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**Dispersal: a barrier to integration?**

**The UK dispersal policy for asylum seekers and refugees since 1999: the  
case of Iraqi Kurds.**

**by**

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'When an alien lives with you in your land, do not ill treat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt' (Leviticus, 19: 33-34).

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'O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise. You perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord. You hem me in – behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast' (Psalm 139: 1-10).



## **Declaration**

The thesis is the candidate's own work and it has not been submitted for a degree at another university

## ABSTRACT

The large rise in the number of asylum seekers coming to Britain in the 1990s and since then has made asylum policy and associated matters an increasingly important issue for the government. On the one hand, the government has wished to deter asylum seekers but on the other, it recognises the importance of integrating those who are given permission to settle. Issues surrounding asylum seekers have become highly political as the media, local authorities and local people have all become involved in trying to influence the content and delivery of asylum policy. This thesis focuses on the effect of the current dispersal policy on asylum seeker and refugee integration. In this piece of research, an asylum seeker is an individual who reaches the UK through his/her own means and submits a request for asylum to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) at the Home Office. Asylum seekers who are granted permission to reside in the UK are defined as refugees in this thesis, whether they be Convention refugees or individuals possessing Humanitarian Protection (HP) or Discretionary Leave (DL). This study uses the approach to integration developed by Ager and Strang (2004a) and in particular their four main components of asylum seeker and refugee integration. My major hypothesis is that dispersal exercises a negative impact on the four dimensions of integration studied because this policy sends asylum seekers to localities where there are no settled co-ethnics, hostile host-community members, limited employment opportunities and inadequate dwellings.

In order to test this hypothesis, I compare the significantly different integration opportunities encountered by asylum seekers and refugees in two contrasting dispersal cities, Newcastle and Birmingham. Given the national, ethnic and socio-economic heterogeneity of the group under study, I also adopt a case study approach and focus on the experiences of Kurds from Iraq. Significantly, asylum seekers and refugees possess different rights and for this reason, their experiences of dispersal and integration are analyzed separately.

I chose semi-structured interviewing with asylum seekers and refugees because this method reflects my structured research strategy as well as my commitment to remain alert to unexpected findings. Furthermore, this technique helps the researcher appreciate the standpoint of the group studied, an important objective in my study. The in-depth nature of the qualitative data produced also assists with the understanding of the complex processes tied to the effect of the dispersal policy on integration. A non-probability sampling technique, snowball sampling, customarily used when a population is elusive, was employed to select the sample of asylum seekers and refugees. Semi-structured interviews were also carried out with national policy-makers and local service providers as well as Kurdish community workers and businessmen. These interviews helped the researcher understand the standpoints of central and local government, the voluntary and private sector as well as the perspective of influential Iraqi Kurds.

The findings suggest that asylum seekers and refugees' experiences of dispersal and their process of integrating into UK society are not necessarily contradictory phenomena. In fact, in some instances, the dispersal policy has introduced members of this group to better integration opportunities than they would otherwise have encountered in their voluntarily chosen, traditional areas of concentration, in London and the South East of England. The conclusions also highlight several gaps in Ager and Strang's (2004a) integration framework, namely the absence of an intra-national spatial dimension, the failure to incorporate the ambivalent, non-linear effect of the passage of time and finally, the lack of reference to the idea that success in one sub-area of integration can reduce progress in another.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BSA	British Sociological Association
CPH	Centre Provisoire d'Hebergement
DETR	Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
DfID	Department for International Development
DL	Discretionary Leave
EA	Emergency Accommodation
ECRE	European Council for Refugees and Exiles
ELR	Exceptional Leave to Remain
HP	Humanitarian Protection
ICAR	The Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees in the UK
IKRP	Iraqi Kurdistan Research Programme
ILR	Indefinite Leave to Remain
IND	Immigration and Nationality Directorate
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
LGA	Local Government Association
NASS	National Asylum Support Service
NERS	North East Refugee Service
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
RCOs	Refugee community organisations
RRC	Regional Refugee Council
RSL	Registered Social Landlord
SUNRISE	Strategic Upgrade of National Refugee Integration Services
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees



## INTRODUCTION

*'Our nightmare is of asylum seekers being scattered across the country, isolated on sink estates in monocultural areas. Local community relations would suffer. Of course, many, if not a majority, will drift back to London. Without any entitlement to state support, they will be dependent on their families and communities – already desperately poor – for help or face the risks and exploitation of illegal working' (Nick Hardwick, Refugee Council, The Guardian, 5 August 1998).*

This statement accurately reflects the perspective of national voluntary sector agencies and local authorities outside of London and the South East of England at the time when central government was forming the very first foundations of the current UK dispersal policy. For some of those involved in the formulation and implementation of the dispersal programme, this view has become a reality. However, based on my research, this description of dispersal does not constitute the full picture. In order to explore the reasons for this assertion, it is first necessary to present the specifics of my dissertation as well as the reasons for choosing to study this particular topic.

The aim of this thesis is to identify the impact of the current UK dispersal policy on asylum seeker and refugee integration. Iraqi Kurds, a group who present many of the typical traits of the broader asylum seeker and refugee population in the UK, were chosen as a case study. There exists a significant amount of literature concerning the integration of Black and Minority ethnic groups and to a certain extent asylum seekers and refugees. However, very little research has been undertaken on integration in relation to dispersal policies. Having studied various approaches to integration, Ager and Strang's (2004a) stance was finally



adopted for this study. The particular strength of their approach is that these authors combine the functional and relational aspects of integration whilst valuing and emphasising the 'two-way process' of integration. They note that 'an individual or group is integrated within a society when they:

- achieve public outcomes within employment, housing, education and health which are equivalent to those achieved within the wider host communities;
- are socially connected with members of a (national, ethnic, cultural, religious or other) community with which they identify, with members of other communities and with relevant services and functions of the state;
- and have sufficient linguistic competence and cultural knowledge, and a sufficient sense of security and stability, to confidently engage in that society in a manner consistent with shared notions of nationhood and citizenship'.

Several dimensions of integration have been focused upon in this piece of research, namely social bonds, social bridges, employment and housing. Following fieldwork, it was ascertained that a series of intervening factors influenced the effect of the current UK dispersal policy on the integration of asylum seekers and refugees. As a result, my analysis of the relationship between dispersal and integration focuses on the different ways in which these elements intervene to produce varied outcomes. My findings are based upon semi-structured interviews undertaken with Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees, national policy-makers, local service providers and Iraqi Kurdish community workers and businessmen in Newcastle and Birmingham. The reasons for carrying out this particular piece of research are presented below.

## Researching asylum seekers and refugees

Undertaking research on asylum seekers and refugees is important because, since the 1990s, at a worldwide level, the number of individuals in search of asylum has increased significantly. Moreover, the asylum route constitutes one of the most popular and effective ways, at least for those originating from developing countries, of entering and settling in a Western country. In the case of the UK, asylum seekers and refugees constitute a high proportion of the newly immigrated population. Furthermore, they represent a growing share of the total immigrant population presently residing in the UK.

Table A. Asylum applications received in the UK (excluding dependents), 1989-2003.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of asylum applications</b>
1989	11 640
1990	26 205
1991	44 840
1992	24 605
1993	22 370
1994	32 830
1995	43 965
1996	29 640
1997	32 500
1998	46 015
1999	71 160
2000	80 315
2001	71 025
2002	84 310
2003	49 405

Source: Home Office asylum statistics (Heath, Jeffries and Purcell, 2004; Watson and Danzelman, 1998).

## **Studying integration**

Integration, as defined by Ager and Strang (2004a: 5), constitutes an essential research field, particularly in the political and social climate that exists in the UK at present. The riots in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford in the summer of 2002 revealed that many members of the different national and ethnic groups residing in the UK rarely interact with one another, living parallel rather than cohesive lives (Community Cohesion Unit, 2003). In addition, the suicide bombings in London on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005 showed that some British-born Muslims feel a greater loyalty towards their Muslim brothers and sisters abroad than they do towards their co-nationals in the UK. As a result of these events, many individuals from all sectors of UK society are reflecting upon the effects of national and ethnic diversity on the current and future cultural, social and religious norms of the country. The relative absence of community cohesion amongst the Black and Minority Ethnic groups as well as between the latter and the majority white British group is concerning as is the divided allegiances of some British-born Muslims. Consequently, the principles and the process of integration currently feature prominently in the minds of host-community members as well as on the government's policy agenda.

Refugee integration is particularly topical, at present. The Home Office is now channelling substantial resources towards developing a refugee integration strategy. Their SUNRISE programme (Strategic Upgrade of National Refugee Integration Services) is due to commence shortly (Home Office, 2005a). Finally, within the sphere of academic research, according to Castles et al (2002: 158), 'there has been very little systematic research about integration issues at the national level, since 1996'.

## **Analysing the current UK dispersal policy**

Embarking upon a study that focuses on a dispersal policy represents a crucial research initiative. Certainly, dispersal policies for asylum seekers, refugees, members of Black and Minority Ethnic groups and the homeless have been frequently used by many Western countries since the end of the Second World War. Given their continuing popularity, it is important to analyse and evaluate the effectiveness of dispersal policies, to ensure that the lessons learnt from one policy model are channelled into the formulation and implementation process of the next dispersal programme.

The current dispersal policy itself is very different from previous UK policies and therefore constitutes an important subject for research. Indeed, the dispersed asylum seekers form a highly diverse population, both in terms of their nationalities and ethnicities. This contrasts with the earlier dispersal schemes that were directed towards one national or ethnic group at a time. The pattern and process of integration certainly varies when the integrating population is very diverse. Secondly, the current policy has been implemented on a far larger scale than ever before, given the greater number of asylum claimants in the UK at present compared to previously. Thus, this policy, unlike earlier programmes, has the potential to modify dramatically the whole ethno-cultural landscape of the UK. Regarding the existing body of research on the current UK dispersal policy, the majority of the publications originate from the government and voluntary sector agencies. These studies essentially focus on policy formulation and implementation, organisational operations and the functioning as well as the quality of specific, tangible services (Refugee Council, 1997, 2004c, 2005a,



2003a, 2004a, 2004b; Audit Commission, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c; Wilson, 2001; Carter and El-Hassan, 2003; Garvie, 2001). Indeed, there is very little research on the actual experiences of dispersed asylum seekers and refugees. This study endeavours to fill this gap.

The extent to which public policies, like dispersal, can successfully influence the residential location of a large group of individuals, and in so doing affect their social ties, their employment prospects and their housing conditions, is also very interesting. Studying a dispersal policy is certainly a way of exploring the degree to which public policy can shape the social structure of society. It is important to note, however, as discussed and implied throughout this thesis, that some of those dispersed are able to overcome the restrictive aspects of the dispersal programme via the use of creative, subversive strategies. Thus, researching dispersal can also help uncover the extent to which individuals and groups re-shape public policy to their own advantage. A further fascinating feature of the current UK dispersal policy, in particular, is that it embodies the very contradictions that are present within UK asylum policy. Certainly, dispersal aims to deter future asylum applicants whilst striving to encourage the settlement and integration of refugees in the dispersal localities to which they are sent as asylum seekers. The research undertaken reveals how these incongruities are worked out in practice.

### **Investigating Iraqi Kurds**

There are considerable practical and methodological difficulties in studying such a heterogeneous and mobile category of people as asylum seekers and refugees. The problems of obtaining a representative sample and interviewing

people in different areas with different languages would be huge. I therefore decided to undertake qualitative rather than quantitative research and to focus my research on one specific group, namely Kurds from Iraq.

Iraqi Kurds were chosen as a case study group because of my existing knowledge and personal experience of Kurdistan and Iraq. Indeed, between October 1999 and February 2001, I worked on a project, funded by the Department for International Development (DfID), as a research officer in the Kurdish region of Iraq. The project, entitled the Iraqi Kurdish Research Programme (IKRP), aimed to develop the evidence-based planning capabilities of the recently established Kurdish Regional Authorities. During my stay in Iraq, I had the opportunity to meet many Kurdish politicians, policy-makers and service providers. I also developed several good friendships with my Kurdish colleagues. Through the discussions I had with Kurds, I developed an understanding of their cultural norms and views. My experience of living and working in the Kurdish part of Iraq certainly helped me connect, during my fieldwork, with Iraqi Kurds residing in the UK. Moreover, my knowledge of Kurdish society helped me improve my understanding of Iraqi Kurds' experiences of dispersal and integration in the UK. The entire idea of undertaking this thesis first emerged whilst I was working for IKRP. At the time, many Kurds were asking me about life in the UK and what it would be like for them to live there. I knew little about refugee policy and the experiences of refugee communities in the UK and I was therefore unable to accurately answer their questions. Their queries, however, sparked my interest and I therefore decided, at the end of my contract with IKRP, to undertake research on the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK. Finally, keeping in mind that the profile of migrant groups is constantly changing, Iraqis, a proportion of whom are Kurds, currently constitute a significant share of the total

population of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK and thus, I judged that a study focusing on Iraqi Kurds would be valuable for policymakers and academic researchers alike. Certainly, according to Home Office asylum statistics (Heath, Jeffries and Lloyd, 2003), 17% of all asylum applications lodged in 2002, excluding dependents, were made by Iraqis, the largest nationality group that year.

Table B. Asylum applications received in the UK from Iraqis (excluding dependents), 2000-2003.

Year	Asylum applications from Iraqis	
	Number	Percentage of all applications
2000	7 475	9.3
2001	6 680	9.4
2002	14 570	17.3
2003	4 015	8.1

Source: Home Office asylum statistics (Heath, Jeffries and Purcell, 2004)

In addition to interviewing Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees, I also interviewed national policy makers, local service providers, Kurdish community workers and Kurdish businessmen.

### **Exploring Newcastle and Birmingham**

Newcastle and Birmingham were chosen as case study dispersal cities because of the contrasting traits they presented regarding the four main domains of integration chosen for this study. Thus, I opted for Newcastle which is characterised by a small group of recently arrived Iraqi Kurds as well as host-society members that are generally unaccustomed to residing alongside Black and Minority Ethnic groups and refugee communities. In Newcastle, there is also



a large amount of vacant dwellings, particularly in the social rented sector and there are relatively limited employment opportunities. Birmingham, in contrast, contains a large group of newly settled Iraqi Kurds and host-society members that are accustomed to living in a multicultural environment. Birmingham is also typified by a relatively small proportion of empty housing and greater opportunities for work. Importantly, as noted by Castles et al (2002: 158), 'comparative research about the situation of refugees and asylum seekers in different geographic locations within the UK is missing'.

### **Thesis structure**

The following chapter examines the rationale for and traits of past and current dispersal policies in the UK as well as contemporary dispersal programmes present in several European countries. The effect of the dispersal schemes on the short and long term spatial distribution of those dispersed is also discussed. Chapter 2 analyses the sociological debates regarding the meaning of 'refugee' and presents the legal approaches towards and definitions of this term. Various definitions and theories concerning refugee integration, including the one adopted in this thesis, are presented as well as the reasons for focusing my study of integration on the dimensions of employment, housing, social bonds and social bridges. The potential effect of the dispersal policy on these aspects of integration and the possible intervening factors that influence this relationship are also examined. Chapter 3 investigates the ways in which my research hypotheses were tested through my fieldwork, exploring my justification for using semi-structured interviews, snowball sampling and a case study approach. My own experiences of research in the field are discussed and the effects I might have had on the various components of the research process are analysed.



Finally, the ethics of interviewing asylum seekers and refugees as well as undertaking research on a politically sensitive and emotionally charged subject are scrutinised. Chapter 4 appraises the short and long term impact of the dispersal policy on Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees' participation in local, co-ethnic social bonding. Chapter 5 considers the short and long term effect of the dispersal policy on Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees' social bridging with non-co-ethnics. Chapter 6 and 7 assesses the short and long term influence of the dispersal policy on Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees' access to suitable employment and housing. The Conclusion chapter presents the main findings of the thesis and the implications for policy.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **THE CURRENT UK DISPERSAL POLICY:**

#### **FOUNDATIONS, PRINCIPLES AND OPERATIONAL TRAITS**

This chapter examines the origins as well as the objectives, underlying principles and operational traits of the contemporary UK dispersal policy. The Vietnamese 'thin' dispersal model as well as the Bosnian 'cluster' dispersal scheme are reviewed in detail, given their influential role in forming the basis of the current UK policy. As a means of locating this discussion within the broader context of contemporary international migration patterns, this chapter begins with the analysis of Europe's new position in the global refugee system.

#### **1.1 Europe's new position in the global refugee system and the introduction of dispersal policies**

In the early 1970s, Europeans viewed the circumstances of refugees as a Third World concern to be resolved within the Third World. On the occasions when Europe did become involved, it received predetermined, cautiously selected programme refugees whose settlement occurred under controlled conditions (Robinson, 2003b: 3). Furthermore, European states implemented a reasonably open policy with regards to asylum seekers and until the mid-1970s, European countries still welcomed foreign labour. However, from the mid-1980s, the liberal governmental policies became increasingly restrictive and the question of asylum, until then relatively uncontroversial, became more and more of an issue. This change is the product of several phenomena.

