, immigration, housing, move-on arrangements and the development of policy and regional refugee community organisations. There is a very high demand for NERS support and their offices are based in Newcastle, Middlesbrough, and Sunderland.

### **Asylum seeker support team (ASST)**

Each LA area has an asylum seeker support team. The function of each team will vary. Several provide support primarily around housing need, while others have a broader role and a statutory social work role.

### **Refugee community organisations (RCOs)**

Within the north-east there are 41 RCOs, providing practical help, influencing social policy and meeting cultural and social needs. An umbrella body for RCOs, the Refugee Regional Forum (RRF) for the north-east was established in 2001. RRF seeks the advancement of education and the relief of poverty, distress and sickness among asylum seekers and refugees in north-east England as well as providing a mechanism for hearing the voice of asylum seekers and refugees by bringing together in council representatives of refugee communities working in the area of benefit (RRF Constitution, 2003).

### **Voluntary sector, Black and minority ethnic community groups and churches**

In response to people being dispersed into communities, the voluntary sector, Black and minority ethnic groups and churches have extended their provisions to be

inclusive and to a large extent fill the gap in support. Provision varies from inclusion into already established services to more specific support such as drop-ins, ESOL, individual practical and emotional support, befriending, youth work and campaigning.

## Section 4: Research findings

There were a number of positive aspects reflected throughout the research just as there were concerns on the education system. Many schools have a significant range of resources internally and externally which can be used to support pupils. These include many different languages spoken in schools and an active policy of recruiting staff from ethnic minority groups. There are textbooks and bilingual dictionaries to assist pupils. Homework clubs also work well as an additional support. Externally some schools have home liaison support workers dealing with matters pertaining to discipline and communication with parents. Mentors are attached to pupils and there are organised cultural days every term. The young people and children commented on having good relationships with some teachers and also feeling that their school was a safe place to be. However, in order to strengthen these positive aspects, a number of issues were raised and these are dealt with in this section. They include the following.

- Knowledge of the education system
- Parental support and involvement
- Community relations
- Immigration
- Language support
- Performance of asylum seeker and refugee children
- Needs assessment
- Placement of asylum seeker and refugee children in schools
- Funding
- Racism and bullying

### 4.1 Knowledge of the education system

Across all areas the RCOs involved in the research placed significant value on all kinds of education with this being a high priority for asylum seeker and refugee families. Numerous comments were made relating to future attainment and access to educational opportunities. In contrast to this many felt that they would not be able to attain their desired educational goals due to the transitional nature of their stay in this country, the education system not allowing for people's learning experiences in their countries of origin and cultural clashes with host communities.

RCOs play a significant role in signposting people to education service providers as well providing them with access to a range of other supports relevant to their situations, such as housing, finance, and language acquisition. Parents expressed a desire to become more involved in their children's education but experienced a number of barriers to this, the main one being language and a lack of understanding of the education system. This in part often related to parents not realising that they were empowered to approach schools with issues relating to the education of their children. This lack of confidence meant parents did not feel able to ask for clarification of issues as and when they arose.

## 4.2 Parental support and involvement

Involvement of parents in school life was seen as one of the important steps in supporting asylum seeker and refugee children. Parental involvement (cutting across cultural and religious boundaries) was seen as vital not only in curriculum development, implementation and evaluation but also in providing support for their children in school activities such as homework and school fundraising. This would also improve understanding of the expectations between parents and schools but could be more meaningful when measures are based on holistic needs assessments involving the family and taking into account issues beyond learning. Schools support asylum seeker and refugee parents in different ways in north-east England. Below are some good practice examples from schools.

In some schools, parents can stay in the school if they wish as long as this does not negatively impact on the children. If possible some parents work with language interpreters to assist the children. Welcome booklets are given to parents in various languages and these have been quite useful in informing parents about the school curriculum as well as the role of parents in the school in general and support for their children's education in particular.

Where parents cannot speak English, services of interpreters are acquired. Some secondary schools offer ESOL classes during the day for pupils and parents. This helps parents with basic literacy and enables them to support their children. Most of the schools prior to pupil admission refer parents to the LA for completion of the required forms and orientation in the support available to them.

Various projects promote cultural awareness among children. For example, the Somali project involved both parents and children in the promotion of Somali traditions and culture.

Parents take an active part in the school through workshops such as for parenting skills, and the school also helps with computing courses.

Some schools have found it difficult to support asylum seeker and refugee and ethnic minority parents. Schools try to involve parents in the education of their children by inviting them to the school to become involved, but very few parents respond. In area C (see below) it was found that asylum seeker and refugee parents isolate themselves from the White British community: for example, when they drop or collect their children at the school, they always stay to the back or choose a different gate from which to collect their children.

Lack of asylum seeker and refugee parental involvement worked against integration, according to RCOs. It was found that parents faced more difficulties than children. Children are said to integrate and adapt quicker since identity spaces and boundaries are arguably still blurred at this stage. One school gave the following comment.

### Area A2

Parents face more hurdles than the children. The children adjust more easily. The only time where there is usually a little difficulty is Christmas whereby parents with different religions/faiths disallow their children from participating in the school Christmas activities. The children disallowed by their parents from participating in the activities find it difficult to accept why they are not allowed to participate and therefore feel isolated and disturbed psychologically. Usually adults are the barriers.

It was suggested that schools should provide an open environment within the community and parents should be involved in certain activities in the school particularly with play, sport and leisure and adult and family learning. Other suggestions are summarised below.

## **Area A1**

Introduce Internet chat rooms where parents and teachers can discuss issues – this entails having Internet access.

Homework and class work assistance is an issue that needs further exploration.

The following observations were made by RCOs.

## **Area A1**

Asylum seeker and refugee parents don't know where to go to ask for help and often complain about the methodology and system. There's lack of communication between parents and teachers.

Children's needs should be addressed jointly and monitored by school and parents on a continuous basis.

Parents need orientation on the standards of education regarding homework – they need to talk to teachers.

## **Area C**

Schools should provide an open environment within the community and parents should be involved in certain activities and the life of the school.

LAs and schools were making efforts to involve parents, including refugee parents, in the education of their children. There are various initiatives that were being undertaken by schools to improve school–parent relationships. Good practice can be seen in the employment of community link workers in some schools, breakfast clubs, parents' days, workshops for parents to improve their language and literacy including information technology courses, school trips with parents taking part and cultural events. Parents have an opportunity to communicate and mix with other parents and teachers. However, depending on the location, asylum seeker and refugee parents in schools do not mix with host communities.

The relationship between schools and parents varies between primary and secondary schools. The former are said to have a stronger relationship, because parents drop their children at school every morning so they tend to communicate with the school more regularly. Some schools have an open door policy where parents can sit in on the classroom to help their children, although asylum seeker and refugee parents do not stay to help their children. In one of the primary schools in area D the majority of children are from Somalia, and Somali parents are being used as a resource. The relationship also depends on the type of school. Faith-based schools tend to have a stronger relationship with parents and the support for asylum seeker and refugee parents is greater.

## Area A1

In the past we organised a parents' night in a bid to create contact but parents did not come.

## Area D

We conduct holistic assessments on children with difficulties in which parents and other agencies are involved.

School grounds are seen as a social area for parents and they may stay around in groups chatting.

In area D, some of the asylum seeker and refugee parents indicated that they had very good relations. School grounds are seen as social areas for parents and they often stay in groups chatting. One RCO suggested it may be time that will provide a lasting solution to peaceful coexistence of members of the indigenous and asylum seekers and refugee communities.

