

Unit 3

How do we find refugees in our area?

How to identify where refugee communities and their organisations are located

What will this unit help you do and why?

What?

This unit will help you:

- find out about the refugees you have in your area and the organisations they create
- understand what data sources, national resources and sources of information are available to help you identify them
- find out how refugees and asylum-seekers may be organising, meeting and networking if their presence is not immediately obvious.

Why?

- Finding out about the refugee community organisations (RCOs) in your area will enable you to promote your services, make your services more accessible to RCOs, and may increase their uptake of those services.
- Refugees (and sometimes other groups of new migrants) may be quite small in number compared with other communities in your area that you already know about, but they may well have as great a need for support.

Example

'I suppose we don't think that there's anything in particular we can do for refugees round here – we don't really know of any groups or organisations except for really informal ones and we are not geared up to helping them.'

Key issues

How do refugees arrive in an area?

When refugees arrive in the UK, they may not have a choice about where they reside because some programmes, such as the Gateway Protection Programme, settle refugees in partnership with particular local authorities. When refugees do have a choice, like anyone else, they tend to go to areas where they have existing contacts: friends, family, community or faith groups. If they have none, the area they go to may be a matter of chance. For example, some may be studying in the UK when they have to seek refuge, and may stay near the university where they were studying.

Communities do not necessarily form only in places where there are already refugees. For example, large numbers of Zimbabweans and Tamils arrived in many areas of the UK to work or study and settled there. Later on refugees coming to the UK naturally gravitated around these areas.

Where there has been a refugee programme, this has usually been run in co-operation or partnership with local authorities which have volunteered to become a settlement hub for the relevant communities, as described in Unit 2.

Until 2000, the great majority of asylum-seekers (and so, eventually, refugees) were in London and the South East, simply because that is where the major ports and airports in the UK are. London is one of the most diverse cities in the world, and so provides a natural home for new arrivals, who will find people speaking the same language, as well as shops, places of worship and community centres that they are familiar with.

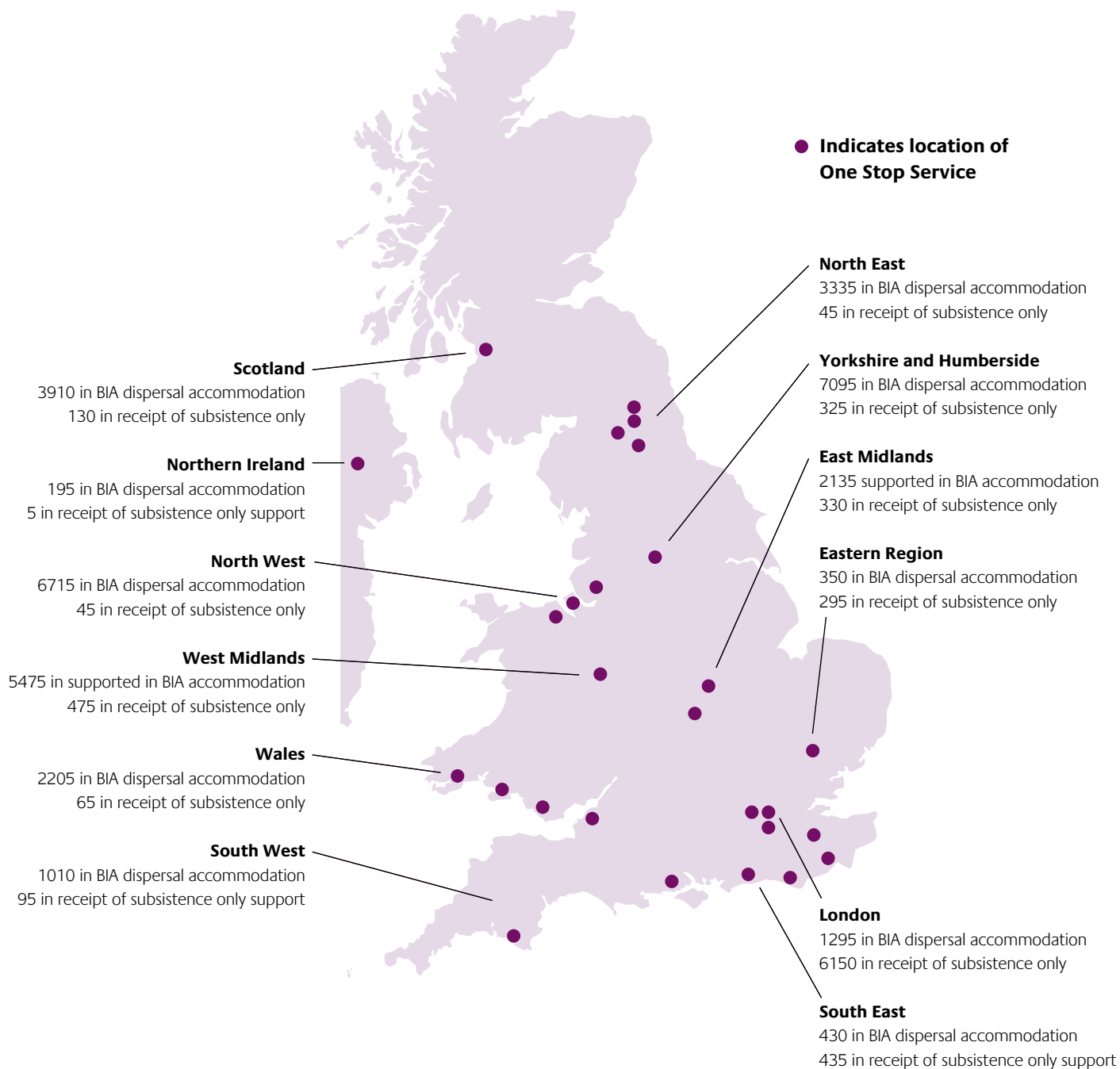
Since 2000, the government has had a mandatory dispersal programme in operation for all asylum-seekers who need accommodation. The map on page 22 shows where known asylum-seekers were at the end of December 2007.³ This includes those accommodated by the UK Border Agency (UKBA) formerly known as the Border and Immigration Agency (BIA), and those receiving subsistence-only support (ie, those staying with friends or family) and receiving support from the UKBA. Of those receiving subsistence-only support, 70% were in London. The map does not show destitute asylum-seekers or refugees who are unable to access housing.