Firstly, the economic boom came to an end in the 1970s. Indeed, Europe experienced a severe recession sparked off by the increase in oil prices and perpetuated by the New International Division of Labour. The latter deeply damaged the manufacturing industry of the high wage economies in Europe and significantly decreased their previously high demand for unskilled labour. As a result, labour immigration was stopped. Secondly, the number of applications for asylum began to increase because of the reduction in the real price of air travel, the propagation of direct air routes to European destinations, the wider dissemination of media and communications technology in the Third World and the chain effect of prior migration (Robinson, 2003b: 4 & 22). Importantly, the number of asylum claimants also grew because it was difficult to be granted admission into a European country in other ways (Joly, 1996: 46-48). These events coincided with the outbreak of conflicts which failed to attract significant international humanitarian attention. Consequently, the option available to refugees in these areas was to travel to Europe on their own initiative and lodge a claim for asylum (Kjaerum in Joly, 1996: 48). Thirdly, the prospect of the Single European Act being ratified in 1986 caused great concern amongst the so-called Northern EC countries. Promising to abolish internal EC borders, the implementation of this Act would eventually lead to the free movement not only of goods and capital but also of people. The Northern EC nation states felt that this measure would increase the concentration of asylum claimants in their respective countries, the latter being very attractive to asylum seekers because of their relatively strong economies and good welfare systems. These fears and concerns gave rise to the Schengen Agreement between Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, France and Germany in 1985. This agreement signified a 'harmonisation of asylum policies to make them more restrictive throughout the Schengen territory' (Joly, 1996: 48). Finally, the beginning of the



1990s witnessed the dismantlement of the communist regimes and the end of the Cold War. These events certainly increased the potential for significant population movements from the Eastern European states to the Northern EC countries, the prospect of this possibility becoming a reality further deepening Europe's restrictive approach on immigration (Joly, 1996: 45).

A rationale of deterrence now dominates the policy objectives of European countries. Refugee recognition rates across Europe have sharply declined suggesting that national governments are keen to present to the indigenous population an image of toughness towards 'bogus asylum seekers', this higher proportion of refusals being perceived by the public as evidence that the majority of those applying for asylum are in fact economic migrants (Robinson, 2003b: 4). Additionally, with the source of those seeking asylum having expanded from fellow European countries to Third World nations, the term asylum seeker has become racialised, referring now to individuals who are visibly distinct and culturally different (Robinson, 2003b: 5). The growing perception of asylum seekers, amongst Europeans, as counterfeits and therefore undeserving has provided a strong justification for the national governments' restrictive stance and consequently, national public policies directed towards asylum claimants are generally portrayed as solutions 'to what is now perceived and represented as a problem' (Robinson, 2003b: 6).

One of the central concerns of the late 1990s in Europe regarding asylum seekers and refugees was the manner in which this group was inclined to congregate and settle in specific areas, cities and even neighbourhoods in their host-country (Robinson, 2003b: 6). In particular, the ports of entry and capital cities constitute attractive locations for asylum seekers and refugees. Certainly,



these areas are typified by the presence of already established co-national and co-ethnic communities, the existence of a large formal and informal economy as well as proximity to the authorities involved with the asylum application process (Pearl and Zetter, 2002: 228-9). In addition to this phenomenon of congregation being perceived by Europeans as problematic in itself, this trend also led to the concentration of the financial and social costs involved in settling asylum seekers and refugees (Boswell, 2001).

In response to media hype (Kaye, 1998) and the combination of the events listed above, public attitudes towards asylum seekers in Europe changed significantly. Across Europe, it would appear that the growing consensus during the 1990s was that dispersal policies constituted a reasonable response as well as an adequate solution to the 'problem' of asylum seeker and refugee spatial concentration. The main justification for its introduction is the conviction that this type of policy effectively and efficiently distributes the costs of supporting this group. Indeed, national European governments maintain that the arrival of asylum seekers constitutes a national, rather than a local, 'problem' and consequently, no specific area should be expected to cover a disproportionate share of the costs involved in this group's settlement. Moreover, it was maintained that the indigenous population possessed a right, over and above the rights of asylum seekers and refugees, to reside in communities where their cultures and identities would not overly be challenged by the settlement of non-conforming groups (Robinson, 2003b: 23).

This review of the current international migration patterns, within which the current dispersal policy is broadly located, is now followed by a discussion of the Vietnamese and Bosnian dispersal models.

## **1.2 Foundations of the contemporary UK dispersal policy**

The dispersal of refugees (or asylum seekers) is not a novel concept in the UK. Indeed, since 1945, the government has formulated and implemented dispersal policies for various groups of programme refugees<sup>1</sup>. However, the contemporary UK model is new. Indeed, it originates from the failings of the Vietnamese 'thin' dispersal programme and builds upon the subsequently devised 'cluster' dispersal model adopted for the Bosnian and Kosovan programme refugees. These dispersal policies are herewith reviewed as a means of presenting the origins of the contemporary dispersal model. Prior to this, as a means of placing these past policies in context, the earlier Polish and Ugandan Asian dispersal programmes are briefly discussed.

The first post-war dispersal policy in the UK was directed towards Polish programme refugees who arrived during and after World War II. These individuals were dispersed 'as widely as possible', in clusters of approximately 450 persons to reception centres (Sword, Davies and Ciechanowski, 1989: 271). In the long term, the bulk of the Polish refugees continued to reside near their initial dispersal area, usually in neighbouring cities (Patterson, 1977: 222). It is possible that the widespread labour shortages existing across the UK, English-Polish marriages and onward emigration plans account for this outcome. Importantly, by 1950, a quarter of the dispersed Polish refugees had drifted

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<sup>1</sup> Programme refugees are refugees who came to the UK as part of an organised programme and include the Poles (legally defined as economic migrants but sociologically identified as refugees), the Ugandan Asians (British passport holders who, in sociological terms, are refugees) and the Vietnamese, Bosnians and Kosovans (both legally and sociologically defined as refugees).

towards London and the South East (Sword, Davies and Ciechanowski, 1989: 339).

In 1972, the UK government introduced another dispersal programme in response to the resettlement of approximately 30,000 Ugandan Asians to the UK (Bristow, 1976: 268). The principal aim of the policy was to disperse the refugees as 'widely as possible throughout the UK'. Although dispersal would be voluntary (Bristow, 1976: 270), only the localities designated by the government as 'green' contained dispersal housing. The attribution of one of these two colours to a location depended on the local availability of housing, schools, social services and employment (Kuepper, Lackey and Swinerton, 1975: 74). Interestingly, the criterion most frequently used was the size of the locality's existing Asian or other immigrant communities (Dines, 1973: 381). Significantly, the UK government only dispersed 38% of the Ugandan Asians (Ugandan Resettlement Board, 1974: 8). The primary explanation for this low rate of dispersals appears to have been the lack of political will amongst governmental officials to facilitate the implementation of the policy (Kuepper, Lackey and Swinerton, 1975: 75). Indeed, the principal aim, given Enoch Powell's popularity at the time, was to minimise the possibility of a white backlash over immigration and race relation issues rather than disperse and settle destitute refugees or meet refugee needs (Bristow, 1976: 277).

### 1.2.1 The dispersal of the Vietnamese refugees

#### Traits of the Vietnamese dispersal policy and basis for its introduction

In 1979, in response to the crisis in Hong Kong, the UK government accepted two quotas of Vietnamese, totalling 11,500. Relatives arrived subsequently through the family reunification scheme (Robinson, 1993: 325). As part of the reception and resettlement policy, the government dispersed the Vietnamese throughout the UK, following a short stay in transit camps.

One of the principal characteristics of the Vietnamese dispersal policy was that it presented compulsory characteristics whilst never overtly being labelled as forced. Indeed, on the one hand, the UK government provided Vietnamese families with a selection of alternative destinations for resettlement and in some cases, the Vietnamese visited potential homes to assess their suitability. However, on the other, the Vietnamese had very limited knowledge of the various UK regions and towns, given the absence of a pre-existing, established co-national community residing in the UK that could have informed them. Consequently, 'choices were (...) not based upon rational assessments of a destination's advantages or disadvantages but were effectively random selections between unknown alternatives' (Robinson, 1993: 327). The resettlement officers' keenness for the Vietnamese to vacate the transit camps quickly further reinforced this compulsory aspect of the policy. Certainly, those implementing dispersal placed subtle pressure on the Vietnamese to 'choose' their housing promptly.



A further distinguishing feature of the Vietnamese dispersal policy was the Home Office's recommendation to disperse this group of refugees thinly in sets of four to ten families. The UK government seemingly advocated this approach for several reasons. Firstly, from the perspective of the local authorities involved, securing council housing for a small number of individuals would be more easily achieved and more readily acceptable by practitioners as well as local residents than obtaining dwellings for a larger group of persons. Thus, central government could rely on voluntary offers of accommodation from each relevant local authority, thereby avoiding the politically unfavourable task of requisitioning property.

Moreover, the UK government believed that the adoption of this measure would circumvent the need to reimburse local authorities for any additional costs engendered by the presence of the families in their locality, given the very small number of Vietnamese refugees in each area. In addition, central government was keen to avoid criticism over accepting Vietnamese refugees at a time of mass unemployment and consequently hoped that the thin dispersal of this group throughout the UK would minimise their impact on any particular local labour market. Furthermore, the UK government maintained that dispersing this group widely, in such small numbers, would prevent the formation of strong local opposition to their resettlement. In addition, the UK government claimed that the thin dispersal of the Vietnamese would stimulate the process of integration, their small numbers in any one locality encouraging them to interact with host-community members. Finally, the government wished to avoid the formation of Vietnamese 'ghettos' (Robinson and Hale, 1989: 6; Robinson, 1993: 326).

## Impact of the dispersal policy on the lasting geographical distribution of Vietnamese refugees across the UK

Significantly, the UK government failed to disperse all of the Vietnamese quota refugees. Indeed, according to Jones' (1982) research, the government dispersed less than half of his random sample. Certainly, some Vietnamese refugees relied upon their own strategies, obtaining assistance, in particular, from the UK Catholic community who helped some members of this group settle in their new host-country. Illustrations of this trend are especially evident in Birmingham (Joly, 1989: 89-90).

It would seem that slightly more than half of the dispersed Vietnamese refugees (51%) relocated to another area in the UK (Robinson, 1993), a significant proportion moving shortly after their initial dispersal. Indeed, 'almost a third of movers had changed their address within one year of resettlement and over half of all movers had made their first move within two years' (Robinson and Hale, 1989). Robinson remarks that the scale of secondary migration amongst the dispersed Vietnamese refugees is astounding, considering the barriers to relocation that exist amongst recently arrived immigrant groups. Indeed, the majority of the dispersed Vietnamese spoke little English, possessed limited prior experience of contact with western culture and had low levels of education and transferable skills. Moving localities thus involved high levels of risk and insecurity without the assurance that life in the new location would be of an improved standard. Moreover, on arrival in the UK, the Vietnamese had no pre-existing ethnic community on which they could rely upon for assistance. Furthermore, they brought with them their experience of persecution, flight and

loss and their possible lack of motivation as a result of their refugee trauma and camp living (Robinson, 1993: 333-334).

The dispersed Vietnamese's sense of isolation in their respective dispersal localities explains, in part, the trend towards secondary migration amongst half of this group. Certainly, the isolation of the Vietnamese was a product of thin dispersal, the absence, as already noted, of an already established Vietnamese community throughout the UK as well as the group's poor level of English language fluency and their consequent inability to communicate effectively with host-community members. The Vietnamese's feelings of loneliness are likely to have been further aggravated by the unwillingness of the local authorities to provide services specifically for this group, precisely because their numbers were so small (Joint Committee for Refugees from Vietnam, 1982). Incidentally, refugees, in contrast to economic migrants or members of Black and Minority Ethnic communities, may require supplementary support and assistance because of the additional trauma they have suffered. UK governmental agencies have clearly acknowledged the phenomenon of isolation experienced by the Vietnamese. Indeed, 'the policy of dispersal is now almost universally regarded as mistaken, despite its initial attraction (...). It has left many Vietnamese isolated from compatriots to whom they can relate and from whom they can draw support' (House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee, 1985: xxii).

An additional reason for the presence of secondary migration amongst this group appears to be the lack of employment opportunities in the initial dispersal localities or, similarly, the existence of increased work prospects in non-dispersal areas. Certainly, as is the case with the current UK dispersal policy, the

Vietnamese dispersal programme was essentially housing-led<sup>2</sup>. This meant that the regions to which this group were sent tended to be characterised by high levels of unemployment (Joly, 1996: 97). Indeed, as discussed in chapter two, the presence of available and affordable housing in a locality is customarily tied to the low job prospects in that area. Thus, as Robinson notes, the Vietnamese tended to migrate towards the urban regions of the South East, West Midlands and the North West (1993: 337), the Vietnamese congregating 'not simply in areas with existing ethnic concentrations but more precisely in areas of ethnic concentrations contained within the UK's economic heartland' (Robinson, 1993: 342). Interestingly, it would appear that prior to 1984, the dispersed Vietnamese who left their original dispersal locality would tend to converge towards areas of the UK possessing a buoyant economy whilst following 1984 and the strengthening of the UK economy overall, this group usually congregated in locations of the UK characterised by significant concentrations of co-ethnics (Robinson, 1993: 348).

Significantly, according to Robinson's (1993) figures, 49% of the dispersed Vietnamese refugees continued in the long-term to remain in proximity to their original dispersal area. Some members of this group might have been dispersed to localities containing more than the stated quota of between four and ten Vietnamese families, their sense of isolation being less pronounced and their

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<sup>2</sup> It is noteworthy that the Vietnamese in the UK were viewed as resettled once accommodation had been arranged for them whilst in France, 'the settlement policy aimed to find employment before the refugees left their reception centres. The securing of accommodation was linked to employment, as a regular income often had to be demonstrated before housing was offered' (Joly, 1996: 109). At the policy implementation level, 'this led several reception centres to employ officers whose task was to prospect for jobs, establish links with employers and sometimes organise a campaign of information for employers in the region' (Barrou et al, 1988 and Fle, 1988 in Joly, 1996:109). Research has shown that 'specific measures taken by the Centre Provisoire d'Hebergement (CPHs) to actively seek out positions made a noticeable difference (Fle, 1988) while in the few cases where the reception centre was simply referring the refugees to structures existing for French people, it did not yield positive results' (Fle, 1988 in Joly, 1996: 109).



ensuing desire to rejoin larger groups of co-ethnics elsewhere in the UK being more subdued. Certainly, the availability of housing offers as a criterion determining the location of an individual's dispersal often superseded the principle of thin dispersal. Indeed, 'offers of accommodation were so scarce and of such variable quality that the charities were unable to refuse them simply because they were in areas of existing ethnic concentration or because the quota of four to ten families had already been resettled in the locality' (Robinson, 1993: 328). Jones' research undertaken for the Home Office (1982) reflects this phenomenon, 53% of the dispersed Vietnamese, in his sample, settling in groups which exceeded the Home Office's maximum recommended size. Another part of this set of individuals who had experienced thin dispersal was probably unable to overcome the barriers to secondary migration, listed above, the remainder of this group perhaps genuinely preferring to settle permanently in their original dispersal locality.

Overall, this dispersal policy failed to impact upon the long-term spatial distribution of the majority of the Vietnamese refugees primarily because of the social isolation this group experienced in their dispersal areas as well as the lack of employment prospects. As noted by Robinson, 'the government's efforts to disperse the Vietnamese across all regions and all types of regions have already been largely negated by secondary migration. Moreover, this has occurred within only six years of the implementation of the dispersal policy' (Robinson, 1993: 350).

### 1.2.2 The dispersal of the Bosnian refugees

It is particularly insightful to explore the origins, principles and traits of the dispersal scheme for the Bosnian programme refugees because firstly, this scheme forms the basis of the current UK dispersal policy. Secondly, unlike preceding dispersal policies, the Bosnian model is widely regarded as having been highly successful in terms of limiting the loneliness of those dispersed, fomenting settlement and reducing secondary migration to London and other large conurbations (Asylum Rights Campaign, 1999: 11; Pearl and Zetter, 2002: 235). Incidentally, the dispersal of the Kosovan programme refugees mirrors the Bosnian dispersal model (Sales, 2002: 468)<sup>3</sup>.

#### Characteristics of the Bosnian dispersal policy

In 1992, under pressure from the UNHCR, European countries, opposition parties and sectors of the national media, the UK government accepted a quota of 1,000 Bosnian ex-detainees and their dependents as well as a group of medical evacuees. In August 1995, the UK accepted a further quota of 500 Bosnians (Graessle and Gawlinski, 1996: 14). During that time, a total of 2,585 programme Bosnians settled in the UK (Robinson and Coleman, 2000: 1222).