## 4.3 Community relations

The research reflected a range of responses from positive community relationships to very negative ones. There were also discussions relating to what people considered to be their community and for many groups and individuals this was not the host community but consisted of their own relatives, extended family and their friends who shared the same language, religious beliefs and culture. LAs on the whole did not perceive too many difficulties between host community children and asylum seeker and refugee children within school but they recognised that outwith the playground this was very different. Asylum seeker and refugee parents expressed being fearful of taking their children to and from schools, as they were often ostracised at the school gates. Language again is an identified issue with parents not feeling that they could approach other parents as there were communication barriers. One participant had this to say:

## Area C

The school is actively involved in providing information about its experiences with ethnic communities. Although the school works hard to include both asylum seeker and refugee children and English children within the school, the reality of integration slightly changes outside of the school – the asylum seeker and refugee children don't mix with the local community and vice versa.

Schools have been instrumental in breaking down barriers within communities by organising activities that bring people together, as have religious and community centres.

## Area C

The community workers are available at any time to help asylum seeker and refugee parents. The school also organises a breakfast club and Friday coffee morning to mix White and Black and minority ethnic communities (a holistic approach). The teachers acknowledge that non-English speaking communities need a huge help from the school.

## 4.4 Immigration and the education of asylum seeker and refugee children

Immigration status emerged as one of the issues requiring further exploration. In several areas there are examples of good practice where a one-stop service is provided which means that a person will not have to visit several locations to get information: it can be obtained in one place.

All of the RCOs were of the opinion that immigration issues dominated asylum seeker and refugee spaces and have a profound effect on the education of their children. Delays in the determination of asylum claims, detentions and deportations and negative publicity about asylum and refugee issues were raised by all participants. It was stated that the Government has created a mess in dealing with the asylum system and should stop treating people like slaves. The uncertainty over immigration status makes it difficult for asylum seeker and refugee parents to make plans for their children.

### Area B

On the issue of immigration, children should be considered innocent victims and decisions should be made as quickly as possible for asylum applicants especially those with children. Sometimes decisions can take between 3–5 years. (RCO)

Prolonged waiting for the decision from the Home Office, in some cases 4–5 years, has mental health implications both for parents and for children. Some participants had this to say:

### Area C

I'm depressed by the immigration system because you've to wait for a long time before you get Home Office decision. This affects people psychologically and one can commit suicide.

### Area B

Immigration status is a fundamental problem and this is a big challenge to the parents. Most families are worried about their immigration status and this leads to depression. In such a situation of psychological depression, parents find it very difficult to give attention to their children and this affects children's education profoundly.

Immigration status affects many facets of life including education. Reducing the waiting period for asylum applicants, especially those with children, was suggested by most RCOs. They contend that if decisions are made quickly, they can decide to relocate elsewhere before resources and their 'time is wasted'. In addition, asylum seeker and refugee children need emotional and practical support. Even if children wanted to do well at school they are greatly disadvantaged when the whole family is scared and traumatised. Parents' participation in school activities is also reduced since their focus is on their security needs. This also confirms what schools said about low attendance of refugee parents to school activities. This relates to issues raised by schools that have significant numbers of children in transition throughout the school year, which impacts on the classes these children are placed in. Not all of these children are asylum seekers as many ethnic minority families are accustomed

to removing their children from school for extended family holidays of up to six months.

Too many immigration policies were also said to be confusing the delivery of service. Some service providers gave wrong advice to asylum seekers and refugees because they do not know differences between Exceptional Leave to Remain, Humanitarian Protection and Discretionary Leave. One participant had this to say:

## **Area B**

There're too many policies on support which confuse service providers – some young people are given work permits!

In these circumstances, inter-agency coordination could help reduce some of the problems. In Manchester, a multi-agency coordination forum is held every three months to encourage engagement with communities and collaboration between agencies. Such forums can go a long way to influence policy and delivery of services that are accessible to all<sup>3</sup>. In the north-east, such a culture is also emerging in the form of NECARS and RRF; however, it is still weak at the LA level. One RCO had this to say about their LA:

## **Area C**

There's no collective involvement of all sectors – education, immigration and security – to look into the issues of asylum seekers and refugees.

The Gateway Protection Programme and Sunrise Project, although still being piloted, are examples of good practice. The Gateway Project, as it has become known, entails identification of most vulnerable displaced people and refugees in war-torn countries and offering them a safe route to a country where they are automatically offered refugee status. Since 2004, about 83 refugees from Liberia and Democratic Republic of Congo have benefited from the scheme. In this way, refugees do not go through the cumbersome asylum process and immediately enter into livelihood revival.

The Sunrise Project, piloted in Glasgow, London, Leeds/Sheffield and Manchester, provides transitional move-on services to asylum seekers with a positive decision on their asylum claims. Beneficiaries are assigned a caseworker as soon as possible after they receive a positive decision on their asylum claim. Intensive face-to-face work then takes place within the 28-day period until they are no longer eligible for NASS support and then at regular 3, 6, 9, and 12 month reviews throughout their first year of settlement. This is likely to facilitate smooth and quicker integration into a refugee's new life in the UK.

The asylum seekers who have reached the end of their asylum process but are unable to return to their countries due to physical impediment or exceptional circumstances face destitution and their children can be taken into care since they are neither getting NASS support nor are they allowed to work. The only support they can get is the Section 4 'hard case' support grant. 'Hard case' support comprises

<sup>3</sup> Multi-Agency for Refugee Integration in Manchester (Marim) can be accessed at [www.manchester.gov.uk/ssd/adults/marim/marim.htm](http://www.manchester.gov.uk/ssd/adults/marim/marim.htm)

basic full-board accommodation, normally outside London. Those supported may have to undergo regular monthly reviews. To receive the support grant, a person must be able to show that they are complying with efforts to remove them.

Asylum seeking families who have reached an end of their asylum process are aware of the 'threat of knock at the door or removal from school' to the extent that some have decided not to send their children to school to prevent children being removed from school and taken to detention centres or parents being taken away in the absence of their children. They are also afraid their children will be taken into local authority care.

Similar comments relating to NASS support were reflected in the various regions and the main points raised related to the lack of funding for children attending school. The lack of school uniform provision and access to funds that would enable pupils to fully participate in the curriculum were identified. RCOs saw this provision as the responsibility of NASS and the lack of adequate support meant that children were unfairly discriminated against. There was also an issue relating to dispersal with NASS placing families in hard-to-let areas.

## **Area A2**

Housing in hard-to-let areas means refugee families are housed alongside people who are themselves socially excluded, poor, uneducated and resentful.

Some participants also complained about lack of communication between NASS and LAs to help schools arrange for dispersed families before arrival.

While immigration issues were raised by RCOs as having a profound effect on education, it was not a major issue with LAs and schools. However, immigration does affect stability of school enrolment and funding. Some schools, especially those with high ethnic minority populations, tend to have high transient rates, with some schools recording up to 60 per cent transience. One school had this to say:

## **Area A1**

There are problems regarding school numbers and the fluctuation of this. Our school has 400 children and 60% mobility due to extended holidays and university students' children. The mobility affects classes and school staff. In the past there were 66 new EAL children over a two-week period.

## **4.5 Language support**

Language support emerged as one of the issues from RCO participants in the study. The following comments were common.

## **Area A1**

The main problem being faced is language. This is both for the parents and their children. As a result of this, children are discouraged from going to school. Parents also find themselves in a helpless position because they are unable to help their children with their homework and other things pertaining to their education. The educational method is different from where they came from and therefore it is difficult

to follow especially for children 11 years and above. However, younger children are fast at learning the language and they're able to adjust and do well.

Language support is not restricted to asylum seeker and refugee children but includes new arrivals with little or no previous educational experience, those who are acquiring English with limited exposure to first language and some more advanced bilingual learners whose specific needs have been overlooked (DfES, 2005).