‘The official line round here is that there are no RCOs, and in a formal sense there may not be. But there are numerous communities which are still living here, many from the dispersal programme. All you have to do is go to the local shop to hear people organising events and support and trying to get by outside the formal networks and funding support.’

CVS worker

³ Source: Refugee Council (*ASP News*, the Newsletter produced by the Asylum Support Partnership Team (ASPT) available on the Refugee Council website. Map provided by the ASPT with statistics provided by the UK Border Agency

Number of asylum seekers in BIA dispersal accommodation or in receipt of subsistence only support at the end of December 2007



- Total number of asylum seekers in BIA dispersal accommodation: 34,150
- Total number of asylum seekers in receipt of subsistence only support: 8,900
- Total number of asylum seekers supported by BIA: 43,050

Notes: One stop services are the services provided by the Asylum Support Partnership under contract with the UK Border Agency. BIA was renamed UKBA in April 2008.

Census data

Although the last census, carried out in 2001, is now quite out of date, it provides a very limited snapshot of what was happening at the time. A good way to review the information from it is to use a mini-site developed by the BBC called Born Abroad. (Go to www.bbc.co.uk and search for 'born abroad'.) This site has used the census information to develop maps and tables about most nationalities living in Britain, and the most popular regions and areas of settlement.

Local authority data on asylum-seekers

To obtain the latest figures on asylum-seekers for a particular local authority area, you can ask the regional consortium that deals with asylum-seekers and refugees. These consortia are now working within the **Regional Strategic Migration Partnerships** set up by the UK Border Agency, (previously known as the Border and Immigration Agency) in each region. (Contact details for these are available from your local authority or regional development agency.) The figures are also held by the Asylum Support Partnership (a partnership of organisations that offer support to asylum-seekers), coordinated by the Asylum Support Partnership Team at the Refugee Council. Maps like the one on page 22 are regularly published in their newsletter, which is on the Refugee Council website, www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

Who can help me find out more?

The main organisations working with refugees are likely to be good sources of information:

- The Refugee Council (www.refugeecouncil.org.uk) is the largest organisation in the UK working with asylum-seekers and refugees, and in some areas also works with RCOs.
- The Scottish Refugee Council (www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk) and Welsh Refugee Council (www.welshrefugeecouncil.org) play similar roles in their respective countries.
- Refugee Action (www.refugee-action.org.uk) has a national remit and offices across England, all of which offer community development services.

Some local authorities have conducted research in their areas that may tell you more about refugee and migrant communities. In London, the Researching Asylum in London website (www.researchasylum.org.uk) is an independent database of research on refugee and asylum issues relevant to London and may be useful. Similarly, the Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees (www.icar.org.uk) is an academic research and information organisation situated in the School of Social Sciences at City University. ICAR provides a number of online resources including up-to-date and accurate information on UK asylum statistics.

Other agencies in your area may already be in touch with refugees. Talk to any that specialise in work with asylum-seekers and refugees, or with black and minority ethnic communities.

Many areas have local **multi-agency forums** on refugee and migrant issues which are attended by voluntary organisations working with refugees, or by RCOs themselves. Many local authorities also have asylum-seeker teams, or (less frequently) **refugee integration projects**. Some areas have a local RCO forum (a forum of refugee-led community organisations – see *Glossary* on page 7), which may be supported by a specialist infrastructure organisation.

The Regional Strategic Migration Partnership in your region (details above) may also be a source of information.

See also *Further resources* on page 59, for details of other organisations working with refugees.

What else can I do to find refugee communities in my area?

Other places where refugees may go include:

- the local college where English for speakers of other languages is taught
- places of worship: find them through your local faiths forum
- sports and leisure facilities
- shops and cafés, especially those offering food from the refugees' countries of origin, internet facilities and international newspapers
- advice agencies.

The UK refugee population is continuously changing and evolving. It is difficult to get up-to-date and accurate information on the number and type of RCOs in a specific area (see Unit 4.) Despite this, it is possible to build up a picture of the type of refugee communities in your area by developing a mix of:

- proactively seeking particular communities (perhaps the ones that appear most in the statistics)
- responding to organisations and individuals that approach you
- advertising your organisation's services, making it clear that the door is open for refugees (and other migrants where appropriate) to encourage them to access your services.

Tips for finding out about refugees in your area

- Settlement statistics are useful, but only as a starting point. Be aware that the numbers of particular communities can change dramatically. Use statistics to fill the gaps if you have not been contacted by RCOs themselves.
- Keep looking. New information will be produced and new communities will be arriving. Keep asking.
- Look for community leaders, faith groups and sports teams in new communities rather than looking for formally constituted RCOs. Refugees may not be organised: they may have informal networks or no structures at all.
- RCOs may not know about LIOs, or about how LIOs can help them. Find ways to identify RCOs' agendas and attract their interest. Development workers are used to dealing with organisations that approach them for support, but who do not realise that they also need assistance in other areas of organisational development. RCOs are no different.