The reception and resettlement of this group was managed by the Bosnia Project, a government-funded, voluntary sector, multi-agency partnership, led by the Refugee Council (Graessle and Gawlinski, 1996:1). With the programme Bosnians, the UK government decided to fund a novel type of dispersal called

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<sup>3</sup> For further analyses on the Kosovan dispersal programme see Sram and Ward, 2000; Smart, 2004; Bloch, 1999b.

'cluster' dispersal. The main principle of this model is that programme refugees are dispersed to a relatively small number of designated localities which leads this group to be concentrated, over time, in clusters rather than thinly dispersed across the UK. By adopting this approach, the Bosnia Project hoped that programme refugees would feel more settled in their dispersal locality and therefore less likely to undertake secondary migration. Importantly, the government agreed to fund this form of dispersal in response to pressure from the Refugee Council, the latter objecting to being involved in a repeat of the failed 'thin' dispersal model used with Vietnamese programme refugees. The government also feared bad publicity if an isolated Bosnian committed suicide, for instance, in one of the dispersal localities.

Although the size of the clusters was never explicitly defined, the Bosnia Project suggested that the number of individuals per cluster should be between 150-300 individuals, a size 'sufficient for a degree of mutual support to occur without having so many in one area that local service providers would be unable to cope with their needs' (Kelly, 2001: 178). At the policy formulation stage, it was intended that the cluster areas would be chosen on the basis that firstly, they possessed a Regional Refugee Council that would provide the support, assistance and advocacy normally offered by an established co-ethnic community. Importantly, the absence of a pre-existing, settled Bosnian community in the UK was concerning and thus, the Bosnia Project tried to remedy this lacuna. Secondly, the cluster area should contain established, albeit non-Bosnian, refugee communities, their presence having hopefully already raised awareness, amongst the local service providers and residents, regarding refugee needs and issues. Thirdly, the cluster locality should be characterised by sensitive and adaptable local authorities and voluntary sectors as well as have a



good availability of housing and suitable premises for reception centres. In addition, the area should be able to provide appropriate healthcare as well as be capable of economically sustaining a sizeable and growing community. Importantly, the UK government advocated a restrictive, although not prohibitive, policy towards the settlement of Bosnians in London, insisting that they strongly preferred that this group resettle in areas without existing housing stress (Robinson and Coleman, 2000: 1226-1239). The six designated cluster areas were Central Scotland, London, North East of England, West Yorkshire, West Midlands and East Midlands. On the arrival of the programme refugees to the UK, reception centres run by the Bosnia Project promptly opened, each center being tied to a resettlement cluster (Robinson and Coleman, 2000: 1226). The intention was for programme Bosnians to be initially accommodated in these centres and then to be moved on, usually within four months (Graessle and Gawlinksi, 1996: 29), to more permanent housing in the resettlement cluster to which the reception center was linked. Despite disagreements at the policy formulation stage between the NGOs and the UK government over the Bosnians' right to choose their place of residence, in practice, due to a shortage of available housing, 'choice' was largely illusory. Indeed, if an individual elected to settle in a locality other than that designated by the Bosnia Project, customarily s/he was not assisted in his/her search for accommodation and did not receive post-settlement support (Robinson and Coleman, 2000: 1233-4; Kelly, 2001: 177). The vast majority of programme Bosnians were housed in public housing with security of tenure (Kelly, 2001: 180).

The implementation of the Bosnian cluster dispersal model produced a couple of unexpected outcomes. Firstly, the locations of the reception centres, and by extension the cluster areas, were predominantly chosen based on the availability



of affordable housing in a given locality rather than the degree to which the area matched the cluster criteria set out at the formulation phase of the policy. In this instance, the phenomenon of housing shortages compromised the strategic elements of the programme. (Robinson and Coleman, 2000: 1229). Secondly, programme Bosnians were unevenly spread across the designated cluster dispersal areas because, firstly, the Bosnia Project was expecting the arrival of the full quota of Bosnians and their dependents. Consequently, in the early stages, the Project paid little attention to distributing Bosnians evenly between the clusters. By the time it became clear that there would be a shortfall in the number of arrivals, it was too late to top up the smaller clusters. Secondly, programme Bosnians did not reach the UK in a steady stream. Instead, large numbers would arrive in several flights and then no one would come for a few months. This meant that the reception centres were often running below capacity. Consequently, in order to fill the vacancies, new arrivals were sent to the under-occupied centres and as a result, new centres, attached to new cluster localities, were not opened. This phenomenon led to significant numbers of Bosnians settling in the areas where reception centres had first been opened. Thirdly, family reunion limited the even spread of Bosnians across the cluster dispersal areas, dependents invariably wishing to reside near family networks (Robinson and Coleman, 2000: 1236-7).

#### Influence of the dispersal policy on the long-term spatial distribution of Bosnian refugees across the UK

It would appear, in contrast to the geographical mobility of previous refugee arrivals, that the cluster dispersal policy exercised a significant influence on the long-term spatial distribution of Bosnian refugees across the UK, the Refugee

Council estimating that by the end of 1997, less than 200 Bosnians had undertaken secondary migration (Robinson and Coleman, 2000: 1237).

Kelly (2001) offers several interesting explanations for this phenomenon. Firstly, the clustering feature of this dispersal policy might have encouraged the Bosnians to remain in their area of initial dispersal. Certainly, from the perspective of the Bosnia Project and Refugee Action staff, 'the larger numbers in each town compared to the Vietnamese programme meant that there were enough people to form a community and there was not the same urge to move to be with others' (Kelly, 2001: 271). Kelly, on the other hand, argues that the programme Bosnians' temporary refugee status constitutes the major factor that accounts for this group's lack of secondary migration and relative immobility (Kelly, 2001: 273). Certainly, on arrival in the UK, many of these refugees envisaged a short stay in their host-country following which they would return home. 'They thought it was going to be temporary so there was little point in trying to be housed in one city rather than another' (Kelly, 2001: 263-264). Seemingly, this feeling continued to permeate their behaviour, 'even after a few years of living in the UK, when it was increasingly obvious to the refugees that return would be difficult' (Kelly, 2001: 275). Indeed, 'their continuing temporary refugee status reminded them that no matter what their own preferences were the UK government could decide to send them back to Bosnia, and this meant that long term plans were futile' (Kelly, 2001: 276). Kelly (2001) also notes that the programme Bosnians risked losing the Bosnia Project's support and assistance were they to leave their original dispersal locality, this penalty thereby constituting 'a huge disincentive as the Bosnia Project carried out all the support tasks for the families' (Kelly, 2001: 278).

Interestingly, the convoy Bosnians, who did not enrol on the Bosnia Project, showed higher levels of secondary migration. Kelly explains this phenomenon by arguing that this particular group 'usually had very little to lose by moving to another town' (Kelly, 2001: 278). Indeed, these refugees were commonly housed in poor quality privately rented accommodation and a move to another area would almost certainly lead to improved housing conditions. Furthermore, they were more aware than the programme Bosnians of the mechanisms for securing accommodation since they had found their initial dwelling themselves with limited assistance from governmental or voluntary sector agencies and consequently, it is likely that they felt more confident and empowered than the other Bosnians. Thus, Kelly concludes that 'it was often clear to those that had come by convoy that moving to another area presented opportunities but no great risks, whereas for programme Bosnians a move presented no greater opportunities and a degree of risk' (Kelly, 2001: 279).

In sum, the long-term geographical distribution of the majority of the programme Bosnians largely matched the UK government's spatial distribution of this group via the dispersal policy. Some argue that this trend proves the success of cluster dispersal (eg the Bosnia Project and Refugee Action staff) whilst others maintain that other factors contributed to the relative long-term geographical immobility of the Bosnian refugees in their respective dispersal localities. Certainly, Kelly (2001) suggests that this group's temporary refugee status and the risk of losing entitlement to state-funded support wielded a significant influence on this group's limited post-dispersal secondary migration.

Having presented the antecedents of the contemporary UK dispersal policy, an analysis of the current policy is now presented.



### **1.3 The current dispersal policy in the UK**

#### **1.3.1 Origins: the *ad hoc* dispersal programme (1996-1999)**

In keeping with the general trend across Europe, the number of individuals claiming asylum in the UK increased in the mid to late 1990s. This group tended to reside in London and near the ports of entry in the South East of England (Robinson, 2003b: 7; Carey Wood et al, 1995). As a result, the supply of affordable temporary housing in these localities decreased whilst the costs of supporting asylum seekers increased. The challenge revolved around accommodation in particular, certain London boroughs, for instance, failing to obtain reasonably priced housing that would permit their total spending per asylum seeker to remain below the government's grant cap (Audit Commission, 2000b). Dispersal across the UK, on an *ad hoc* basis, was therefore introduced in an attempt to reduce the overspending in London and the South East, avoid the politically-sensitive process of raising local council tax and appease host-community members. This early form of dispersal was undertaken in an unplanned and unstrategic manner by local authorities, boroughs and voluntary agencies based in London and the South East. Asylum seekers were sent to areas in the UK with offers of more affordable and available housing. Importantly, the accommodation was rented from private landlords without necessarily the receiving local authority or voluntary sector organisation being notified or granting its consent (Asylum Rights Campaign, 1999: 8 & 31).



### **1.3.2 Objectives of the current UK dispersal policy**

The current UK dispersal policy systematised, formalised and organised the *ad hoc* dispersal programme. According to the Home Secretary, Jack Straw (1997-2001), the objective of the policy is to distribute the costs of supporting asylum seekers away from hard-pressed London boroughs and South East local authorities, where this group traditionally settles, to other parts of the country (HC Deb, 9<sup>th</sup> November 1999, col.982). The costs most in need of being geographically spread across the UK were the social costs namely the increase in demand for accommodation, school places and health services (Boswell, 2001). Certainly, Mr Desmond Browne, Minister of State for Citizenship, Immigration and Counter-terrorism, emphasises that 'the dispersal of asylum seekers helps to reduce pressure on social housing and local government services where they are already stretched, especially in London and other areas of the South East' (HC Deb, 12<sup>th</sup> July 2004, col.1208).

A further objective of the current UK dispersal policy is to actually reduce or minimise asylum seeker support costs, given the unpopularity of this group amongst the majority of the UK electorate. In order to achieve this, NASS procured the cheapest accommodation in the UK from private and public sector housing providers under five year contracts 'in order to get value for money for the taxpayer', according to Ms Fiona Mactaggart, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Race Equality, Community Policy and Civil Renewal (House of Commons Social Cohesion Select Committee, 11<sup>th</sup> February 2004). Indeed, as Jack Straw emphasised, 'our aim is to make better use of spare and underused housing in less pressured parts of the country. I do not believe that the genuine asylum seeker who is fleeing persecution will mind where in the country s/he is

properly accommodated for the period while his/her claim is processed' (HC Deb, 9<sup>th</sup> November 1999, col.982). Reflecting this stance, a policymaker in NASS remarks that 'at least with dispersal, the government can say we are doing our best to meet our international obligations as cheaply as possible' (NASS, para 69). The subsistence only support option as well as the 'grace period' offered to asylum seekers in receipt of the Home Office's decision on their application, measures which are discussed more fully below, constitute other means by which NASS aims to minimise its support costs. Indeed, in the case of subsistence only asylum seekers, NASS is exempt from paying for their accommodation costs whilst the 'grace period' ensures a swifter vacating of NASS housing. The outcome of the latter is that this measure reduces the total amount of accommodation that NASS is required to procure (Refugee Council, 2002a: 2).

An additional objective of the dispersal policy is to encourage the long term settlement of refugees in the designated dispersal areas. Indeed, according to the Home Office Minister, Mr Mike O'Brien, 'our long-term aim is to ensure that those who are granted refugee status can stay in the area to which they have been dispersed as asylum seekers so that communities can develop there. We do not support secondary migration, especially back to London and the South East' (Stg Co Deb, Immigration and Asylum Bill, 4<sup>th</sup> May 1999). In order to achieve this aim, policy makers agreed that asylum seekers should be dispersed to localities where this group could access adequate support and assistance.

In response to criticism from the Opposition and other political parties regarding the Labour government's treatment of asylum and immigration, the dispersal policy also implicitly seeks to present an image of political toughness to the electorate. Certainly, the growing concentration of asylum seekers in London and

the South East was an important election issue in 1997-1998, the British National Party, the Conservatives and the press increasingly criticising the Labour government's 'soft' approach. This phenomenon was particularly apparent in Dover, a politically contested town as well as one of the main ports of arrival for asylum seekers.

### **1.3.3 Characteristics of the current UK dispersal policy**

The current UK dispersal policy incorporates two dispersal schemes that run in parallel. The first began on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1999 and is called the interim dispersal measures and the second commenced on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2000 and is entitled the NASS dispersal programme. Since the dominant means of dispersal, at the time of my fieldwork (October 2003-March 2004), was via NASS, the following section focuses primarily on the NASS dispersal programme. Nevertheless, prior to discussing this measure, the workings of the interim scheme are briefly presented.

In December 1998, the Home Secretary encouraged the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Association of London Government (ALG) to devise an official dispersal policy that would replace the *ad hoc* arrangements. This would allow local authorities and boroughs to 'transfer' supported asylum seekers to another local authority outside of London and the South East, as long as the latter authority agreed to be responsible for supporting the asylum seekers (Audit Commission, 2000c: 11). This initiative developed into a dispersal scheme and is formalised in the IAA 1999 where s95, s98 and Schedule 9 empower local authorities to provide interim support to asylum seekers. This distribution programme operates through multi-agency regional consortia, their role



consisting in organising new arrival arrangements and identifying available accommodation. Due to the significant number of agencies participating in the programme, negotiations were extensive and the scheme eventually became operational on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1999 (Robinson, 2003a: 122).

The initial interim measures (December 1999 - April 2000) were largely unsuccessful. Indeed, a significantly low quantity of housing units were secured in the dispersal localities and, moreover, the designated distribution areas were mainly located in only two regions, namely Yorkshire and Humberside and the North West (Audit Commission, 2000c: 17). This trend developed despite the emphasis, at the policy formulation stage, on allocating dispersal accommodation based on 'patterns of ethnicity, availability of accommodation, access to support services and equity of responsibility across the UK regions' (Asylum Rights Campaign, 1999: 9-10). Moreover, the implementation of this scheme appears to have been significantly chaotic, the financial and logistical responsibility for the transport arrangements of asylum seekers from their initial place of residence to their designated dispersal area remaining unclear throughout the initial stages of the programme and the exchange of information between participating local authorities being significantly flawed. Certainly, some local authorities offering housing units never received their scheduled number of asylum seekers and on the occasions when dispersed individuals reached their destination, limited prior information was available regarding the new arrivals' language or personal characteristics (Robinson, 2003a: 122). Finally, the asylum seekers themselves were particularly unenthusiastic regarding dispersal, 37% of the initial referrals made to the London Asylum Seekers Consortium refusing assistance if this involved residing outside of the capital (Robinson, 2003a: 123).



Importantly, due to the lack of sufficient NASS accommodation secured in the dispersal areas by 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2000, it was decided that the interim measures would, temporarily, continue to function in conjunction with NASS dispersal. Thus, NASS began its operations by supporting destitute asylum seekers who had claimed asylum 'on arrival' in the UK on or after 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2000. Destitute asylum seekers who claimed asylum in-country on or after 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2000 continued to be eligible to claim interim support from local authorities only. Later, in-country applicants were eligible for NASS support, depending on whether they were living in England and Wales, and the date of their asylum claim (Willman, Knafler and Pierce, 2004: 110). The aim is for NASS to eventually take responsibility for all destitute asylum seekers, the interim period having been extended until 4<sup>th</sup> April 2005<sup>4</sup>.

NASS' role, the concept of emergency accommodation, NASS' support options as well as NASS' dispersal programme are now discussed. According to the IAA 1999 s95(1) and AS Regs 2000 reg 7, NASS is responsible for supporting asylum seekers and any dependant who appears to be destitute or is likely to become destitute within 14 days<sup>5</sup>. NASS is a constituent part of the Home Office and 'support' refers to accommodation adequate to the household's needs and/or essential living expenses provided in cash. Significantly, in keeping with the NIAA 2002 s55(1), NASS may not provide support unless it is satisfied that the asylum claim was made as soon as reasonably practicable after the person's entry into the UK<sup>6</sup>. Under IAA 1999 s98, full-board emergency accommodation is arranged

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<sup>4</sup> Asylum Support (Interim Provisions) Amendment Regulations 2002 SI No 471 and Asylum Support (Interim Provisions) (Amendment) Regulations 2004 SI No 566.

<sup>5</sup> Or 56 days if they are already receiving asylum support.

<sup>6</sup> The exceptions to this provision are if support is necessary to avoid a breach of the asylum seeker's rights under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) or if the household

whilst NASS considers whether an asylum seeker is eligible for s95 support. This type of housing is provided by one of the NASS-funded voluntary sector refugee organisations, in the locality where the asylum seeker registered his/her request for support (Refugee Council, 2003a: 2). As discussed in NASS Policy Bulletin 73, NASS initially aimed to make a decision on an asylum seeker's eligibility within two working days of receiving the application form. However, in practice, there have been delays of several months in processing the forms (Refugee Council, 2003b: 1).