All RCOs involved in the exercise held similar language views; it was identified as the second major problem after immigration. It was argued that it was one of the most important ingredients for breaking barriers and integrating both children and parents into communities. The following emerged from RCOs.

Provision of translation services, signposting parents to language centres where ESOL is provided as well as linking them with education social workers, were among the support provided by RCOs. There was no specialist education service provided by RCOs or any charitable organisation.

Language assessments were making a difference in helping children settle quickly in schools. The refugee education services were said to be accessible and helpful and some schools were providing education assistant support to help children learning EAL.

The provision of ESOL to parents as well as children 15 and above was hailed as a positive way of starting the integration process. However, participants voiced concern over the standards of ESOL as it is not known who is 'controlling or monitoring ESOL standards' (area B).

Using language to screen children was said to be 'bad' practice; children with poor language skills were put in lower sets despite their ability and sometimes 'schools judge by names of children – they assume that children with foreign names would not know or speak English' (area A).

Children aged 15 years and above were said to be facing a number of problems. One participant had this to say:

## **Area B**

A problem exists for children aged 15 and above as schools refuse to enrol these children and refer them to ESOL where they learn with adults. Most schools don't want to accept the burden of assisting such children. When these children finish their ESOL classes, they can't be accepted to enrol with their counterparts in Year 11 because they wouldn't have done Year 10. These children are left with no option but to enrol at colleges where they can only do a limited number of subjects as colleges offer a limited curriculum.

## **Language support: LAs and schools**

Language is one of the defining characteristics of the asylum seeker and refugee child. In some schools up to 42 different languages are spoken with the majority coming from Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa. In some schools as shown in the previous section up to 90 per cent of the children have EAL. On admission, some of the children can neither speak nor write in English. The children most disadvantaged are those where no English is spoken at home. The language barrier is also compounded by cultural differences where, for example, in male-dominated families

women are not often given the opportunity to learn English. One of the participants commented:

## **Area B**

The integration process differs for families with children and this very much depends on personal experiences. When language is an issue, it is usually very difficult to get to the bottom of a problem. When it comes to the question of benefits, we find difficult to answer questions.

Because of the complexity of the language issues, LAs and schools, depending on their geographical location and number of asylum seeker and refugee and other ethnic minority children, have devised a number of approaches in providing appropriate support to these children without relegating the indigenous children.

## **Area A1**

The support we give in basic English to children takes place during class periods and lasts for about 20–30 minutes. This is because we do not want to remove children from the mainstream. That would exclude them. On the whole children learn more quickly from their peers than when isolated. Discrimination is more pronounced among adults than among children.

Most schools said they supported children within the mainstream classroom wherever it was possible, as time out of subject lessons for additional language tuition would cause the learner to fall behind in the curriculum. Having a separate unit would also entrench exclusion.

## **Comments from schools included:**

### **Area A1**

Language is a problem because some of these children can not speak nor write in English at all. As a result of this, we have a special EAL class, which lasts for about 4–6 weeks before the children are transferred to the mainstream. The EAL class is designed to improve the language of the children who have language difficulty. At the end of it we assess them by the National Curriculum checklist. In addition to this, we have a member of school staff who gives additional language support where necessary. 28% of the school population is ethnic minority and these are deemed as children who need language support although some are advanced EAL. We always have a review of language with classroom teachers. We monitor EAL every half-term.

Some schools developed networks with asylum seekers and refugees and other parents from ethnic minority groups who assist with translations and interpretations. Comments like the one below were common.

### **Area A2**

We have resources for language, computers as well as dual language booklets for communication, because we have a network of parents who are ready to help with the translations, we get along very easily. Some of the Muslim girls wear their long sleeves, trousers and scarves to school. We have come to accommodate all these and we don't make issues out of these circumstances. We have a stock of uniforms to give to families who might want them if they can't afford to buy for their children.

In addition to meetings with parents, some schools make home visits with a view to obtaining a holistic picture of the educational needs of the family. One school had this to say:

## **Area A2**

We normally arrange meetings to review the support given and in this way we provide additional lessons where necessary. We provide multicultural educational activities to show children are valued. What we do is just out of experience. We think ahead of time. The 19 languages spoken add to the curriculum. We do home visits of families to explain to them what a child needs. We are the only school that sells halal foods to the children.

In some LAs, depending on the number of children who need additional language support, support is centralised with a pool of resources available upon request. The resources include textbooks, bilingual dictionary, language mentors and interpretation service.

## **Responses from children and young people about language support**

The majority of children in the study were at one time given English language support. Responses from children include the following.

Sometimes children are allowed to speak their languages.

Some teachers spoke fast and in slang, children could not understand and were scared to ask questions.

Teachers don't care if you understand or not.

Primary and middle schools were better than secondary schools in language support. We should be allowed to take dictionaries into exams.

## **4.6 Performance of asylum seeker and refugee children**

The performance of the asylum seeker and refugee children in schools was seen as being inextricably linked with support from parents and where parents did not understand the system or were unable to provide additional support then the children were disadvantaged.

## **Area A1**

Asylum seeker and refugee parents need to know the teaching and learning methodology for them to be able to support their children.

Although statistics were not made available, it was considered that many asylum seeker and refugee children did well in spite of the obstacles they have to overcome particularly in relation to language.

## **4.7 Needs assessment**

Involvement of asylum seeker and refugee parents in school life is not a new thing but it could be more meaningful when measures are based on holistic needs assessments involving asylum seeker and refugee families, taking into account wider factors than English including the extent to which parents' capacity to contribute to the school life can be integrated. One RCO commented:

## Area A1

The education needs assessments are not holistic because they mainly focus on language needs and leave out other but quite important aspects such as understanding of the teaching and learning methodologies.

According to LAs, the initial assessment of educational needs of asylum seeker and refugee children is done solely to help the family contact the right people who can assist in helping their children get places and the available support. Also as part of the integration process, they are told about catchment schools. At the initial meeting schools use a form to assess the needs of the child. A personal plan is established after the initial assessment.

LAs receive notification of the families who are arriving and they then make a home visit and ascertain which school the child should attend. With regard to admissions into schools, age can be an issue therefore they make sure that the date of birth is authentic. This is because in some cases children's ages are lowered ages in order to get children admitted into school. However, it has become more difficult to place children close to where they live and often schools do not want to accept asylum seeker and refugee children as they are afraid they will reflect badly on school in the league tables.

## 4.8 Placement in schools

Placement was seen as a complex issue, which cannot be approached separately but should rather be seen in the context of dispersal system, inter-agency and intra-agency coordination, education system and grants system. Owing to families being housed in socially disadvantaged areas, children tend to be admitted to schools in the same area. Issues raised by RCOs included the following.

### Area A1

Long delays in placing newly dispersed children meaning asylum seeker and refugee children lose a lot of time out of school.

Asylum seeker children arriving towards end of summer term are not enrolled until September.

Problem of age – if the child's age is overestimated, the child loses education opportunities and social services support.

School places are not enough for our children. In most cases, places are in public schools. But the education in these schools is not thought to be good enough. They do not have discipline and are involved in different types of violence and racism.

Although Catholic schools have good education, these have limited places and parents have to be in the waiting list for a long time before their children are accepted.

### Area B

Asylum seeker and refugee children are placed in low rated schools with poor Ofsted reports; they are placed in schools where you find children rejected from other schools on the basis of indiscipline.

## LA and school responses

According to LAs and schools, admissions were done in accordance with education policies. The following emerged.

LAs and schools reiterated RCOs' concern that age was a problem and also waiting time ranged from three days to three months before children were accepted. Interviews with Catholic schools revealed that the catchment area for their schools was wider which means that the problems associated with one housing area would be more diluted as pupils come from a range of geographical areas and there is increased positive peer pressure.

Admissions to primary schools was said to be less of a problem as compared to secondary schools with the usual process for enrolment through the local authority. In some schools, especially in disadvantaged areas where asylum seekers and refugees are accommodated, children were admitted on a daily basis. This becomes a cause for concern regarding the impact this can have on staff and other children. Structural changes have been made to prepare teachers to meet the demand.

Good practice in admission procedures included the following.

- On being approached, some schools immediately check to see if there is a place available. If there is, admission takes place on a nominated day the following week. This gives staff the opportunity to gather background information and devise a welcome pack.
- Most schools had a welcome book, sometimes with photographs of the children in the class and all the staff who work with that class and a short biography written by each person.
- All schools that participated had a buddy system to help children settle quickly. Buddies act as a welcome committee and will take new children on guided tours of the school, show them where the toilets are, etc. This gives them a sense of normality and helps them settle quickly.
- Most schools, especially those with a high number of ethnic minority children, make a huge emphasis on visual displays. This gives messages to families with limited literacy about the work the school does and helps transmit the school ethos.

## 4.9 Funding

Funding arrangements including policy frameworks, grants system and implementation models emerged as issues that needed exploration. This was mainly raised by RCOs, schools and LAs.

Most RCOs recognised the efforts of the Government in making funds available to support asylum seeker and refugee children. There was a notable absence of RCOs being involved in schools although there was a willingness from them to become involved in awareness-raising activities. Although lack of funding was raised, it was apparent from discussions that most RCOs were not aware of funding sources that existed. They expressed concern on poor funding support mechanisms. Comments like those below were common.

## Area B

Financial support – lack of money for uniforms, school trips, etc. therefore children feel isolated and different; they lack a sense of belonging to the community. Lack of school uniforms leads to further exclusion and isolation.

## Area C

Schools should not make unnecessary demands for uniforms – they should not require extra money for outings – they should have their own fund for uniforms.

They were also of the opinion that while the attention given to immigration policies was a welcome move, education policies lagged behind in meeting the emerging needs of asylum seeker and refugee communities. Human resource development to include change in teacher training, staff development programmes for teachers as well as employment of more bilingual teachers was recommended. One RCO had this to say:

## Area B

There's no funding for teacher and support workers to meet this emerging need. How do you develop the capacity without financial support?

Each LA identified the range of external support that they were able to access to support asylum seeker and refugee children. In some geographical areas schools were also able to receive extra funding from community grants and government schemes. There were a number of initiatives which schools were familiar with and several LAs commented on the provision of support services from local church groups. One participant had this to say:

## Area A1

The church groups are more successful at providing a range of accessible resources.

Schools in highly deprived areas tend to access more external support. New Deal Communities and Education Action Zones are examples of such funding which some schools are tapping into.

While LAs and schools can access a variety of funds, the Vulnerable Children Grant (VCG) and the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) from DfES were the major sources of funding. The VCG allows LAs to allocate funding based on local needs in order to provide support to a range of vulnerable children, including those from asylum seeking and refugee backgrounds. The main focus of the grant is on school-age children but this does not limit LAs from taking a wider view and supporting children from birth to 19. While the VCG is ring fenced at the LA level, it is not at the school level. Schools have the discretion to use the funds according to their priorities.

The EMAG is targeted at pupils learning EAL, including asylum seeker and refugee children, as well as for those minority ethnic pupils at risk of underachievement. The grant is devolved to schools as headteachers are best placed to make decisions about how to use this funding to support these children, including providing support

for EAL<sup>4</sup>. However, the study found that there was a ‘yawning gap’ in funding to meet the ‘specific needs’ of asylum seeker and refugee children. Both funds were inadequate in meeting the increasing demand from the asylum seeking and refugee community. For example, one school needed 40 different textbooks to meet the needs of asylum seeker and refugee children.

There are mainly two models that were found across the LAs in the administration and management of EMAG funds. Some LAs, especially those that are larger like area A1, tend to devolve funds to schools while in smaller LAs, like area A2, funds are held by central service organisations.

In the former, schools can acquire services such as interpretation from service providers while in the latter such services can be acquired from the LA diversity and inclusion services. LAs’ comments on funding include the following.

## **Area A1**

We (LA) retain 15% of the allocation while the remaining 85% is devolved to schools. The school budget is based on the number of EAL children and they use this to make decisions as to what services they want to buy in.

We get EMAG from DfES. This money is not meant for the asylum seekers, however, we do utilise the money for both asylum seeker and refugee children. Because of our personal initiatives, we have developed refugee coordination for primary and secondary schools.

There is no provision for uniforms under the LA. The uniform provision has ceased to exist. In any case we don’t have any particular uniform because the school children come in their traditional dresses and they are usually well dressed.

Due to financial restraints it is more difficult for children to integrate into community-based activities. Other funding sources are available to complement DfES funding. Although the funding is not specifically for asylum seeker and refugee children only they include the New Deal Communities and Education Action Zone. For instance, New Deal has paid for two school sweatshirts for each child in our school. There are some criticisms made about this funding as target schools are seen as always getting more money and help.

## **Area A2**

Our funding comes from DfES – EMAG, EMTAS. We also get some money from the council. The Education Welfare Service deals with uniforms. We have no uniform grants. The presence of asylum seeker and refugee children will not attract extra funding.

Funding depends on pupil numbers. Training is provided for mainstream teachers. We get a lot of grants because of the location of the school.

The main problem is language and there is not enough money in the system to take care of interpretation and language problems. However, when asylum seekers and refugees visit schools for the first time we make provision for interpreters and we pay for that using EMAG.

<sup>4</sup> Department for Education and Skills (2006)

[www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ethnicminorities/faqs/asylumandrefugeechildren/#2](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ethnicminorities/faqs/asylumandrefugeechildren/#2)

## 4.10 Racism and bullying

Discipline in schools as it relates to racism and bullying emerged as one of the issues raised by RCOs, LAs, schools and children and families. RCOs and children and families expressed the nature and extent of racism and bullying while LAs and schools indicated how they were dealing with the issue.

### Refugee community organisation comments

Racism and bullying was identified as an area where asylum and refugee children (including other Black and minority ethnic children) needed more support. Some cases of racism and bullying go unreported to both teachers and parents. In some cases, even when reported to teachers, nothing was done to remedy the situation. Due to language problems and lack of knowledge of the education system, parents do not take appropriate action to have the problem resolved. Children are said to be suffering in silence resulting in some children resenting school and developing anti-social behaviour. Below are some of the comments made by RCOs.

#### Area A

Leaflets are not enough to educate people. Teachers should encourage no racism in schools!

Sometimes there could be discrimination as a result of racial harassment.

Consequently some of the children do not want to go to school to avoid being harassed. However, despite this, some of the children are able to adjust to the situation. And because it is a new environment with a different culture, there is usually the cultural shock from the onset but this disappears with time.

#### Area B

Asylum seekers in housing estates in deprived areas are in danger of racial abuse from **some** residents.

Children of asylum seekers and refugees don't feel safe to play outside for fear of being racially abused and this is a factor in their social development.

Discrimination and abuse by local kids/youth is rampant and sometimes goes unreported.

BNP activities in the area are increasing racism and bullying incidents.

Abuse of asylum seeker and refugee children is high in comprehensive schools.

Children seldom report abuses to parents; even when they report it the issue of language becomes another disadvantage – a lot of children suffer in silence.