According to IAA 1999 s96(1), NASS support is provided in the form of 'essential living needs and/or adequate accommodation'. Significantly, accommodation and living expenses can be provided separately. Thus, an asylum seeker may apply and receive NASS 'subsistence only' support if s/he already has accommodation with friends or relatives. Under this particular support package, s/he receives vouchers (until Autumn 2002) or cash (from Autumn 2002 onwards) equivalent to 70% of current income support levels. Importantly, this particular option frees the person from dispersal since there are no restrictions on the location of his/her residence. The right to claim subsistence only support may be ended by NIAA 2002 s43, if the Home Secretary introduces an order (Willman, Knafler and Pierce, 2004: 238). If an asylum seeker has no offers of accommodation from acquaintances, s/he is entitled to the dispersed accommodation only package or the subsistence and dispersed housing option. Under either of these support plans, s/he is allocated housing by NASS, on a no-choice basis, in one of the designated dispersal areas located outside of London and the South East. The 'no-choice' aspect of dispersal is presented in AS Regs 2000 regs 12 and 13

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includes a dependent child under 18 years old (NIAA 2002 s55(5)). For a detailed discussion regarding the controversial s55, see Willman, Knafler and Pierce, 2004: 114-126.

which states that NASS is required to disregard certain factors, including the household's preferences as to the location of accommodation. Moreover, according to AS Regs 2000 reg 20, an asylum seeker's support may be suspended or discontinued if s/he or his/her dependant leaves 'the authorised address'. NASS must, nevertheless, take into account individual circumstances such as the location of other family members, education, medical and other social welfare needs when reaching a decision about where to accommodate a supported household, as set out in NASS Policy Bulletin 31.

NASS contracts housing providers to offer dispersed accommodation to destitute asylum seekers. Regarding tenure, 60% of the housing is provided by private landlords through direct contracts and the remaining 40% is made available through regional consortia contracts. The consortia in turn contract out to local authorities, Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and private landlords. Dispersed asylum seekers are accommodated in hostels with full-board and/or self-catering facilities or in self-contained flats/houses (Audit Commission, 2000c: 47, 55). Importantly, in each dispersal locality, the One Stop Service, run by NASS-funded voluntary sector agencies, provides a wide range of front-line advice and assistance to asylum seekers, both immediately after arrival in the UK and throughout the process of waiting for a decision on their asylum claim (Refugee Council, 2005d).

The asylum seeker remains in his/her dispersal accommodation and/or receives a subsistence allowance until his/her entitlement to NASS support ends, the latter terminating on the 'date of determination'. According to IAA 1999 s94(3) and AS Regs 2000 reg 2(2), as amended, for a successful asylum applicant, this date is 28 days after the Home Secretary notifies the asylum claimant of his decision.



The aim of this measure is to allow a 'grace period' for the asylum seeker to make other arrangements and move out of NASS accommodation. Individuals should expect to receive a decision on their asylum application within two months of having lodged their demand, with the possibility of appeal available during the subsequent four months (Robinson, 2003a: 123-124).

NASS has adopted a cluster dispersal model that is based on the lessons learnt from the failings of the Vietnamese 'thin' dispersal programme. Significantly, it builds upon the subsequently devised 'cluster' dispersal policy adopted for the Bosnian and Kosovan programme refugees. It is noteworthy that the UK government's decision to undertake a centrally managed dispersal policy via NASS reveals a shift in its attitude towards asylum. Indeed, since 1998/1999, asylum is conceptualised as a highly sensitive and politicised national concern rather than a local matter. As noted by Mrs Barbara Roche, Minister of State in the Home Office, 'we are not in a position in which the unfair share of the responsibility should fall on just a few boroughs. (...) We are facing a national problem, which demands a national solution' (HC Deb, 5<sup>th</sup> July 2000, col.107WH).

The selection of the NASS cluster dispersal areas was based, in theory, on 'the presence of available affordable housing, the existence of a multi-ethnic population or infrastructure able to assist asylum seekers, the possibility of linking in with existing communities and the opportunity to develop the support of voluntary and community groups' (Home Office, 1999). Furthermore, it was agreed that efforts would be made to group dispersed asylum seekers into geographical language clusters. According to the Home Office, these clusters aimed to be 'of sufficient size to allow for mutual support and economies of scale



but not so large as to place undue pressure on local resources' (Immigration and Nationality Directorate Asylum Seekers Support Project, 1999: 65). In other words, the objective was to ensure that asylum seekers would access support in the dispersal localities, this positive experience enhancing the probability of successful asylum applicants' long term settlement in their original dispersal area. The clusters were also designed to maximise cost-savings, particularly regarding interpretation costs (Asylum Rights Campaign, 1999: 11), minimise the 'over concentration' of the social costs (Boswell, 2001) of supporting dispersed asylum seekers as well as limit the contentious reactions from the receiving host-communities. According to a policymaker in NASS, the cluster limit was set at one asylum seeker per two hundred host-community members.

However, even during the Parliamentary discussions surrounding the Immigration and Asylum Bill 1999, the real priority criterion for selecting the cluster dispersal areas was the availability of affordable housing. This emphasis is certainly reflected in s2 of part VI of the IAA 1999 where it states that cluster dispersal localities are identified based on the availability of 'suitable housing accommodation'. This trend continued during the early stages of the implementation phase of dispersal. Indeed, as a result of logistical difficulties and the time pressures NASS operational staff were under, asylum seekers were largely allocated to localities across the UK based on the existence of affordable and available housing in that area at the time of their dispersal. The cluster destinations were thus predominantly characterised by a surplus of dwellings, a weaker housing demand and high levels of poverty, unemployment and deprivation (Pearl and Zetter, 2002: 238). As a community officer notes 'the Home Office did adopt a clustering policy but it was driven by accommodation

and also what happened to be available the day a person needed to be dispersed' (Refugee Council, para 21).

This national pattern is reflected in both of my case study cities. Indeed, in Birmingham, an asylum lead officer observed that the language-based cluster dispersal policy 'was thrown out of the window by NASS operational staff, back in early 2001. The first flush of the NASS dispersal arrangements was going very very badly and as a result, they changed the way in which dispersal was organised, including the language clustering. They bullied us a lot but we gave in' (Housing, City Council 2, para 259). Similarly, in Newcastle, until October 2002, 'NASS was completely ignoring the twelve languages specific to the city and sending anybody' (Support manager, Housing, City Council 1, para 57). The manager of a voluntary agency observes that 'in the early days, one of the privately run hostels in Newcastle, out of the 70 people who were living there, there were about 26 different nationalities. It was very much accommodation-led. If there was a place for someone to go, they appeared to be sent there regardless of their ethnic origin' (Specialist voluntary agency 1, para 33). As Robinson observes 'the pressures of everyday implementation have overridden the lists of the ideal dispersal zone. Dispersal has become a scramble to locate vacant and reasonably priced accommodation' (Robinson, 2003a: 146).

Retrospectively, NASS observes that 'by failing to disperse in accordance with policy, it has caused asylum seekers to be sent to areas without established communities, who share the same language'. Aware of the consequence, NASS states that, as a result, 'many asylum seekers had no potential networks for seeking support and integration with local communities was consequently harder to achieve'. It is affirmed, by stakeholders and other interested parties that NASS'

lack of adherence to dispersal based on language clusters, 'has led to dispersed asylum seekers returning to London and the South East' (National Asylum Support Service, 2001: 13, 40).

Following an internal review in 2001 and 2002, the Home Office expressed its wishes, 'taking account of the practical and financial impact on local services', to revert to a policy of dispersal based on language cluster areas (Home Office, 2002: 58 in Robinson, 2003a: 142). According to my own fieldwork, this practice appears to have been unevenly implemented across the UK. Newcastle City Council, for instance, witnessed its return from October 2002 onwards, for council-managed dispersal properties only (Support worker, Housing, City Council 1, para 21). This change followed substantial pressure from local service providers who stressed the pressing need for and substantial benefits of this particular measure in the traditionally white areas of the city (Support manager, Housing, City Council 1, para 61). In Birmingham, however, language-based clustering has not been re-introduced. This might be explained by the absence of an urgent need for this policy due to the multicultural nature of the city. Indeed, newly arrived asylum seekers are at a lower risk of isolation, in comparison with the more mono-cultural context of some localities in Newcastle. Importantly, even in the dispersal areas where language clustering has been re-introduced, as in the case with Newcastle, this criterion remains secondary to the availability of accommodation in that locality. Indeed, under the terms of NASS' contract with the housing providers, if the size of the household to be dispersed does not match the size of the available property in the cluster area, NASS has the right to override the housing provider's wish for language clustering (Support manager, Housing, City Council 1, para 61; LGA, para 103). NASS itself admits that it



follows 'a fairly crude, unrefined, broad-brush language cluster policy' (NASS, para 13).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter's review of previous and current UK dispersal policies shows that government, local authorities and boroughs as well as the voluntary sector have channeled some of the lessons learnt from previous dispersal programmes into current policy-making. Certainly, a 'thin' dispersal model has been widely recognised as unsatisfactory and thus, has been superseded by a 'cluster' dispersal approach, as in the cases of the dispersal of the Bosnian programme refugees and the multi-national / multi-ethnic asylum seekers. This review also points towards the difficulty in selecting 'cluster' areas based on more criteria than simply the existence of affordable and available housing.

In the following chapter, theories of integration are examined, an analysis that culminates in the identification of key hypotheses that require testing in order to ascertain the impact of the UK contemporary dispersal policy on asylum seeker and refugee integration.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REFUGEE INTEGRATION**

This chapter focuses upon the sociological debates surrounding the meaning of 'refugee' as well as the legal approaches towards and definitions of this term. These issues are addressed in order firstly, to help identify the extent to which refugees are distinctive from other migrants and secondly, to demarcate the appropriate meaning of the 'refugee' concept for this piece of research. In addition, this chapter reviews the definitions of refugee integration elaborated by international, European and national organisations as well as by social scientists. The approach towards and definition of refugee integration adopted in this thesis (Ager and Strang, 2004a) is placed within the context of this review. The reasons for prioritising access to employment, housing, social bonds and social bridges are also examined and the potential effects of the dispersal policy on these means and markers of integration are demarcated.

#### **2.1 Who is a refugee?**

##### **2.1.1 Sociological discussions and definitions**

There exists an ongoing debate regarding the sociological definition of the term 'refugee', the deliberation centring on the analytical validity of distinguishing between refugees and labour migrants. From the perspective of those designated by Koser (1997) as the realists, refugees are clearly distinctive from other migrants (Kunz, 1973; 1981). Indeed, refugee movements are the result of primarily political rather than economic factors and refugee flight is principally involuntary rather than voluntary. On the other hand, for those labelled by Koser

(1997) as nominalists, the distinction between economic and socio-political determinants of population movements is inappropriate since these factors are inextricably linked (Richmond, 1995). Moreover, the division of migratory flows into voluntary and involuntary movements is misleading since freedom of choice is often limited. These scholars suggest that a more accurate means of conceptualising population movements is by locating them on a continuum where the majority are situated between two sets of extremes combining various degrees of autonomous decision-making on the one hand and numerous combinations of economic and socio-political determining factors on the other. The standpoints of Koser's realists and nominalists are now presented in more detail.

#### Refugees: involuntary population movements caused by political factors

Kunz, who according to Koser's (1997) classification is a realist, supports the view that refugee movements are characterised by their involuntary nature. Indeed, the distinguishing traits of refugee movements, unlike voluntary migrations, are 'the reluctance to uproot oneself and the absence of positive, original motivations to settle elsewhere' (Kunz, 1973: 130). Kunz also notes that 'when making their choices the refugees are seldom aware of crucially important factors and even when they are, they are seldom able to exercise a rational choice' (1981: 46). Thus, Kunz (1973: 131) perceives refugee movements as primarily kinetic.

Joly (1996) similarly argues that whilst the distinction between refugees and other migrants is somewhat unclear, refugees nevertheless do exhibit some very distinctive characteristics. In order to clarify the specificity of the refugee

experience, Joly contrasts this group with 'so-called economic migrants'. The first distinction between refugees and economic migrants is that refugees leave their society of origin primarily because of political reasons whilst the departure of economic migrants is principally due to economic factors. Secondly, Joly notes that the refugee's decision to leave his/her home country carries primarily negative connotations whilst the economic migrant's decision involves essentially positive associations. Thirdly, the refugee's move is collective in nature, occurring in response to 'a dramatic change that jeopardised the life they were leading'. In contrast, the economic migrant's move is more individual since s/he has a personal project to improve his/her life. Fourthly, in contrast to the circumstances of economic migrants, the refugee's flight from his/her society of origin is most often unplanned because s/he is moving in response to a dramatic change that is threatening his/her life. Consequently, the refugee usually leaves unprepared, both psychologically and materially. Fifthly, the refugee's experience of flight can be particularly traumatic, more so than for the economic migrant, because of his/her possible experiences of 'detention camps, severe persecution, torture and fear of death'. Moreover, the majority of refugees are 'dispersed at the whim of fate'. This means that, having not been able to select their host-society, the cultural compatibility between themselves and the receiving population is likely to be lower than in the case of economic migrants who have the opportunity to choose their preferred destination. In addition, the past of the refugee, his/her degree of suffering in the home country prior to flight, as well as the trauma of flight itself mark the present and the future of the refugee in a deeper way than in the case of other migrants. Indeed, 'the overriding importance of the past to determine and understand refugee settlement is unique'. Furthermore, refugees share a collective sense of loss. Indeed, 'refugees have experienced the most complete dislocation of their social world. They are deprived of power as social



actors both in the country of origin and the country of reception' (Joly, 1996: 149-150; 154).

Joly and Kelly (1999) propose additional aspects that distinguish refugees from other migrants. Firstly, refugees carry different legal statuses with distinctive political rights and entitlements to social welfare that contrast with those of other migrants. Secondly, other migrants can envisage returning to their country of origin whilst refugees are prevented from considering this option. Their home country could continue to be in a situation of generalised political instability and insecurity. Alternatively, they could risk persecution if they returned home because they might adhere to the ideology and projects of political groups opposing the governing regime. Finally, whilst all migrants are likely to experience separation from their relatives, refugees are particularly concerned for the security of their relatives who continue to live in their home country.

#### The voluntary-involuntary and political-economic dichotomies are problematic

Zolberg, Suhrke and Aguayo (1989), nominalists according to Koser's (1997) typology, recognise that distinguishing refugees from other migrants based upon the involuntary-voluntary and political-economic dichotomy is problematic. Concerning the latter, these authors quote Vernant (1953) who states that 'it is difficult to distinguish between events which are political and those which are not. (...) In a great many States any measure, whatever its nature, is a political event' (1989: 31). With reference to the involuntary-voluntary nature of migration, Zolberg, Suhrke and Aguayo note that 'the more immediate and intense the life-threatening violence is, the more clearly a person is a refugee rather than a migrant'. These authors introduce a notion of a degree of need to flee the country

of origin, itself based upon 'an index of danger, which might combine the magnitude of threat with the probability of its occurrence' (1989: 31). Thus, they support the view of locating migrants along a continuum, based upon an index of danger, rather than adopting a dichotomous view of refugees as involuntary migrants and other population movements as voluntary.

Richmond, another nominalist according to Koser's (1997) classification, argues that a clear distinction between economic and socio-political factors that determine population movements is untenable. Indeed, he notes that 'the modern world is characterised by states, religious leaders, multinational co-operations and supra-state agencies that become involved in decisions which affect the lives of millions of people. Consequently, the majority of the contemporary population movements are a complex response to the reality of a global society in which ethno-religious, social, economic and political determinants are inextricably bound together'. Richmond is equally critical of the distinction made between voluntary and involuntary movements. He notes that 'all human behaviour is constrained and enabled by the structuration process within which degrees of freedom of choice are limited. Individual autonomy is relative to opportunity structures that are themselves determined by social forces' (Richmond, 1988: 20).

If it is not possible to distinguish between political and economic reasons for migration and if all migrants have a limited freedom of choice, then how does one distinguish, in sociological terms between refugees and other migrants? What if the boundaries between these sociological categories are further blurred by the fact that, whilst claiming to be a refugee, the individual prepared him/herself, both psychologically and materially, to migrate? What if this same person did not flee

from his/her country in response to a dramatic change that jeopardised his/her life?

As an alternative to the political-economic and involuntary-voluntary dichotomies, Richmond suggests that population movements should be conceptualised based upon their location on two axes, one vertical and one horizontal. The vertical axis represents decision-making on a continuum from maximum to minimum autonomy. The horizontal axis represents the interaction of economic and socio-political forces. 'Between the two extremes, a large proportion of the people crossing state boundaries combine characteristics, responding to economic, social and political pressures over which they have little control, but exercising a limited degree of choice in the selection of destinations and the timing of their movements' (Richmond, 1988: 17, 20). In this paradigm, Richmond distinguishes between proactive and reactive migrants. Proactive migrants are 'those who have relatively unconstrained choice' whilst reactive migrants are more constrained (1988, 1995: 58). Richmond's model 'demonstrates the inadequacy of any definition of "refugee" that singles out one element in the causal chain, such as having a "genuine fear of persecution" because such fear is often only one factor in a much more complicated relation' (Richmond, 1995: 62, 71).