### Comments from children

Some children indicated that teachers were quite helpful if the children were racially abused. The children get extra support at school such as mentoring suites and through the buddy system. Schools were also said to be offering safe environments for them. Extracurricular activities such as football, clubs, drama and parties were said to add value to their integration at schools. Some of the comments made include the following.

#### Area A1

When you are new at school they always look for someone to hang out with so you're not alone at lunch or break times.

Most people at our school have respect for our colour.

Children indicated racial abuses were a dominant feature in relations between White and asylum seeker, refugee and other Black and minority ethnic children especially in comprehensive schools. Name calling, kicking and pulling of Muslim girls' scarves were common especially when the teacher goes out or during play time. Primary school children indicated that they related well with children from minority groups. In secondary schools, in some cases, White children who associate with Black and minority ethnic pupils risk being isolated by their White counterparts. Below are some of the comments made by children.

## **Area A**

I found the teachers helpful when I was being bullied.

## **Area B**

We wear head scarves and the girls pull them off, we tell the teachers and they say they will stop it. But they still keep on doing it. Now we have all come to a decision, we will not tolerate this behaviour from them. We now fight back, but the teachers say it is our fault. This has affected our school work and we go to the mentoring suite for extra support.

Since the day I started school we were racially abused by kids at school. My mum visited the school and the bullying and racism has got worse. We both have extra support from the teachers but they can't stop the children from their behaviour, because the kids hide and shout at us both.

Just because I stuck up for my friend – he is from Eritrea – the other people in my class have stopped talking to me. I sit by myself most of the time, people in the school call me names but I ignore them and walk away.

## **Area C**

Bullying and name calling happens any time, anywhere especially when the teacher goes out.

## **Area D**

Some of pupils are racist and call people nasty names. People from different countries... because they don't speak English, they feel confused.

Tell the headteacher that people are being racist or tell the teacher.

Make a questionnaire to try and see if people are being bullied.

## **Comments from young people**

Common racism and bullying abuses raised by young people included kicking, name calling and telling humiliating and degrading jokes about Asian and Black people. Young people state that teachers in some schools do not care even when they observe or when racism and bullying incidents are reported; some children have resorted to defending themselves through fights or forming gangs as a way of protecting themselves. When they fight back, they are at the receiving end as teachers stand up for offenders. They call for parental intervention and more awareness on asylum and refugee issues.

## **Area A**

If you get bullied at school and you tell the teacher, nothing gets solved. Bad jokes about Asian or Black people from teachers and students. Sometimes teachers don't care if you are bullied, even though they witness the bullying. Other children imitating your accent and feeling embarrassed and deterred from asking questions. If parents could intervene in bullying at schools we can change the habit.

## **Area B**

Once I had a broken leg and this guy walked up to me and kicked me down, three teachers were witnesses but nothing was done – WHY? Teachers take racism lightly and stand up for offenders and try and justify their actions. When fights break out the minority is always to blame – why? Every time I've been involved in arguments or fights, the principal will conclude by saying the other person didn't mean it or he was just joking. It's high time someone takes racism seriously – IT HURTS!

Children and young people also reported bad behaviour with smoking and lack of respect for teachers (swearing) being the most common.

## **Comments from refugee parents**

Racism and bullying was identified by refugee parents as one of the big issues affecting the performance of their children at school. They contended that racism was within the structure of the education system. When some parents approach teachers nothing is resolved; actually the problem worsens in some cases. One of the participants (area B) went to the school and asked for their race equality policy and the action plan, which the school did not have, then went to the Director of Education and the problem was quickly solved. A refugee parents' support group was mooted as one of the solutions to help schools reduce racism and bullying incidents. Common comments included the following.

## **Area B**

Structural racism. The teachers are also racist. The racism against my kids. Have been to speak to the teachers but no action was taken. Racism, bias, treating children unfairly, child criminalisation all encourages rebellion. Children at school are being bullied and at the end of the day are being victimised and become the accused. There is a risk of silencing the victim which can have sad consequences, i.e. SUICIDE. To solve these problems, there's a need to get in touch with the authorities (Director of Education). This is not an individual solution but change is needed in the system. Refugee parents also need a platform or common group where they can have support in dealing with racism and bullying incidences. Also schools should have annual record books to where they maintain records of racism and bullying.

## Comments from LAs

Schools and LAs in all areas involved recognised existence of 'few' and 'occasional' racism and bullying incidents involving children of mixed background. However, it was noted that cases could be under-reported or unreported due to language problems. In some areas, especially in areas with a long history of minority groups, bullying and fights occurs between Black and minority ethnic groups rather than between Whites and non-Whites. Children who caused problems relating to racism and bullying were a manifestation of, and mirrored, the home and its environment. In recognition of this, most schools indicated that they had:

- systems in place for managing racism and bullying within the context of the school discipline and race equality policies of their respective schools;
- a system for reporting serious racism and bullying incidents to LAs;
- buddy systems to orient new children, with buddies who have similar linguistic or cultural origins, which helps the child to settle in quickly into the school system;
- questionnaires administered at identified intervals to keep checking racism and bullying incidents;
- an open door policy where parents accessed schools to discuss any problems with school teachers or authorities.

Some of the comments included the following.

### Area A1

There are occasional incidences of racism and bullying but we do not tolerate these. We have a code of conduct and we ensure the children know their rights. We have rules and we believe this is effective. We have sanctions if bullying is serious. We also have a reporting system to the LA if the issue is very serious. Racism is not a huge issue in the school. However, a racist attitude usually starts from the home because children listen to comments and remarks made at home and they tend to copy their parents in attitude and manners. (Secondary school)

We have a race equality policy. When new students come in, they are normally told of what to do in case of any problem. Verbal attacks are very rare and even where such take place, they are usually after normal arguments among students. There are no physical attacks. (Secondary school)

### Area A2

Our children are accepting. Colour is not an issue to the children in our school. They accept each other as individuals. As part of the integration process, we do organise cultural days every term. In this way we raise awareness of cultural differences. Majority of the refugee/asylum seeker children are friendly and they usually make the first move. We also do questionnaires at the end of every school session to try to find out whether there has been bullying, racism and general performance. So far no issues pertaining to these have arisen. However, we have our reservations on this. This is because the non-response could be due to language difficulty or fear. Nevertheless, some of the parents do tell us directly about their problems and we sort out such problems immediately. (Secondary school)

## Comments from street interviews

People interviewed in the street indicated that racism and bullying were supported by the structural racism as well as immigration and housing policies which placed

asylum seekers and refugees in socially disadvantaged areas. Detentions and deportations, language barriers, house locations and poverty or destitution of asylum seekers and refugees provide a fertile ground for racism and bullying of children at school. Common comments included the following.

Children pick up bad habits from parents and people outside school which they bring into the classroom.

Racism incidents are higher in high school as compared with primary schools, because children are still young.

## Section 5: Support models for asylum seekers and refugees, and future

Participant responses and literature reflect a variety of approaches being used to support asylum seeker and refugee children and their parents. Instances of good practice have been identified and in some cases replicated. Yet there is still an absence of a generally agreed approach on how asylum seeker and refugee children and their parents can be supported. The last section details ranges of supports for asylum seeker and refugee children and their parents. The following were the major models identified.

- Single agency model
- Multi-agency model
- Sustainable model
- Resilience model

### 5.1 Single agency model

The single agency or signposting model assumes that asylum seekers and refugees have complex but identifiable problems which can be dealt with by specialised agencies. Asylum seekers and refugees are signposted to those agencies by voluntary agencies, including those contracted by NASS and RCOs. Those contracted by NASS, NERS and Refugee Action, for example, are increasingly offering one-stop advice and support services which include immigration, housing and interpretation services. RCOs and faith-based organisations also offer some advice to asylum seekers and refugees. Service users with education issues, especially those with children, are referred to the LA's education department to begin the process of admission to schools. If the child has some learning problems, which are in most cases identified later, the services of specialists are enlisted to determine the kind of extra support that might be needed. Obviously, there are merits in adopting this approach for the asylum seeker and refugee children and their parents: they get to know where service providers are physically located, and it also helps them to gain some idea about the education system, including rights and entitlements.

While this model recognises that the needs can be complex it tends to compartmentalise the needs of asylum seeker and refugee children rather than seeing them from a holistic angle.

### 5.2 Multi-agency model

The multi-agency model assumes that the needs of asylum seekers and refugees are complex and cannot be dealt with by a single agency. Practical and strategic needs of children and their parents such as psycho-social, learning and livelihood needs are interdependent and reinforce each other. Relegating some of the needs to secondary levels, or ignoring them and attending to them at a later date, may be detrimental to the future of the child.

Agencies involved in supporting asylum seeker and refugee children and other new arrivals second staff members to a central team. This is coordinated by the LA and may comprise workers from the LA refugee education service, ESOL, schools and voluntary agencies. The team is overseen by a steering group comprising representatives of parent agencies. Box 5.1 illustrates how the multi-agency model works in one of the LAs that participated in the study.

## **Box 5.1: East District New Arrivals Support Team (EDNAST)**

EDNAST was formed as a response to *Every Child Matters* to support newly arrived families so that they can benefit from early intervention and preventative services. It supports the transition of asylum seeker and refugee children and their families and allows them to take opportunities that will assist them build a positive new life. The team comprises workers who are seconded to the team from: Diversity and Inclusion Team; Manchester Play Team; Cedar Mount High School, Routes Project and ESOL. The team is overseen by a steering group comprising representatives of parent agencies.

There are two tiers to the team's work. The first tier involves short-term holistic assessment and support planning for the newly arrived families and referral to a variety of agencies. This is actioned by a visit to a family home where a full and comprehensive needs analysis is carried out with the support of an interpreter where appropriate. During a staff case conferencing and action planning meeting, the team targets members of the family for support based on the needs analysis. The family is supported by the agreed plan until the core work is completed and the planned exit from intensive support is decided upon. The core casework is supported by each staff member's knowledge of their own service and the resources available within those services, enabling support to be linked to the work of the colleagues. Each member of the team is responsible for different aspects of the support. Tier 1 work is intensive and limited at present to 10–15 families at any one time. Families in excess of this number are referred on to additional agencies or placed on a waiting list if necessary.

Tier 2 work is longer-term support promoting health, well-being and educational achievement of family members, particularly the children. This is achieved by continuing to monitor and advise on progress and needs of individuals in school, continued support to access play and leisure provision and supporting adults to engage in family learning and education for themselves. Some of the support takes place in existing provision, and some is provided by the team members as additional targeted work. The family's progress is monitored for six months following core casework closure to enable the team to continue the tier 2 work with individuals. Each family is unique so the team is flexible in its approach, sometimes providing information and signposting, sometimes more in-depth advocacy and personal introductions to key agencies.

EDNAST (2006)

<http://www.cedarmount.manchester.sch.uk/extended/community.htm>

The multi-agency model can also take the form of multi-agency forums where agencies involved in refugee issues share ideas to improve the coordination of responses. The forum may take different forms depending on the context. In box 5.2 we illustrate how one of the LAs has successfully implemented the model.

## **Box 5.2: Multi Agency for Refugee Integration in Manchester (MARIM)**

The multi-agency forum arose in recognition of the need to develop a coordinated response to the dispersal of asylum seekers and refugees into Manchester following the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. As the lead agency Manchester City Council successfully sourced funding to establish a core development group to facilitate and develop the work of the forum. The forum consists of seven theme-based task groups:

- Advice and information task group
- Education task group
- Post-16 education, employment and training task group
- Health task group
- Housing task group
- Mental health task group
- Supporting communities task group.

The forum seeks to ensure that the membership of each of the task groups is drawn from the appropriate statutory, non-statutory and voluntary sector organisations working in each of the themed areas.

The overarching objectives of each of the task groups are:

- the coordination, planning and delivery of services to asylum seekers and refugees in Manchester
- the development of strategies and working practices necessary to improve service delivery
- to maximise resources used to support asylum seekers and refugees by reducing the duplication of work across agencies.

The task groups have therefore created action plans based on specific, agreed objectives and are further divided into sub-groups or working groups to implement the identified actions necessary to meet these objectives.

MARIM has a project team whose role is to coordinate and facilitate the functioning of the task groups. As the lead agency within the forum is Manchester City Council, the team is part of Adult Services Division of Manchester City Council and consists of a project coordinator, a development worker and a part-time administration assistant. The team has responsibility to:

- promote integration of asylum seekers and refugees to Manchester
- work with the organisations within the multi-agency forum to devise and implement action plans
- identify priorities within the action plans and assist the organisations in fulfilling the tasks, actions and objectives identified
- take responsibility for developing and implementing particular actions within

each task group.

- ensure that all minutes and information resulting from the task groups is distributed among the other task groups, and ensure that any other pertinent work is disseminated to other relevant organisations
- promote partnership working and models of good practice
- promote positive images of asylum seekers and refugees in the city.

Additionally, the team will help locate and secure funding for projects, groups or those working professionally within the city to improve services for asylum seekers and refugees.

The team is responsible to the chair of the forum, and to a steering group that consists of representatives from the task groups of the multi-agency forum and reports back to the steering group on a regular basis.

Adapted from: Multi Agency for Refugee Integration in Manchester website  
[www.manchester.gov.uk/ssd/adults/marim/marim.htm#The%20Multi-Agency%20Forum](http://www.manchester.gov.uk/ssd/adults/marim/marim.htm#The%20Multi-Agency%20Forum)

### 5.3 Sustainable model

This model is founded on the race equality policy. It applies more at the school level and assumes that schools will continue to receive ethnic minority children who will need support. Innovation regarding support is school-wide rather than belonging to individuals or section of the school. To ensure ownership and sustainability, teachers, children, parents and boards of governors are involved in the formulation and revision of school policies and action plans. Lack of involvement of all the sections of the school would reflect a piecemeal approach with a high risk of innovations dying away. The sustainable model is being employed to sustain intra-school and inter-school innovations. Box 5.3 illustrates the model at the school level.

#### Box 5.3: Sustainable model

X Primary School is a large school with about 490 pupils aged 7–11. The majority of pupils belong to minority ethnic groups and more than 50% speak English as an additional language. There are 21 languages spoken in school. The turnover of pupils is more than a third each year, many from outside the country and some as refugees or asylum seekers. The percentage with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also well above the national average.

The curriculum is rich, broad, well balanced and meets the needs of all children. The school capitalises upon and celebrates the rich cultural diversity of its children, incorporating this very well into the learning experiences. This excites children's interest and a strong emphasis on language development is inherent in all activities. In addition to staff development programmes, the school employs bilingual teachers and teaching assistants from the refugee community who are also native speakers of the Somali language who form the majority of asylum seeker and refugee children. Careful analysis and unusually strong partnership with parents, teachers, governors and refugee education support services ensure that children's varying needs are diagnosed and catered for, enabling them to achieve well.

Very good procedures ensure that the many newcomers are able to settle swiftly,

helped by bilingual staff members and child buddies who, wherever possible, speak the same language.