### **2.1.2 Legal definitions**

#### The 1951 Geneva Convention

The 1951 Geneva Convention constitutes the principal international legal instrument that defines who a refugee is. S/he is an individual who 'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality,



membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality, and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail him/herself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his/her former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it' (1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, Chapter 1, Article 1, A(2)). It is important to stress the declaratory nature of refugee status defined in paragraph 28 of the UNHCR Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status: 'a person is a refugee within the meaning of the 1951 Convention as soon as s/he fulfils the criteria contained in the definition. This would necessarily occur prior to the time at which his refugee status is formally determined. Recognition of his refugee status does not therefore make him a refugee but declares him to be one. S/he does not become a refugee because of recognition but is recognised because s/he is a refugee'. Significantly, from the mid-1970s onwards, with economic recession, the growth in the volume of international migration and the ensuing development of a new asylum regime a situation developed whereby 'more asylum seekers were arriving at a time when few were welcome'. Thus, a restrictionist trend came to the fore and alternatives to Convention refugee status, demanding less commitment from European states, were introduced (Joly, 1996:11-12)<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> For a European-wide illustration of this phenomenon, see Joly, Nettleton and Poulton's (1992) refugee typology.

Asylum seekers, Convention refugees and refugees with complimentary statuses in the UK

The UK, like other European countries, has developed its own series of legal statuses: asylum seekers, Convention refugees, those in receipt of Humanitarian Protection (HP) and those granted Discretionary Leave (DL). Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR) is included in the current discussion, despite it being superseded in April 2003 by HP and DL, because the overwhelming majority of those interviewed in my fieldwork were either asylum seekers, Convention refugees or individuals with ELR.

An asylum seeker is an individual who reaches the UK through his/her own means and submits a request for asylum to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) at the Home Office. The IND aims to decide on asylum claims within two months (Refugee Council, 2003a: 2, Home Office, 2005b: 35). Individuals who apply for asylum from 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2002 onwards are generally not permitted to work. However, persons who requested asylum prior to 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2002 are able to apply for a work permit once their claim for asylum has been lodged with the IND for six months. Asylum seekers who were granted permission to work before 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2002 are permitted to continue working. Only asylum seekers with permission to work who applied for asylum before 1<sup>st</sup> April 2000 are entitled to the same training and educational rights as UK citizens on income support. Concerning adult education, all asylum seekers can study any further or higher education course at any level, either full-time or part-time (Refugee Council, 2002b: 1-2, 2004a: 2, 35 & 38-39, 2003a: 5). Although asylum seekers are free to travel within the UK, if they are residing in dispersal housing, they are not permitted to leave their accommodation for more than seven

consecutive days. If they travel outside of the UK, the Home Office will withdraw their asylum application. Asylum seekers are generally not entitled to family reunion. They are legally permitted to access all available NHS services (Refugee Council, 2003a: 4, 2004a: 42-43).

A Convention refugee is an asylum claimant who is residing in the UK who has been recognised as a refugee by the IND within the meaning of the 1951 Geneva Convention. Receipt of this status is also accompanied by the granting to the individual of Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) in the host-country. From August 2005, Convention refugees are granted five years leave to remain. Prior to April 2003, those asylum applicants who did not qualify for Convention refugee status but for whom the IND considered it was too dangerous to return to their home country were granted ELR, for a duration of four years or less, with the option of being able to apply for ILR on completion of the four year period (Refugee Council, 2004b: 1; Refugee Council, 2004a: 10; Refugee Council, 2004c: 2). From April 2003 onwards, HP and DL replaced ELR.

The first of these two statuses, HP, is granted 'to anyone who is unable to demonstrate a claim for asylum but who would face serious risk to life or person arising from the death penalty, unlawful killing, torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. HP should be granted for up to three years. If at the end of three years, following an active review, it is decided that further protection is needed, a claimant will usually receive ILR. If protection is no longer needed and a person has no other basis of stay in the UK, they will be expected to leave' (APU notice 1/2003, Home Office website). DL 'may be granted for a limited number of specific reasons. These people will either not be considered to be in



need of international protection or will have been excluded from such protection.

DL may be granted to an applicant who:

1. Has an Article 8 (right to respect for private and family life) of the ECHR claim
2. Has an Article 3 of the ECHR claim only on medical grounds or severe humanitarian cases
3. Is an unaccompanied asylum seeking child (UASC) for whom adequate reception arrangements in their country are not available
4. Would qualify for asylum or HP but has been excluded
5. Is able to demonstrate particularly compelling reasons why removal would not be appropriate.

An individual grant of DL should not be made for more than three years. (...) After the DL period has expired the claimants situation will be reviewed with further leave granted if appropriate. A person on DL will normally become eligible to apply for ILR after 6 years. However, a person who has been excluded from asylum and/or HP but granted DL will be excluded from ILR under the DL provisions. They will only be able to apply for ILR under the long residence concessions and even then they may be excluded. A person who no longer qualifies for leave will be expected to depart from the UK' (APU notice 1/2003, API Discretionary Leave, Home Office website).

Individuals with Convention status, ELR, HP or DL, all possess the right to work and are fully entitled to access all available NHS services. Moreover, they generally have the same rights and entitlements to social, housing and welfare benefits as all other UK residents and citizens. In terms of this group's entitlement to government training schemes and adult education, they possess the same rights as the asylum seekers who lodged their claim with the IND before 1<sup>st</sup> April 2000. This group is only allowed to vote for or stand at elections if they are a

Commonwealth citizen or if they have been granted UK citizenship. Persons with Convention status are not allowed to travel using their national passports because they are no longer considered to be under the protection of their home country. Instead, they are required to apply for a UN Convention Travel Document (CTD) granting him/her the right to pass through and sojourn in any country apart from his/her country of origin. Persons with ELR, HP or DL wishing to travel abroad are permitted to use their national passports or alternatively, they may apply for a Certificate of Identity. For those individuals with Convention status, it is possible to request family reunion for close family members. Persons with ELR, HP or DL, however, are generally only eligible for family reunion once they have been granted ILR. Persons with Convention status or ILR are entitled to apply for UK citizenship once they have possessed ILR for a minimum of one year and have continuously resided in the UK for five years or three years if the individual is married to a UK citizen (Refugee Council, 2004a: 35, 38, 41-43, 49, 53-54; Refugee Council, 2004b: 1-3).

### **2.1.3 Refugees in this piece of research**

Given the focus in this thesis on dispersal and integration, the individuals of particular interest are those who are most significantly affected by the dispersal policy as well as those who have the potential, however remote this might actually be, to integrate. Thus, two groups are omitted from this study, namely those persons reaching the UK who decide, for whatever reason, not to apply for asylum as well as those individuals who have received a final negative decision from the IND on their asylum application. Both these groups are relatively unaffected by the redistribution scheme and possess limited opportunities to integrate. The remaining groups in the UK that can be considered as forced

migrants are asylum seekers, Convention status refugees and individuals who are granted the right to stay on humanitarian grounds, that is individuals with ELR, HP or DL. Members of these legal categories are affected by dispersal and possess a potential for integration and therefore these sets of individuals all constitute the subject matter of this piece of research. However, as reflected in the analysis above, they possess different rights, the two most distinctive categories being asylum seekers on the one hand and those with permission to reside in the UK on the other, called refugees in this piece of research. Consequently, whilst referring to the distinctive legal groups when necessary, the research undertaken centres around these two categories of persons.

It is important to emphasise, however, that this thesis focuses primarily on the experiences of asylum seekers. Insufficient time has elapsed between the introduction of the dispersal policy and the undertaking of the fieldwork for this study to thoroughly assess the effect of this policy on refugees. Indeed, previously dispersed asylum seekers who were refugees at the time of my fieldwork only obtained this status several years ago and thus, as analysed in the following chapters, the observable impacts of dispersal on this group are similar to those experienced by asylum seekers. Notwithstanding, the findings regarding refugee circumstances enrich this thesis, as they highlight, more powerfully, the situation of asylum seekers.



## **2.2 Defining refugee integration**

### **2.2.1 The challenges involved in defining refugee integration**

Prior to commencing the process of discussing refugee integration, it is important to note that this particular concept is difficult to define precisely. Indeed, 'there is no single, generally accepted definition, theory or model of immigrant and refugee integration. The concept continues to be controversial and hotly debated'. It would seem that this is partly due to the scope of the phenomenon of integration. Certainly, 'the integration of newcomers to a society takes place at every level and in every sector of society' and consequently, it requires the involvement of a multiplicity of different social players. As a result, the definition of integration easily becomes blurred as various sectors, lobbies and interest groups appropriate the concept, attribute their own particular meaning to it and infuse the term with connotations tied to their specific belief and value system. Thus, 'integration means different things to different people. It has been used in varying ways in different places and at different times' (Castles et al, 2002: 113-114; Ager et al, 2002: 4).

### **2.2.2 Refugee integration for policy makers and lobbyists at an international, European and national level**

#### **The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)**

The principal mandate of the UNHCR is to 'seek permanent solutions for the problems of refugees' (Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951), by facilitating 'resettlement in a third country of durable asylum, local integration in

the country of first asylum or voluntary return'. The 1951 Geneva Convention outlines the social, civil and economic rights of people in need of international protection, emphasising that 'refugees should be treated on a basis "not less favourable" than that accorded to non-nationals' (ECRE, 1998: 6). In so doing, it is hoped that 'refugees become assimilated in their new countries and avoid the kind of social marginalisation that might result if they were given only a second-class status' (UNHCR, 1995: 83). In this instance, 'assimilation within new national communities' has usually been interpreted as meaning economic, social and legal integration, although this has never been formally defined by the Convention (ECRE, 1998: 6).

The mandate of the UNHCR and the refugee rights enshrined in the Geneva Convention are crucial in setting a rights-based, international standard and agenda. However, the brevity with which the meaning of refugee integration is developed and the need for the UNHCR to apply its definition to the context of both developing and developed nations render this particular explanation of integration inappropriate for my piece of research.

#### The European Council for Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)

ECRE, a pan-European organisation of 72 refugee-assisting agencies in 28 countries, has developed an extensive definition of refugee integration founded principally upon the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1967 New York Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees (ECRE, 2002: 8). ECRE describes integration firstly, as 'a process of change that is dynamic and two-way' placing demands on both host-societies and refugees. From the standpoint of the latter, integration entails a willingness to adapt to the

way of life of the society of reception without being obliged to abandon one's own cultural identity. From the perspective of the former, integration necessitates a readiness to adjust public institutions to modifications in the population profile, acknowledge refugees as a component of the national community, and be decisive in assisting with this group's access to resources and decision-making processes. Moreover, integration constitutes a long-term process, beginning, at least psychologically, at the point of arrival in the host-country and ending when the individual develops into an active constituent part of the society of reception, from a legal, social, economic, educational and cultural perspective. Additionally, it is intended that integration is multi-dimensional. It should connect 'both the conditions for and actual participation in all aspects of the economic, social, cultural, civil and political life of the country of durable asylum as well as to refugees' own perception of acceptance by and membership in the host society' (ECRE, 2002: 4; Ager et al, 2002: 7; ECRE, 1998: 7).

Although ECRE's definition and understanding of refugee integration is extensive and very useful for this particular piece of research, it is primarily directed towards the national governments in Europe. Therefore, it emphasizes the means by which the conditions for integration can be achieved, through national and local governmental programmes and strategies, omitting in the process to fully discuss and conceptualise the process of integration itself, namely the development of relationships amongst refugees themselves and also between this group and host-community members and host-society institutions. Thus, ECRE's position on refugee integration does not constitute, in my view, a sufficiently exhaustive approach towards the subject matter.



## The Home Office

Prior to discussing the content of the Home Office's definition of refugee integration, it is necessary to present the foundational principles that underpin the adopted approach. Firstly, a national government's definition of refugee integration tends to be based upon the society's 'cultural understandings of nation and nationhood' (Saggar, 1995 in Ager et al, 2002: 4), this sense of identity including particular values that permeate the national understanding of integration. In the case of the UK, since 1965 and the first Race Relations Act, society has been conceptualised as multicultural and characterised by ethnic pluralism, divergent sets of individuals concomitantly existing whilst maintaining independent cultural identities. Under the broader banner of race relations, UK policy-makers have been attentive to the cultural and social repercussions of integration, significant focus being placed on harmony and the risk of disharmony as well as achieving 'good race relations' in terms of 'peaceful co-existence through tolerance, diversity and pluralism' (Castles et al, 2002: 122; Weil and Crowley, 1999: 108). Thus, the Home Office's refugee integration policy 'should be seen as an important contribution to the work of promoting good race relations under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and in building cohesive communities'. Similarly, the strategy is founded upon a tradition of upholding the 1951 Geneva Convention, promoting the national economic benefits of refugees and ensuring equality of opportunity for all (Home Office, 2005a: 3, 5). Significantly, the focus of discussion in the UK appears to centre on integration rather than assimilation. Certainly, achieving integration has now become the primary aim of refugee settlement policies in the UK, the right to maintain cultural and religious identity and practices increasing in acceptance and the concept of a pluralist society gathering strength (Ager et al, 2002: 5). Notwithstanding this

linguistic paradigmatic shift, assimilationist policies can continue to develop under the guise of 'integration' programmes.

Recently, debate amongst civil society in the UK has been pronounced regarding the point in time at which refugee integration and therefore state-funded refugee integration programmes should begin. The Home Office clearly notes, from its standpoint, that 'integration can only begin in its fullest sense when an asylum seeker becomes a refugee'. The UK government's promotion of asylum seeker integration would counter the principally deterrent nature of its asylum seeker policies, undermine the Labour government's image of political toughness towards immigration as well as make it harder to deport failed asylum applicants. A further characteristic of the Home Office's refugee integration strategy is that it applies to those refugees who arrived in the UK relatively recently and who are 'at the beginning of the process of integration'. The strategy also stresses the specificity of the experience and needs of refugees, in contrast to that of other migrants. However, the Home Office is committed to mainstreaming the support offered to this group rather than opt to provide separate services or structures. The Home Office also emphasizes refugee empowerment, equality of opportunity, self-sufficiency as well as rights and responsibilities. Moreover, the Home Office believes that the personal safety of refugees as well as the 'building of bridges' with host-community members is essential in order for this group 'to contribute to the community as fully as possible'. In addition, the Home Office emphasises that, in order to facilitate access to services, such as housing, the NHS and education, assistance should be offered 'in a timely way and particularly during the critical period after receipt of a positive decision on asylum' (Home Office, 2005a: 3, 5-6 14-15, 20, 23, 26).

The definition and understanding of refugee integration offered by the Home Office is particularly insightful and informative concerning the specificity of the UK policy experience. However, insufficient emphasis is placed on the 'two-way process' of integration. The responsibilities that host-society members and communities have with regards to facilitating the integration of refugees thus appear limited. Additionally, despite discussions within the strategy regarding community cohesion, race relations, social harmony and the development of constructive relationships between refugees and host-society members, the Home Office appears to be predominantly concerned with functional integration, those elements of integration that deal with the availability and quality of social services as well as refugee access and rights to employment, education and housing (Korac, 2001; Ager et al, 2002: 6; Castles et al, 2002: 124). As will be discussed shortly, my study of integration focuses, in addition to the functional aspects, on the relational components, namely the relationships that develop amongst refugees and also between this group and members of the host-community. Consequently, a definition that overly stresses the functional qualities of integration is inadequate.

### The Refugee Council

The Refugee Council, the main voluntary sector organisation in the UK working for refugees, posits a significantly distinct stance from that adopted by the Home Office, their definition and appreciation of refugee integration being based fundamentally on ECRE's pro-refugee approach.

Firstly, the Refugee Council emphasises that a person's integration process begins from their point of arrival in the UK and thus, government-led integration



policies and measures should commence whilst a person is still an asylum seeker. The Refugee Council's concern regarding the delay of an individual's entitlement to state-funded integration schemes until they receive permission to remain in the UK is based on the principle that a person's potential experience of exclusion during the reception phase can stunt their long-term integration, particularly when the duration of the asylum application process is significant. Moreover, the Refugee Council highlights that refugee integration constitutes a 'two-way' process, where demands are placed not only on refugees but also on the receiving society.' Furthermore, the Refugee Council advocates that community organisations are of vital importance in promoting and facilitating integration. Additionally, the Refugee Council observes that refugees' real and perceived sense of contribution to and membership of the host-country are crucial, the integration process seeking 'to create conditions for participation in all aspects of the economic, social, cultural, civil and political life of the country of asylum'. Finally, the Refugee Council believes that for integration to develop refugees need to feel safe and secure within their local areas, possess the confidence to report incidents of racial harassment as well as trust the relevant authorities that they are taking action in their best interests (Refugee Council, 2004d: 3-4, 19, 21; Ager et al, 2002: 7; Refugee Council, 1997: 15).