(Ofsted Report, 2005) <http://live.ofsted.gov.uk/reports/>

## 5.4 Resilience model

This model assumes that while asylum seeker and refugee children and their parents are among the most vulnerable groups, they have some form of resilience on which their support could be built. This model emphasises that asylum seeker and refugee children and their parents 'can do' rather than the deficit model which focuses on vulnerability or the negatives. This tends to blur the coping mechanisms and capacity of asylum seeker and refugee children and their parents, especially recognising the challenges they could have gone through. Resilience describes an active process of self-righting, learned resourcefulness and growth – the ability to function psychologically at a level far greater than expected given the individual's capabilities and previous experiences (Paton *et al.*, 2000).

In this model asylum seeker and refugee children and their parents are seen as untapped resources which could be turned into assets to contribute to the sustainability and resilience of communities. They can help strengthen the social, human, natural, physical and financial capital especially recognising the knowledge, skills and experiences they bring with them. In area C, asylum seeker and refugee children working together with the LA diversity and inclusion team produced a video which has proved to be a useful awareness tool. Box 5.4 also illustrates an example of the resilience model.

### Box 5.4: Resilience model

X Primary School is situated in one of the LAs in north-east England in a socially deprived community. There are 420 children on roll, aged 3–11.

72% of its children live in the 10% most deprived wards and 28% live in the 1% most deprived wards in England.

There is very high mobility (68% of the school population moves in and out per year and 52% are casual admissions).

31 languages are spoken at the school. The impact of supporting asylum seeker and refugee children, particularly for schools with no history with such children, is challenging.

In supporting asylum seeker and refugee children and their families, it does not approach this with a deficit model but with a can-do model, where children's abilities are enhanced in an incremental manner. The school's belief is that 'good practice for asylum seeker and refugee children is good practice for all children'. The school builds on the best of what it is already doing; staff are very good at adapting practice to meeting changing needs.

The school provides high quality care for children and their families and is uniquely placed to have daily contact with children and families. Parents are allowed to get into classrooms for about ten minutes every day when dropping their children. They are also able to sit in the classroom to help their children.

The curriculum has been adapted and the school has revised the way it provides

support and guidance. All teachers have been trained to become more aware of the ethnic minority needs. There is a huge emphasis on visual displays giving messages to families with limited literacy about the work the school does and helping to transmit the school ethos.

## 5.5. Possible future research areas

While the policy provides a framework on support for asylum seekers and refugees, there is no blueprint on its implementation. The situation differs between LAs and from school to school. There are a number of recurrent dilemmas or questions which decision makers are confronted with, especially at the LA and school levels, which need further investigation. Some of them are highlighted below.

### Experience of host communities

There is much focus on experiences of refugee communities regarding their integration into the host community, yet integration is a two-way process with both communities playing their roles. Schools are among those that provide space for integration. So what are the experiences of host children in supporting asylum seeker and refugee children?

### Networks to support asylum seekers and refugees

There were two suggestions on the formation of networks. First, there was a suggestion to form parent–teacher networks. This would help improve asylum seeker and refugee parents' knowledge of the education system. Parents wanted to know the teaching methodology so that they could be in a better position to assist their children with homework. In addition, parents did not know how to go about helping their children if they had disciplinary problems. Suggestions included the formation of 'refugee parents support group/forum/platform in education' or a network of parents sharing ideas using IT.

Secondly, it was suggested that networks at regional and LA levels pool resources and share knowledge. There is need for empirical evidence on how such programmes could work and the benefits they would bring.

### Participation and involvement of asylum seeker and refugee parents in the education system

Evidence shows that asylum seekers' and refugees' contribution to the economy is typically underestimated but their contribution in the UK context may only be realised after achieving immigration security, which may take up to five years. Additionally, asylum seekers and refugees are a focus of attention from politicians and media thus increasing their vulnerability risk and risk of stigmatisation. Given the challenging circumstances under which asylum seekers and refugees find themselves, to what extent can their contribution be expected in schools and wider community initiatives?

### Evaluation of the asylum and refugee support system

The models including those suggested in this study need further exploration including the extent to which they affect integration of asylum seekers and refugees. How are the models grounded?

Contemporary disaster literature indicates some complementary and sometimes competing frameworks concerning recovery and rehabilitation of displaced persons. There is a possibility of investigating how disaster risk reduction and sustainable livelihood frameworks could be introduced in school curricula to improve children's understanding of the refugee experience.

## **Children's view of identity**

This study established that at the primary school racist and bullying incidents could be less than those at the secondary school. One of the reasons could be that at the primary school children see little or no difference between each other. This changes when children reach the secondary level and they start identifying and excluding themselves from ethnic groups. One of the reasons given for this is that adolescents tend to seek their own identity at this stage. The question is: Why is there this difference? What happens during the transition from primary to secondary school for the case of refugee, asylum and host children?

## **Concept of integration**

This study established that the concept of integration is still a contested one. It may be viewed as having three stages: primary integration where asylum seekers and refugees integrate with each other as people in similar circumstances; secondary integration where asylum seekers and refugees integrate with people outside their refugee community; and tertiary integration where the person is now independent and in control of his or her own livelihood opportunities. If this holds true, how does this happen? Does the host community go through the same process? What relationships exist between new refugee and settled refugee communities? For example, what relations exist between asylum seeker and refugee and settled Black and Minority Ethnic communities?

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## Appendix 1: Informed consent form



### CONSENT FORM

**Study Title: Supporting Asylum Seeker and Refugee Children in the Northeast of England (SPARC).**

I \_\_\_\_\_ (name)

of \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

give consent for myself/son/daughter (*delete as appropriate*) to participate in the SPARC research. I have received an information sheet about this study and I understand that participation is voluntary and I can withdraw at any stage, or avoid answering any questions that I feel are too personal or intrusive without giving reason. Should I require any further information I will contact the principal researchers whose details are given in the information sheet.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ (Participant)

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## INFORMATION SHEET

*You are being invited to take part in this study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the study is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the information. Ask if anything is not clear.*

### Project Name

SPARC (**S**upporting **A**sylum Seeker and **R**efugee **C**hildren within the education system in England).

### Project Aims:

The project aims at making an appraisal of the support given to asylum seeker and refugee children in their integration into the education system in the Northeast of England. It will determine the extent of involvement of the refugee parents in the integration of their children into the education system in the Northeast of England and one other area in England. It is envisaged the outcomes of the project will provide policy options and strengthen the capacity of refugees/asylum seekers service providers in the light of emerging challenges from the study.

**Geographical Focus:** Northeast of England and one other region

**Funder:** CfBT Education Trust

Time Frame: 1 year

**Implementing Agencies:** Northumbria University, Disaster and Development Centre (DDC) School of Applied Sciences; North of England Refugee Service (NERS)

**Target beneficiaries:** Refugee Community organisations (RCOs), refugees/asylum seekers, policymakers, host community

**Participation:** Your participation in the project is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without penalty.

**Procedures:** This project uses participatory learning and action (PLA) tools where participants are actively involved in sharing experiences with researchers/other participants. This will include use of focus group discussions and diagramming techniques and will take at most two hours.

**Confidentiality:** Results from the study will be confidential and you will not be identified should the work be published.

### Contact for further information:

Dr. Andrew Collins, DDC Director, Northumbria University, 6 North Street East, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8ST T: 0191 227 3583. Email: [andrew.collins@unn.ac.uk](mailto:andrew.collins@unn.ac.uk)

Daoud Zaaroura – NERS Chief Executive No. 2 Jesmond Road West, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 4PQ T: 0191 245 7311 Email: [dz@refugee.org.uk](mailto:dz@refugee.org.uk)

**Project Approval:** The project has been approved by Northumbria University, School of Applied Sciences; North of England Refugee Service; and CfBT.

**What if something goes wrong?** If you feel there is something wrong with any aspect of this research, please contact either Daoud Zaaroura or Dr. Andrew Collins who will refer the matter to Northumbria University Ethics Committee.

## Appendix 2: Demographic data for participants

Table 1: Distribution of participants according to gender

Participants by gender, %	Location of participant					All
	Gateshead	Middlesbrough	Newcastle	Sunderland	Manchester	
Male	40.0	44.7	45.6	37.5	45.7	44.2
Female	60.0	55.3	54.4	62.5	54.3	55.8
N	10	47	57	24	70	208

Table 2: Distribution of participants according to age

Participants by age, %	Location of participant					All
	Gateshead	Middlesbrough	Newcastle	Sunderland	Manchester	
0–9	0	4.3	12.3	33.3	5.8	10.1
10–19	0	25.5	17.5	16.7	20.3	19.3
20–29	0	8.5	12.3	12.5	27.5	15.9
30–39	50.0	27.7	36.8	25.0	29.0	31.4
40–49	20.0	23.4	7.0	0	13.0	12.6
50–59	30.0	6.4	14.0	8.3	4.3	9.2
60–69	0	4.3	0	4.2	0	1.4
N	10	47	57	24	70	208

Table 3: Distribution of participants according to ethnic origin

Participants by origin, %	Location of participant					All
	Gateshead	Middlesbrough	Newcastle	Sunderland	Manchester	
Asian or British	20.0	23.4	31.6	0	13.0	19.3
Black or British	0	46.8	31.6	54.2	30.4	35.7
Mixed	0	0	8.8	4.2	5.8	4.8
White	80.0	29.8	26.3	41.7	47.8	38.6
Other ethnic group	.0	.0	1.8	0	2.9	1.4
N	10	47	57	24	70	208

Table 4: Distribution of participants according to immigration status

Participants by status, %	Location of participant					All
	Gateshead	Middlesbrough	Newcastle	Sunderland	Manchester	
Asylum seeker	0	19.1	17.5	29.2	5.7	14.4
Refugee	0	21.3	24.6	0	2.9	12.5
British (naturalisation)	30.0	4.3	7.0	0	2.9	5.3
British	70.0	31.9	26.3	20.8	14.3	25.0
Other	0	0	1.8	0	0	0.5
Participants who declined to answer	0	23.4	22.8	50.0	74.3	42.3
N	10	47	57	24	70	208

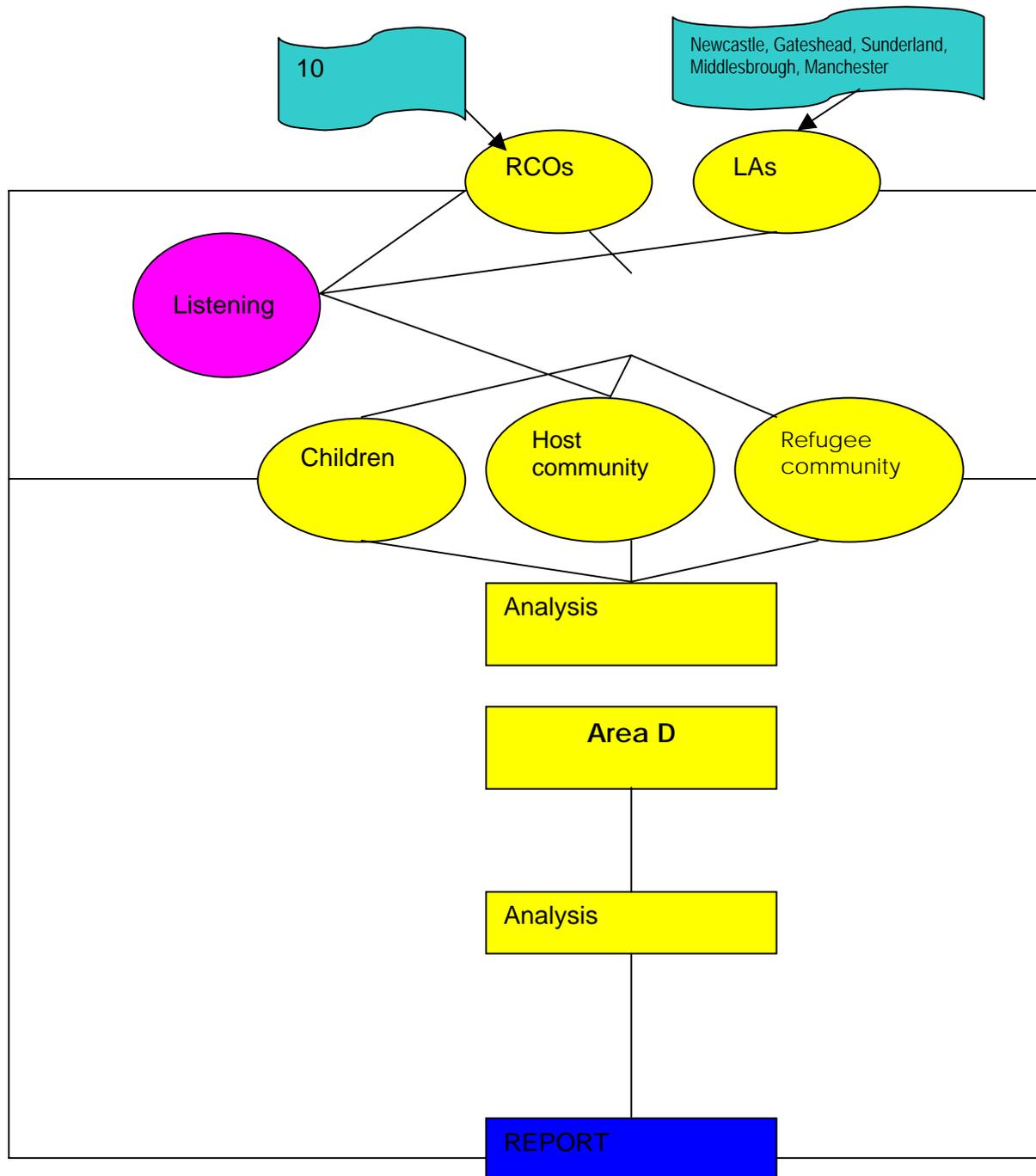
Table 5: Distribution of participants according to sector

Participants by sector, %	Location of participant					All
	Gateshead	Middlesbrough	Newcastle	Sunderland	Manchester	
LA	70.0	0	5.3	0	7.1	7.2
RCO	20.0	31.9	50.9	50.0	7.1	30.3
Other voluntary organisation	10.0	4.3	7.0	0	4.3	4.8
Not part of any organisation	0	63.8	36.8	50.0	81.4	57.7
N	10	47	57	24	70	208

Table 6: Distribution of participants according to responsibility

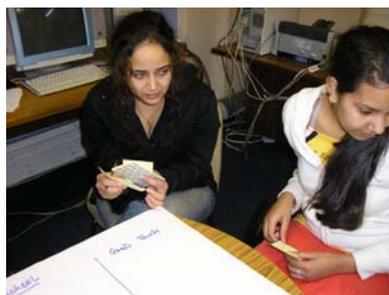
Participants by responsibility, %	Location of participant					All
	Gateshead	Middlesbrough	Newcastle	Sunderland	Manchester	
Policymaker/Management	40.0	6.4	17.5	16.7	8.6	13.0
Employee	40.0	14.9	17.5	4.2	7.1	13.0
Volunteer	0	10.6	10.5	20.8	2.9	8.7
Other	0	8.5	19.3	4.2	1.4	8.2
No indication	20.0	59.6	35.1	54.2	80.0	57.2
N	10	47	57	24	70	208

## Appendix 3: SPARC research process design



## Appendix 4: SPARC in pictures

Focus aroud





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