Whilst the Refugee Council's approach towards refugee integration covers many of the components of integration, the definition itself is overly functional, in the same way as the Home Office's stance, and not sufficiently developed or refined for it to constitute the conceptual foundation of integration in this piece of research. Moreover, the Refugee Council's definition of integration and its emphasis, along with ECRE's, on striving for equal group rights borders on being unrealistic and unachievable without a significant societal transformation. Whilst it

is morally right that refugees are treated as equals, in practice, refugees do not possess equal powers. Indeed, they do not possess the right to vote unless they have naturalised and, as a group, they constitute a relatively small and less resourced proportion of the population, in the UK. This inequality of power significantly influences the type of integration that can be achieved.

### **2.2.3 Sociological conceptualisations of integration**

#### Integration as one of the outcomes of Berry's (1980; 1988) acculturation process

Berry (1980; 1988) has devised an acculturation model, whereby acculturation constitutes 'the process by which groups adjust to different cultures' (Castles et al, 2002: 113). Acculturation, in this context, is conceptualised as a process with four possible outcomes: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation. The distinction between these four states is based upon two factors: firstly, whether the acculturating group maintains or loses its own cultural identity and secondly, whether or not it engages in social relations with the dominant society. 'A situation where the group becomes submerged into the dominant society is labelled assimilation. The opposite, where there are no relations with the larger society and the group sticks to its own identity is called separation (or segregation where it is imposed by other groups). There is also the possibility that the group loses its own culture yet does not become part of the dominant society – this is termed marginalisation. Finally, a group may maintain its identity but also interact with society as a whole – this is integration' (Kuhlman, 1991: 5).

Table 2.1 Berry's acculturation model

		Maintenance of cultural identity	
		YES	NO
Relations with other groups	YES	Integration	Assimilation
	NO	Separation	Marginalisation

Source: Kuhlman (1991), modified from Berry, 1988: 45

Berry's acculturation model and his approach towards the definition of integration focus supremely upon cultural orientation. The nature of the relationships that develop in the country of reception amongst the in-coming group and host-society members is also central. Thus, Berry's standpoint adds significant depth to the present discussion on refugee integration by exploring issues such as 'identity, belonging, recognition and self-respect' (Castles et al, 2002: 114). Nevertheless, his perspective fails to include a more functional viewpoint and since, as stated earlier, a significant part of my research focuses on state policy and policy-related aspects of integration, Berry's definition, on its own, is incomplete and therefore inadequate for this particular study.

The components of adaptation (Goldlust and Richmond, 1974)

Goldlust and Richmond's (1974) research offers a detailed study of the components of the overarching process of acculturation, or as they call it, adaptation. These authors distinguish between objective or external aspects and subjective or psychological aspects of adaptation.

Goldlust and Richmond's objective aspects of adaptation are the economic, cultural, social and political experiences of the migrant. The economic experience refers to 'the industries and occupations into which migrants move, their subsequent occupational and social mobility, together with their incomes and



expenditures. The cultural sphere includes the establishment of channels of communication with the receiving society through language learning, together with the interchange of cultural artefacts and symbols between immigrants and the receiving society. Social aspects include the integration of immigrants into networks of primary relationships with kith and kin, as well as members of the receiving society. It also involves the secondary level of social participation in formal organisations of various types'. Finally, 'political aspects include participation in the normal processes of voting and standing for election, together with the formation of new parties and pressure groups representing the special interests of immigrants and ethnic minority groups'. Goldlust and Richmond's subjective aspects of adaptation are the migrant's experiences of identification, internalisation and satisfaction. Identification refers to 'the modification of the migrant's own sense of identity and a transference of loyalty from his/her former country to the new'. Internalisation involves 'the processes of change in the attitudes and values of the migrant and is closely related to the objective process of acculturation. However, the latter may simply involve outward conformity to the demands of the new society due to external sanctions, without any marked change in the personality'. The level of satisfaction of the immigrant is likely to 'differ according to the specific aspect of the post-migration experience. It will almost certainly involve relative comparisons with the immigrant's situation before migration and may also involve comparisons with other immigrants and with members of the receiving society' (Goldlust and Richmond, 1974: 198-199).

Goldlust and Richmond's (1974) extended analysis of the components of adaptation contributes significantly to the understanding of the constituent parts, both functional and relational as well as objective and subjective of refugee integration. However, by opting to exclusively develop the meaning attributed to

adaptation, they offer limited assistance concerning the specificity of a definition of integration.

#### Refugee integration (Kuhlman, 1991)

Kuhlman (1991: 7) defines refugee integration as: 'participating in the host-economy; attaining an acceptable standard of living; maintaining individual or group cultural identity; establishing a progressive mode of psychological adjustment; absence of a deterioration in the standards of living and economic opportunities of host-society members; level of friction between host population and refugees no worse than within host-population itself; level of discrimination experienced by refugees no higher than what already exists between groups within the host-society'.

Kuhlman's perspective on refugee integration is broad and wide-ranging, covering both the functional and relational features of the concept and as such, his work contributes significantly to an overall appreciation of the phenomenon under study. However, his standpoint is deeply rooted in his research experiences in developing countries. Given both the different scale of refugee movements as well as the distinct economic, social and political circumstances of the host-countries in these regions, compared to Europe, for instance, his definition of refugee integration is unsatisfactory for a study that focuses on refugee settlement in developed nations.

### Refugee integration (Ager and Strang, 2004a)

Ager and Strang (2004a), basing themselves largely on social capital literature, have elaborated a holistic refugee integration framework. Prior to analysing their definition, it is helpful to contextualise their stance by presenting the origins and fundamental traits of the social capital concept. Although social capital has become a buzzword in political and academic circles, there is often confusion regarding the meaning of the term. Generally speaking, social capital is concerned with the advantages of people being connected to one another (Halpern, 2005: 1). This principle is not new in sociology. Durkheim emphasised that group life can be an antidote to anomie and self-destruction and Marx distinguished between an atomised class-in-itself and a mobilised and effective class-for-itself. However, the contemporary value of the social capital concept is that it highlights how non-monetary forms of capital can be important sources of power and influence (Portes, 1998: 2).

The origins of mainstream academic interest in social capital date back to the late 1980s when Bourdieu and Coleman drew attention to the concept (Halpern, 2005: 6). Bourdieu maintains that 'social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 119). Coleman argues that 'social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures and they facilitate certain actions of actors within the structure' (Coleman, 1988: S98). Despite the significant theoretical contributions made by these two authors, it is Putnam who is now most closely associated with



the social capital concept. He defines the latter as 'the features of social life – networks, norms and trust – that enable participants to gather together more effectively to pursue shared objectives' (Putnam, 1995: 664-5). Portes (1998: 15) has also contributed significantly to this field, emphasising, in particular the potentially negative, as well as positive, effects of social capital on individuals or groups. Certainly, the presence of social capital can exclude outsiders, make excessive claims on group members, restrict individual freedom and lead to a downward levelling of norms.

New theoretical work has broken down the notion of social capital into different sub-types, the most relevant of these distinctions being between 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital. 'Bonding' social capital 'brings closer together people who already know each other' (Gittell and Vidal, 1998: 15). It is inward looking, reinforces exclusive identities as well as homogeneous groups and creates strong in-group loyalty. It is considered 'good for getting by'. The dense networks present in some ethnic enclaves, that provide crucial social and psychological support, constitute the archetype 'bonding' social capital. Significantly, this form of social capital may also create strong out-group antagonism (Putnam, 2000: 22-3). In contrast, 'bridging' social capital 'brings together people or groups who previously did not know each other' (Gittell and Vidal, 1998: 15). It is outward looking, encompasses people across diverse social cleavages and facilitates linkages to external assets and information. It is viewed as 'good for getting ahead' (Putnam, 2002: 22-3). This differentiation closely mirrors Granovetter's (1973) distinction between 'weak' and 'strong' ties. Similarly, Woolcock (1998: 168) distinguishes between integration (bonding) and linkage (bridging).

Woolcock's societal typology, based upon the divergent mixes of bonding and bridging, is particularly insightful since it illustrates that individuals and groups can possess 'too much' or 'too little' social capital, thereby suggesting that social capital is a resource that needs to be optimised rather than maximised (1998: 158).

Table 2.2 Woolcock's societal typology of bonding and bridging

	<b>Low bridging</b>	<b>High bridging</b>
<b>Low bonding</b>	Amoral individualism	Anomie
<b>High bonding</b>	Amoral familism	Social opportunity

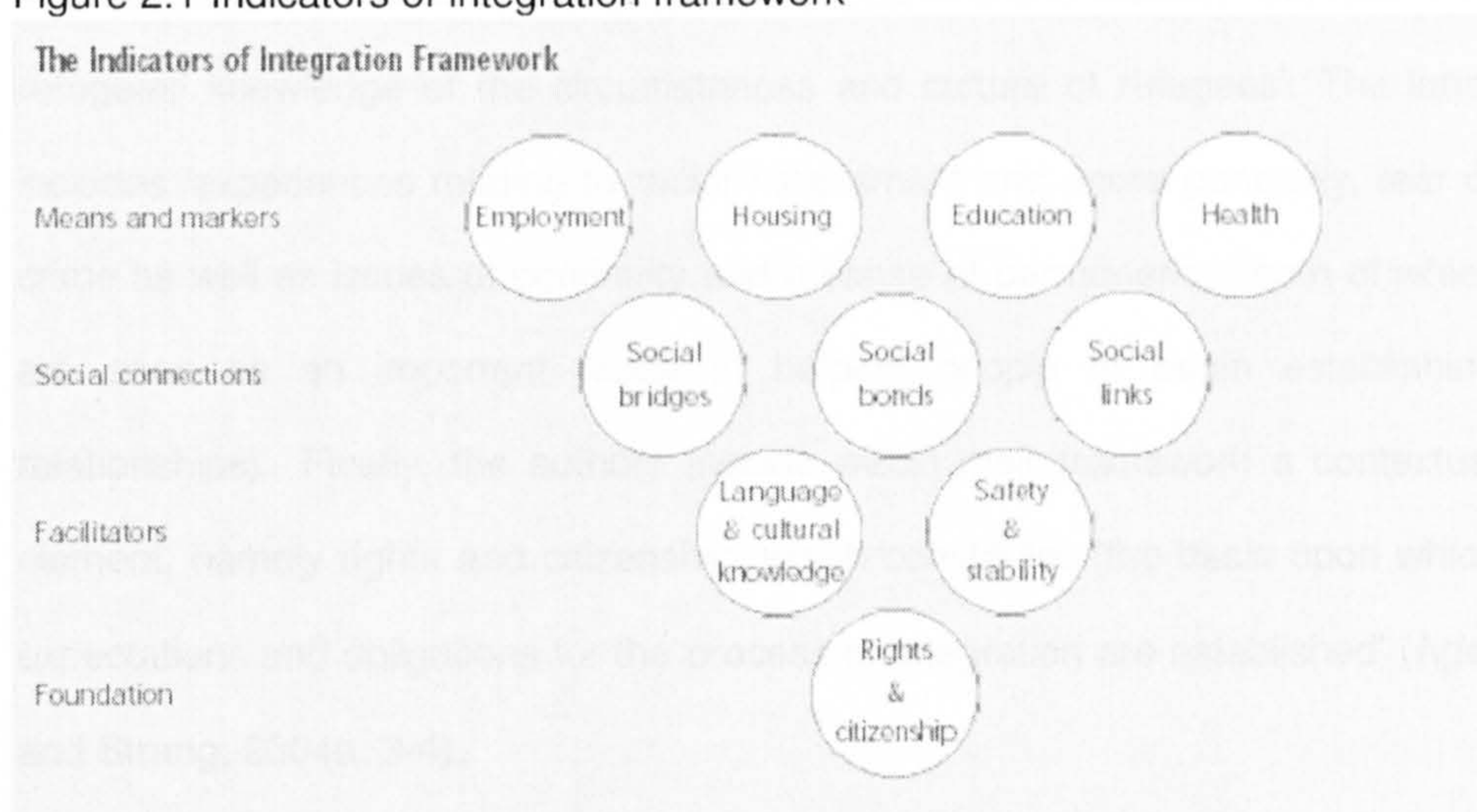
Source: Woolcock (1998)

According to this typology, amoral individualism equates to a deficit of bonding and bridging, a situation where there is no familial or generalised trust, where narrow self-interest pervades all social and economic activity and where members are isolated, by circumstance or discrimination, from all forms of cohesive social networks. Anomie is associated with a relative excess of bridging and a deficit of bonding, where individuals possess a newly-found freedom and opportunity to participate in a wide range of activities whilst lacking the stable community base to provide guidance, support and identity. Amoral familism is present when there is a relative excess of bonding and a deficit of bridging. In these instances, generalised trust extends only to immediate family members / blood relatives generating fierce ethnic loyalties as well as familial attachments. This state of affairs can discourage economic advancement, geographical mobility and amicable conflict resolution with outsiders. Finally, social opportunity is achieved when equally high levels of bonding and bridging are present (Woolcock, 1998: 171-5).



Having provided the social capital background to Ager and Strang's (2004a) approach, an explanation of these authors' visually displayed integration framework follows.

Figure 2.1 Indicators of integration framework



Source: Ager and Strang (2004a: 3).

Firstly, one can observe from this schema that Ager and Strang (2004a) incorporate into their framework the principal functional aspects of refugee integration, namely employment, housing, education and health. These fields constitute the 'major areas of attainment that are widely recognised as critical factors in the integration process. These domains are "markers" because success in these areas is an indication of positive integration outcomes as well as "means" because success in these fields is likely to assist the wider integration process'. Secondly, Ager and Strang stress the importance of relationships for the definition and achievement of the integration process. Like Woolcock (1998), the authors identify three forms of social connections namely 'social bonds, that is connections within a community defined by, for example, ethnic, national or religious identity; social bridges, with members of other communities; and social



links with institutions, including local and central government services'. Thirdly, Ager and Strang have located within their framework, two key facilitators, namely 'language and cultural knowledge' and 'safety and stability', which, they argue, stimulate the integration process. The former incorporates 'both refugees' knowledge of national and local procedures, customs and facilities, but also non-refugees' knowledge of the circumstances and culture of refugees'. The latter includes 'experiences relating to racial harassment and, more generally, fear of crime as well as issues of continuity and a sense of permanence (both of which are seen as an important factor in helping people to begin establishing relationships)'. Finally, the authors include within their framework a contextual element, namely rights and citizenship, which constitutes 'the basis upon which expectations and obligations for the process of integration are established' (Ager and Strang, 2004a: 3-4).

Ager and Strang remark that there exist 'complex inter-linkages between all of the domains posited in the framework, actions influencing one of the domains having potential impacts on all the others'. Significantly, it is noted that the way in which the domains are visually represented in the above diagram does not suggest that 'any domain is more important than any other, or that integration should happen in a particular order, for instance that you achieve employment first, then greater social bonds'. Nevertheless, when using the framework, it would be possible to trace the broad range of 'pathways' connecting the various domains (Ager and Strang, 2004a: 4-5).

Basing themselves on the framework presented above, Ager and Strang (2004a: 5) argue that 'an individual or group is integrated within a society when they:

- achieve public outcomes within employment, housing, education, health etc. which are equivalent to those achieved within the wider host communities;
- are socially connected with members of a community with which they identify, with members of other communities and with relevant services and functions of the state;
- and have sufficient linguistic competence and cultural knowledge, and a sufficient sense of security and stability, to confidently engage in that society in a manner consistent with shared notions of nationhood and citizenship'.

#### **2.2.4 Refugee integration in this piece of research**

In this thesis, the approach and definition of refugee integration as elaborated by Ager and Strang (2004a) has been adopted. In contrast to the other standpoints reviewed above, Ager and Strang are uniquely successful firstly, in valuing and emphasising the 'two-way process' of integration, secondly, in rooting their research and conclusions in the UK and other developed nations and thirdly in combining the functional and relational aspects of integration. Comprehensive research on all features of their integration framework, however, lies beyond the scope of this thesis. Consequently, only four domains have been chosen: housing, employment, social bonds and social bridges. These fields have been elected because they cover functional and sociological aspects of integration as well as raise important issues relating to the effect of the dispersal policy on refugee integration in the UK. As illustrated below as well as in subsequent chapters, the four domains selected are interdependent, each element influencing the other. Consequently, they can be extricated from Ager and Strang's (2004a) framework and studied as an independent whole from the other aspects of the integration structure.

On the functional side, the housing domain has been selected because housing provision has always constituted the key pillar of refugee settlement in the UK (Joly, 1996). Moreover, given the centrality to this thesis of the dispersal policy, an accommodation-led strategy introduced to relieve housing pressures in London and the South East, it was considered essential to analyse the effect of this housing policy on asylum seeker and refugee housing. The employment domain has been chosen because work and income are central to the integration process (Ager, Strang, O'May, Garner, 2002: 10) and also because employment is intimately intertwined with housing, job opportunities and affordable accommodation rarely being encountered together. In light of the dispersal policy's priorities, namely securing affordable housing outside of London and the South East, it is important to explore the consequences this approach has on asylum seeker and refugee access to employment. Housing and employment have been chosen above education and health firstly, because the majority of the Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees are young single men rather than couples with children. Therefore, whilst education issues will be relevant to some members of this group, they are not as prevalent as housing and employment concerns. Secondly, the health issues of the group under study are deemed too complex to analyse for a researcher who does not possess significant medical training.

On the sociological side, the social bonds domain has been elected because it is precisely through this type of social relationship that integration, one of the main focuses of this thesis, distinguishes itself from assimilation. Moreover, by focusing on social bonds, this piece of research can inform the frequently discussed debate regarding the extent to which the dispersal policy stifles



integration by isolating co-ethnics from one another. The social bridges domain has been chosen because this form of social interaction renders the integration process complete, social bonds providing security and social bridges offering independence. Centring on this feature also helps establish the degree to which the dispersal policy facilitates bridging or instead encourages mutual hostility and antagonism. Furthermore, the interactions of social bridges, social bonds and employment prospects are valuable for study. Indeed, most research on social capital amongst Black and Minority Ethnic groups as well as refugees has centred around the link between social capital and employment (Light and Karageorgis, 1994; Portes, 1994; Lamba and Krahn, 2003). Focusing on this relationship amongst Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees will thus contribute directly to the existing body of academic literature in this field. Significantly, Ager and Strang's (2004a) integration facilitators, safety and stability as well as language and cultural knowledge, are not considered independently in this study but rather are discussed within the broader remit of the social bridges research. Similarly, the foundation of Ager and Strang's (2004a) integration framework, rights and citizenship, is not overtly researched in this thesis although these principles remain central to the way in which asylum seeker and refugee housing, employment, social bonds and social bridges are studied. Finally, the study of asylum seeker and refugee relationships with governmental, private and voluntary sector organisations does not constitute an aspect of this piece of research because previous studies have frequently focused on this subject matter already.

Regarding specifically the four chosen aspects of integration, for the purpose of my field research and data analysis:

1. An asylum seeker or refugee is residentially integrated when they are able to obtain suitable housing, that is, when the abode they occupy offers adequate personal space for individual privacy, satisfactory shared space for communal living, guaranteed personal physical security and average quality housing.
2. An asylum seeker or refugee is economically integrated when, assuming that they wish to and are fit to work, they are successful in obtaining an adequate job, that consists in formal, secure employment that broadly matches their qualifications and prior professional experience.
3. An asylum seeker or refugee is socially integrated when they are firstly, in spatial proximity to and are involved in local co-ethnic social bonds and secondly, when they are able to engage in social bridging with members of the host-community.

### **2.3 The potential impact of the dispersal policy on integration**

The dispersal policy possesses a strong potential to fundamentally affect the housing, as well as its location, and the employment of the group under study. The dispersal policy's stated aim is to spatially distribute asylum seekers away from London and the South East, placing them in state-funded dwellings on a no-choice basis. It would seem, as discussed in chapter one, that the allocation of dispersal accommodation is largely based, in practice, upon housing availability and affordability. The use of these criteria has led many dispersed individuals to reside in poor quality, previously vacant dwellings, this phenomenon hindering their capability to obtain an adequate living environment and thus restricting their integration. As noted earlier, the employment and housing markets in a given

location are closely interlinked. Thus, the selection of dispersal dwellings based upon housing availability and affordability impacts upon the employment prospects of those dispersed, dispersal accommodation thwarting the ability of those dispersed to secure work, in itself a significant impediment to integration.

Some of the dispersed individuals have been isolated from the principal groupings of their co-ethnics. In these instances, the benefits of possessing access to local co-ethnic social bonds have logically been absent and integration has been hampered. This is primarily the consequence of the UK government selecting dispersal localities largely based on housing availability and affordability as well as its failure to follow, particularly at the beginning of the dispersal programme, the language-cluster principle enunciated at the policy formulation stage. Finally, for some of those dispersed, the opportunities for social bridging in the dispersal localities have also been minimal, a phenomenon that additionally constrains their integration. This trend is once more the product of the UK government's prioritization of selecting the dispersal areas based on the housing availability and affordability in localities rather than the degree to which the host-communities are accustomed to living alongside refugee communities and / or members of Black and Minority Ethnic groups.

#### Factors influencing the impact of the dispersal policy on integration

Having identified the potential impact of the dispersal policy on the integration of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK, the intervening factors that might influence this relationship are now presented. Basing myself primarily on the work of Kunz (1973, 1981) and Goldlust and Richmond (1974), the variety of factors



that appear to affect the impact of the dispersal policy on integration are identified as follows.

Firstly, there are elements relating specifically to the characteristics an individual migrant possesses on departure from his/her country of origin. These are the extent of his/her educational and technical training, his/her experience of urban living, his/her prior knowledge of the host-country language and his/her demographic traits (Goldlust and Richmond, 1974). Secondly, structural factors connected to local variations within the society of reception influence the impact of dispersal on integration, namely the local degree of cultural compatibility (Kunz, 1973; 1981), the local conditions of the labour (ECRE, 1998) and housing market and the local traits of the public transport infrastructure. Thirdly, governmental structural factors in the country of reception affect the influence of dispersal on integration. Indeed, the date an individual applies for asylum is important, the latter determining which dispersal scheme the person is registered onto as well as whether or not the asylum applicant possesses the right to work. The length of the asylum determination procedure (ECRE, 1998), the range of welfare support packages available to asylum seekers, the time of arrival in the dispersal locality and the variation in size of the dispersal area are also significant. Additionally, the difference in the housing offered to dispersed asylum claimants, the percentage of failed asylum applicants, disbenefitted asylum seekers and refugees in the total co-ethnic population and the receipt of refugee status (Castles et al, 2002) are worthy of note. Fourthly, co-ethnic structural factors in the host-country impinge upon the effect of dispersal on integration, namely, at the local level, the degree of organisation within the co-ethnic group and the presence of migrant leaders suited to act as intermediaries between co-ethnics and host-community members (Patterson, 1963). At the national level,

the relative size of the incoming co-ethnic group (Goldlust and Richmond, 1974) is significant. Finally, the length of residence of an individual in their country of reception (Goldlust and Richmond, 1974) impacts upon the influence of dispersal on integration, his/her settlement experiences and needs changing over time (Lieberson, 1996), namely, for instance, his/her aspirations for return migration (Bloch, 1999a). Significantly, it is possible that the effect of dispersal on integration decreases over time.

Basing myself on the discussions above, the hypotheses to be tested in this piece of research are:

1. The contemporary UK dispersal policy exercises a negative impact on the social bonds of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees because this policy sends this group to localities where there are no settled co-ethnics.
2. The current UK dispersal policy wields a negative impact on the social bridges of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees because this policy sends this set of individuals to areas where the perceptions and attitudes of host-community members towards them are hostile.
3. The contemporary UK dispersal policy exercises a negative impact on the employment of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees because this policy sends this group to localities where suitable employment opportunities are limited.
4. The current UK dispersal policy wields a negative impact on the housing of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees because this policy houses this set of individuals in inadequate dwellings.

When testing these hypotheses, it is necessary to locate the impact of the dispersal policy on refugee integration within the broader sociological debate

regarding structuration and voluntaristic action, the latter consisting in 'an actor's free will or capacity to make choices despite constraints' (Sciulli, 1986 in Richmond, 1988). Certainly, in this particular piece of research, efforts are made to identify instances when asylum seekers and refugees exercise their freewill and integrate despite the structural constraint of the dispersal policy or instead, by manipulating this seemingly limiting aspect of their lives to their own advantage.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, my approach towards the concept of who is a refugee has been delineated and my viewpoint on refugee integration has been explained. The reasons for focusing on four specific components of integration, namely employment, housing, social bonds and social bridges have also been presented. Moreover, a series of personal, structural and circumstantial factors that reinforce or counter the impact of the dispersal policy on asylum seeker and refugee integration have been identified. Finally, the potential outcome of the effect of dispersal on each of the four aspects of integration chosen has been suggested in the form of hypotheses. The following methodology and methods chapter will explain the ways in which the hypotheses outlined above are tested.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY AND METHODS**

In the social sciences, there exist two broad types of data collection methods, namely those that pertain to the quantitative approach, customarily typified by the social survey, and those that relate to the qualitative stance, habitually exemplified by participant observation and unstructured, in-depth interviewing (Bryman, 2000: 1). Significant controversy exists regarding the ways in which a researcher opts between either of these two, seemingly distinct, groups of research methods.

Some authors advocate that the choice should be based upon the epistemological standpoint of the researcher. Others suggest that the decision should be founded upon a study's particular research questions and the appropriateness of the chosen methods for providing evidence to test the key hypotheses. From the perspective of the former, quantitative and qualitative approaches and methods are viewed as competing standpoints, 'the terms "quantitative research" and "qualitative research" signifying much more than ways of gathering data and rather, denoting divergent assumptions about the nature and purposes of research in the social sciences'. From the point of view of the latter, quantitative and qualitative data collection methods simply constitute 'denotations of different ways of conducting social investigations' (Bryman, 2000: 3-5). An individual's epistemological perspective constitutes what s/he believes to be valid or acceptable knowledge about the social world as well as what data collection methods s/he perceives as most suitable to the process of soliciting that knowledge from the social world.

In this research, I maintain that there exist significant differences between quantitative and qualitative research, regarding the type of data that each engenders and the levels of analysis at which each operates. Nevertheless, 'it is important not to minimise the importance of similarities between the two traditions'. Moreover, I maintain that 'the association of quantitative and qualitative research with different epistemological positions is largely assumed' and data collection techniques should be chosen 'in relation to the research problems posed' (Bryman, 2000: 172-173).

The operational definition of integration in this study, based on Ager and Strang's (2004a) approach and presented in chapter two, has not been refined by the identification and use of indicators. The validity of indicators, in general, is questionable since it is difficult to be certain that an indicator or measure of integration accurately reflects the concept to which it is supposed to be referring. Moreover, the focus of my research topic is the relationship existing between the dispersal policy, the integration process and any intervening factors that impact upon that relationship, rather than on the exact degree of integration or non-integration achieved. Thus, the expectation is that the hypotheses detailed in chapter two would be validated under certain conditions and rejected under other circumstances. A deductive and structured approach has been adopted, this stance being particularly suited to policy research (Bryman, 2000).

### **3.1 Data collection methods**

#### **3.1.1 Interviews**

In social research, there exist several interviewing techniques, namely structured interviews, unstructured interviews and semi-structured interviews (May, 2001). Prior to discussing the reasons for adopting the latter in this piece of research, the main characteristics of each of the three existing interviewing methods are delineated.

##### **Structured interviews**

Structured interviews are firstly based upon a questionnaire that is finalised, in terms of the themes to be discussed and the wording of the questions themselves, once the pilot study has been undertaken. Moreover, each interviewer involved aims to adopt a standardised systematic stance, striving to ask the same questions in the same way to all the interviewees (May, 2001: 92), adopting friendly but not over-sociable behaviour (Burgess, 1984: 101). Contact with each interviewee is intended to be brief, 'the researcher adopting the posture of an outsider looking in on the social world. S/he applies a pre-ordained framework on the subjects being investigated and is involved as little as possible in that world' (Bryman, 2000: 95-96). The latter approach is adopted in an attempt to facilitate the impartiality of the researcher and control his/her impact on the interview process. Indeed, it is hoped that, as a result, the differences in the research findings, between one interview and another, 'can be attributed to a "true" difference rather than as a result of how the question was asked or the context of the interview' (May, 2001: 92).



Relative to other interview methods, the structured standpoint of the current technique can facilitate the replicability of the interview itself by other interviewers working alongside one another on the same research project, thus making this method particularly suitable to large scale surveys (May, 2001: 121). Certainly, if many interviewers adopted the fluid and more unpredictable stance of unstructured interviews, the data collected during these types of surveys is likely to be less manageable and troublesome to analyse. It is also hoped that the way in which structured interviews are undertaken can enhance the replicability of the research as a whole, 'replication providing a means of checking the extent to which findings are applicable to other contexts as well as consisting in a means of checking the biases of the investigator' (Bryman, 2000: 37; May, 2001: 91-92).

Regarding the suitability of this method to particular research questions, structured interviews or social surveys 'are likely to be preferred when there is a concern to establish cause and effect relationships, (...) survey researchers tending to be more concerned with the precise delineation of a causal factor relative to other potential causes' (Bryman, 2000: 110).

### Unstructured interviews

In contrast, unstructured interviews are founded upon flexible interview guidelines containing a non-prescriptive list of themes which are themselves likely to be eliminated or modified during fieldwork (May, 2001: 125), an approach which 'allows new leads to be followed and additional data to be gathered in response to changes in ideas'. Generally, specific research questions are not identified before the beginning of work in the field. Furthermore, the data collection

technique under discussion is typified, largely, by the interviewer surrendering the control of the interview to the interviewee, 'the researcher providing minimal guidance and allowing considerable latitude for the subjects'. Finally, unstructured, compared to structured, interviews are characterised by the researcher engaging in more 'sustained contact', over a longer period of time, with the interviewee (Bryman, 2000: 46, 95 & 99).

This data collection method is well-suited to research that focuses on 'viewing events, actions, norms and values from the perspective of the people who are being studied', the opportunity to develop a 'sustained contact' with the subjects through unstructured interviewing enabling the growth of closer relationships between the interviewer and the interviewee. As argued by Bryman, 'in order to gain the necessary vantage point from which empathy may be feasible, sustained periods of involvement are required' (2000: 61 & 96). In addition, unstructured interviews can be appropriate to social research that emphasises change, interconnections and linkages 'between events and activities and explores people's interpretations of the factors which produce such connections'. Use of the latter technique in policy studies, for instance, would 'emphasise the various responses of both those who implement and those who are affected by the policy, the interpretations they invoke of the policy initiative, how they respond to each other's views, how perspectives change' (Bryman, 2000: 66 & 102).

### Semi-structured interviews

In broad terms, the principles and traits of semi-structured interviews constitute a hybrid of those that typify structured and unstructured interviews. For example, it has been emphasised that semi-structured interviews 'allow people to answer

more on their own terms than the structured interview permits but still provide a greater potential for comparability over that of the unstructured interview' (May, 2001: 123; see Newton, 1996). Additionally, questions 'are normally specified but the interviewer is freer to probe (...) seeking both clarification and elaboration on the answers given' (May, 2001: 123).

It is important to note that all three interview methods discussed above are necessarily confronted with the problem of reactivity. The latter is 'the reaction on the part of those being investigated to the investigator and his/her research instruments, (...) the subjects' awareness creating a variety of undesirable consequences in that their behaviour or responses may not be indicative of their normal behaviour or views' (Bryman, 2000: 112). Cicourel, criticising interviews for their lack of 'ecological validity', questions whether 'our instruments capture the daily life, conditions, opinions, values, attitudes and knowledge base of those we study as expressed in their natural habitat' (Cicourel, 1982: 15). Even the more low-key unstructured interview remains 'an obtrusive interruption in the natural flow of events, the most informal interviews still conforming to a question and answer format'. Thus, as a result of reactivity, and despite the lack of viable alternatives, 'the pervasive acceptance of the interview as a legitimate tool of research' is always questionable (Bryman, 2000: 115). I take account of this limitation of my data collection technique in my analysis as well as in the drawing up of my final conclusions.

This particular form of interview was chosen firstly because my research strategy was deductive and structured, as discussed above. Thus, although my preparations for the field did not involve the elaboration of a highly structured questionnaire, my interview guidelines, a copy of which can be found in Appendix



One, did contain a list of fixed themes and sub-themes each of which related in specific ways to my hypotheses, the latter having been delineated prior to commencing fieldwork. Incidentally, although the thematic focus of my research remained throughout the fieldwork process, many of the findings were unexpected and unforeseeable. Moreover, on several occasions, I added some queries to my interview guidelines in response to ideas that arose during the fieldwork process.

In conjunction, one of the focuses of my research is to present the perspectives of asylum seekers and refugees on the dispersal policy and their (non) integration. Indeed, it would appear, regarding this particular topic, that there exists a significant research gap in terms of presenting the perspectives of the group under study, research focusing primarily on evaluating integration or dispersal-related projects or presenting the reported views of asylum seekers and refugees, as perceived by policy makers and service providers employed in this field. In order to grasp a sense of asylum seekers and refugees' standpoint directly, it was envisaged that it would be necessary to engage in relatively unstructured and informal exchanges, usually interviewing individuals on several occasions when time permitted. Certainly, repeat interviews can be advantageous to the research process, Collinson noting that they help 'establish greater levels of trust between the researcher and the respondents, by increasing the informal and personal nature of these relationships. They enable respondents' actions and accounts to be examined over time for consistency; also, it is important to maintain close ongoing contact with informants because over time significant changes can occur' (Collinson, 1992: 106).

A final reason for using semi-structured interviews in my research was that the core of my study consisted essentially in analysing the interconnections and linkages existing between the dispersal policy, integration and other intervening factors. The in-depth nature of the qualitative data produced by semi-structured interviewing greatly assists with the understanding of these complex processes.

In practice, the degree to which the interviews undertaken were more or less structured or unstructured varied depending on the location of the exchange and the individual being interviewed. Indeed, the interviews carried out with asylum seekers and refugees as well as those with Kurdish community workers and businessmen tended overall to be more informal than those embarked upon with national policy makers and local service providers. This pattern perhaps ensued from the fact that interviews with the latter group were all undertaken at their place of work, during working hours and thus in a more anonymous and impersonal professional environment, the additional concern of divulging confidential information on my politically sensitive research topic seemingly constituting an ever-present backdrop in the mind of the interviewee. Additionally, the interviews with policy makers and local service providers were subject to tighter time constraints so necessarily they were more focused and formal. Furthermore, this group may have been defensive about the dispersal policy. In contrast, the interviews with asylum seekers and refugees were generally conducted during their spare time, at their own convenience, in a location of their choosing, most commonly in their own home or at a coffee shop, the situational atmosphere of the interview apparently being more conducive to friendly and informal discussions. The extent to which the interviews carried out were more or less structured or unstructured was also influenced by the personality of the individual interviewed and their mood as well as the rapport that developed

between the interviewee and myself, the more talkative, gregarious, interested, relaxed and comfortable s/he was, the more informal and personal the exchange.

### **3.1.2 Sampling the asylum seeker and refugee population**

#### Probability and non-probability sampling

In social research, there are two forms of sampling, probability and non-probability sampling. In probability samples, 'it is vital that a complete list of the population, a sampling frame, exists from which a sample is randomly selected, mathematically. (...) Each person in the population of interest thus has an equal chance of being part of the sample' (May, 2001: 93). When the sampling frame is unknown, however, 'the researcher must use a non-probability sample' (May, 2001: 95), a sample type where 'there is no guarantee that every element has an equal chance of being studied' (Burgess, 1984: 54-55). Using a non-probability sample means that generalisations cannot be drawn as in the way they can for representative random samples.

Regarding my sample of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees, a non-probability sampling method was adopted because systematic statistical data regarding this group in Newcastle and Birmingham (the two fieldwork sites) is impossible to obtain. Certainly, the Home Office regularly publishes statistics on the number of NASS-supported asylum seekers per dispersal city, by nationality. However, these figures fail to include those asylum seekers who are supported, via the interim dispersal scheme, by local authorities. Moreover, they do not provide personal information regarding each individual asylum seeker supported by NASS, for example their addresses. Finally, Iraqi Kurds are not identified in



the Home Office statistics as a separate nationality group or ethnic category. Concerning refugees, to date, no central government agency systematically records any data on this set of persons.

### Non-probability sampling techniques

There exist several forms of non-probability sampling methods. Firstly, there is quota sampling, a method often used in market research for street interviewing, where 'the general characteristics of the population under study are often known from data obtained from, for example, the Census. The proportion of particular age groups or social classes is thus known beforehand and the sample will consequently consist of a proportionate quota of people with these characteristics' (May, 2001: 95). When I began my fieldwork, this type of information regarding Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees was publicly unavailable and consequently, I decided that this sampling technique would be unsuitable for my study. Nevertheless, in 2004, a Home Office skills' audit of refugees was published (Kirk, 2004) and this report contains valuable information regarding the personal characteristics of a probability sample of Iraqis. Reference to this study will be made in more detail when evaluating the representativeness of my own sample.

There is another non-probability technique called purposive sampling, a method generally employed in political polling, where 'a selection of those to be surveyed is made according to a known characteristic' (May, 2001: 95). This approach is also inappropriate for my study because one of the aims of my research was to interview as varied a group of individuals as possible. Surveying a set of

individuals because they possess one or two known characteristics would fail to capture the variety of perspectives I wished to collect.

Finally, there is snowball sampling, the technique chosen for this study, which is customarily used 'when a population is widely distributed or elusive' (May, 2001: 95). This method 'involves using a small group of informants who are asked to put the researcher in touch with their friends who are subsequently interviewed, then asking them about their friends and interviewing them until a chain of informants has been selected' (Burgess, 1984: 55). Importantly, unlike the other non-probability sampling techniques, this stance does not require any prior systematic knowledge of the group under study. Snowball sampling has already been used for research on refugees (Gammel et al, 1993; Carey-Wood et al, 1995; Wahlbeck, 1999; Griffiths, 2002), a group 'whose members are hard to locate and are therefore hard to identify for the purpose of sampling' (Bloch, 1999a: 371; Sudman and Kalton, 1986).

The advantage of using snowball sampling as a method of selecting the asylum seekers and refugees to be interviewed in my research is the built-in 'security' feature of this approach, namely the fact that 'intermediaries are known to potential respondents and trusted by them and thus are able to vouch for the researcher's *bona fides*' (Lee, 1992: 130). One of the principal disadvantages, however, of this technique is its inclination to produce a relatively uniform sample, the networks of contacts that underpin the procedure 'tending to turn in upon themselves and be homogeneous in their attributes rather than providing linkages to others whose social characteristics are different' (Lee, 1992: 132; Granovetter, 1973). In an effort to remedy this weakness, I have used 'as wide a variety of starting points as possible to ensure an extensive coverage of the study

population' (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981 in Lee, 1992: 133). In addition, it is important to note that the success of snowball sampling heavily relies upon well-developed patterns of social organization (Lee, 1992: 129). Indeed, 'despite its name, snowball sampling does not inevitably lead to an inexorably growing mass of contacts but rather (...) to a slow and uneven accretion of additional data points' (Lee, 1992: 128-129).

In conjunction with this approach, in order to facilitate the development of a heterogeneous and representative sample, judgment sampling was incorporated into my research standpoint. In this instance, 'informants are selected for study according to a number of criteria established by the researcher' (Burgess, 1984: 55). In this piece of research, the following criteria were identified: gender, age, marital status, educational level, occupation in home-country, rural / urban origin, immigration status, length of residence in the UK, familiarity with the English language and society prior to arrival in the UK and pre-arrival presence / absence of network of relatives or friends in the UK. I was also compelled to exercise opportunistic sampling, 'the process whereby field researchers find informants who provide them with their data, the researcher selecting individuals with whom it is possible to cooperate' (Burgess, 1984: 55; Honigmann, 1982).

### Snowball sampling in practice

The process of developing my network of contacts amongst the Iraqi Kurdish community began by approaching, in Newcastle, my first fieldwork city, the main organizations working with, for and alongside this particular group, asking them to introduce me to their Iraqi Kurdish colleagues or acquaintances. In this way, I met an Iraqi Kurd working for the One Stop Shop in the North East who in turn



presented me to three of his friends, the latter, at a later stage, introducing me to their own friends, some of whom were living in Birmingham. I also met, via the One Stop Shop, a couple of Iraqi Kurds who had been significantly involved in trying to set up a Kurdish association in Newcastle. As in the preceding case, these individuals eventually introduced me to their own friends and acquaintances in Newcastle. Additionally, I made contact with the director of the North East Iraqi Community Association, based in Middlesbrough, who was equally able to introduce me to his Iraqi Kurdish acquaintances in Newcastle. Finally, I relied on the support of an Iraqi Kurdish friend I had initially worked with in Iraqi Kurdistan, who, at the time of my fieldwork, was residing in the North East. He put me in contact with several of his acquaintances in Newcastle and Birmingham. I repeated the same strategy in Birmingham, approaching the main refugee agencies and organizations, meeting their Iraqi Kurdish employees and asking them to introduce me to their friends and acquaintances. Furthermore, I spoke to members of the Iraqi Kurdish Community of the West Midlands, based in Birmingham, and developed a further network of contacts thanks to their support and assistance. In Birmingham, I also contacted the Iraqi Kurds that had been recommended to me by those I interviewed in Newcastle.

I endeavored throughout the fieldwork process to interview a heterogeneous group of individuals, asking the Iraqi Kurds I knew to introduce me to persons possessing specific characteristics that were not as yet represented in my existing sample. Despite successfully developing a broad network of contacts, finding Iraqi Kurds who were prepared to be interviewed, who possessed sufficient time as well as a good level of English was challenging and consequently sample variety had to be sacrificed, occasionally, for opportunism. The close ties existing between some members of the Iraqi Kurdish community

throughout the UK significantly facilitated the functioning of the snowball sampling technique in my research.

### Characteristics of my sample of Iraqi Kurds

I undertook 38 tape-recorded semi-structured interviews with asylum seekers and refugees in Newcastle and Birmingham between October 2003 and January 2004, spending two months in each city.

Regarding the personal characteristics of this sample, 79% (30) were men and the remaining 21% (8) were women (Table 3.1). Concerning individuals aged below 18, it is important to note that I decided, before beginning my fieldwork, to focus only on accompanied minors because unaccompanied minors are not actually subjected to the dispersal policy as asylum seekers. In my sample, 45% (17) of those interviewed were aged, at the time of the interview, between 20 and 29 years old and 42% (16) were aged between 30 and 39 years old. *A propos* marital status, 66% (25) were unmarried or widowed and 34% (13) were married. Amongst the 13 interviewees who were married, 70% (9) were residing in the UK with their spouse whilst for 30% (4), their spouse was living outside of the UK. Vis-à-vis the educational level of the individuals in my sample, 14 of the 38 failed to inform me of their educational level. Of the remaining 24 Iraqi Kurds, 58% (14) undertook 14 or more years of education, 38% (9) undertook between 7 and 13 years of education and 4% (1) undertook six years or less of education in their home-country.

Table 3.1 Characteristics of my sample of Iraqi Kurds

Personal characteristic	Category	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	30	79
	Female	8	21
Age (years)	20-29	17	45
	30-39	16	42
	40-49	5	13
Marital status	Unmarried or widowed	25	66
	Married	13	34
Of those married	Residing in UK with spouse	9	70
	Spouse living outside UK	4	30
Education (years)	6 or less	1	4
	7 to 13	9	38
	14 or more	14	58
Profession in home country	Professional occupations	13	36
	Owned or managed private businesses or involved in import/ export trade	10	28
	Skilled tradesmen	6	17
	Other	7	19
Level of spoken English	Good	20	53
	Medium	8	21
	Poor	10	26
Immigration status	Asylum seeker	17	45
	Refugee	21	55
Length of asylum application process at time of interview	6 months or less	5	14
	7 months to 2 years	10	28
	2 years 1 month to 3 years	7	21
	3 years 1 month to 4 years	8	23
	4 years 1 month to 5 years	5	14
Residential location in UK	Chosen by government via dispersal	26	68
	Chosen by asylum seeker	10	32
Of those dispersed	Via <i>ad hoc</i> dispersal	6	23
	Via interim measures or NASS	20	77



On the subject of occupation in their home-country, two of the 38 Iraqi Kurds interviewed were full-time students. Out of the remaining 36, 36% (13) possessed professional occupations (e.g.: accountant, doctor, journalist, barrister, teacher, social worker, lecturer); 28% (10) owned or managed private businesses or were involved in import/export trading; 17% (6) exercised a skilled trade (e.g.: barber, carpenter, electrician, farmer, mechanic, shoemaker); and 19% (7) worked in the administrative and secretarial field, sales, retail and customer service, the military and the arts or possessed elementary occupations. On the topic of English language proficiency, 53% (20) had a good level, 21% (8) possessed a medium level and 26% (10) had a poor level of English.

Moreover, at the time of the interview, 55% (21) of my sample of Iraqi Kurds were refugees, the remaining 45% (17) being asylum seekers. Regarding the duration of the asylum application process, at the time of being interviewed for this piece of research, three did not provide sufficient information. Out of the remaining 35, 14% (5) waited six months or less, 28% (10) waited between seven months and two years, 21% (7) waited between two years one month and three years, 23% (8) waited between three years one month and four years and 14% (5) waited between four years one month and five years. Out of 38 Iraqi Kurds interviewed for this research, 68% (26) had directly experienced dispersal, 23% (6) being dispersed via the *ad hoc* dispersal arrangements and 77% (20) via the interim or NASS dispersal scheme. There was insufficient data for two interviewees. The remaining 32% (10) Iraqi Kurds interviewed either chose to forsake state-funded housing thereby residing in the homes of relatives or friends or opted to migrate voluntarily to a dispersal locality, primarily Birmingham.

In sum, my sample of Iraqi Kurds consisted, in its majority, of relatively young (87% aged between 20 and 39 years old), unmarried or widowed (66%), refugee (55%), males (79%). Moreover, in the main (58%), this group had at least completed secondary school and exercised a professional occupation, possessed a managerial position or worked in the field of export/import trading in their home-country (64%). Generally, they possessed a good level of English language proficiency (53%). Customarily, their application for asylum lasted, at the time of the interview undertaken for this research, between seven months and four years (77%). Further information regarding my sample can be found in Appendix Two.

The representativeness of a research sample is of concern to the quantitative and qualitative researcher alike. Indeed, the extent to which a sample is typical of the wider population enhances or decreases the generalisability of the study's findings. With this in mind, an assessment of the representativeness of my own sample in this study is presented below. Unfortunately, given the lack of systematic, national statistical data regarding Iraqi Kurds or even Iraqis, it is difficult to evaluate the representativeness of my sample. The only apparently relevant information is that provided by Heath, Jeffries and Lloyd (2003) and Kirk (2004). Incidentally, the degree to which the experiences of Iraqi Kurds are representative of the experiences of other asylum seekers and refugees currently residing in the UK is discussed elsewhere, within the context of a broader analysis of case study research.

Regarding gender, the only approximately comparable national statistical data available is by Heath, Jeffries and Lloyd (2003) and concerns the total number, including dependents, of asylum applications made by Iraqis in 2002, the latter

being the earliest date for which this type of information is available. This data reflects that the proportion of male applicants (93%) significantly exceeds that of female applicants (7%). One may affirm from this comparison that my sample is, at least, broadly representative of the imbalance that exists in the Iraqi gender ratio amongst the current asylum seeker and refugee population in the UK.

As far as educational levels are concerned, it is insightful to refer to a skills audit of refugees in the UK undertaken by Kirk (2004). Kirk's (2004) sample data relating to the number of years of education possessed by male and female Iraqi refugees reveals that 26% had received no education at all, 35% had received six years or less, 24% had acquired between seven and twelve years, 8% achieved between 13 and 15 years and another 8% attained 16 or more years. One may assert, from this comparison, that my sample is overly weighted towards the more educated portion of the group under study.

Concerning occupation, Kirk's (2004) research is equally useful, particularly her data on the occupations of those Iraqis who were working prior to coming to the UK, which shows that 32% of her sample were employed in skilled trades, 24% as managers and senior officials, 10% in elementary occupations, 9% in sales and customer services and 7% in professional occupations. One can conclude, from this review, that my sample seemingly represents, excessively, the more qualified section of the Iraqi Kurdish asylum seeker and refugee population. Unfortunately, there is no way of identifying the representativeness of the proportion of married and unmarried individuals as well as the share of refugees and asylum seekers in my sample since there is no publicly available data for the Iraqi Kurdish population as a whole regarding both these topics.



Several factors possibly contributed to my sample of Iraqi Kurds apparently representing an older age distribution and a more well-educated and more professional set of individuals than the average of the current Iraqi asylum seeker and refugee population in the UK, as reflected in Heath, Jeffries and Lloyd (2003) and Kirk's (2004) research. Firstly, it is possible that the initial contacts I made, in the early stages of my fieldwork in both Newcastle and Birmingham, with well-educated Iraqi Kurdish 30-39 year old professionals working in the main refugee organizations, led the remainder of my sample group, through the process of snowballing, to be somewhat over-dominated by these traits. Indeed, as remarked upon earlier, snowball sampling can, at times, produce a relatively homogeneous sample 'rather than providing linkages to others whose social characteristics are different' (Lee, 1992: 132; Granovetter, 1973). Secondly, since I opted not to use an interpreter, I was heavily reliant throughout my fieldwork upon Iraqi Kurds who possessed a good level of English language fluency. Importantly, it would appear that there exists significant links between age, level of education, occupation in the home-country and level of English language proficiency in the host-country. Certainly, those Iraqis currently between 30 and 39 years of age and above seem to be better educated than those aged between 20 and 29 years old, given the seemingly superior educational opportunities available to all in Iraq during the former group's childhood and adolescence. Since English is taught at school in Iraq, the better the education people receive and the longer they remain in education, the greater their proficiency is in English on leaving Iraq and the quicker they will improve their standard of English in the UK. Finally, a precondition to exercising a professional occupation is necessarily to have been in education for many years and as it has already been noted, the greater the latter, the better an individual's knowledge of English is likely to be.

It is very difficult to assess the degree to which my sample of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees is representative of the total population of the group under study. Nevertheless, in comparison with Heath, Jeffries and Lloyd (2003) and Kirk (2004), it would appear that my sample overly represents the perspectives and views of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees who are 30 years old and above, well educated and who in their home-country exercised a professional occupation. It is also probable that my sample contains an over representation of good English speakers. Finally, it is very likely that those most willing to be interviewed were those who had successfully negotiated the UK's asylum system. These findings, regarding the typicality of my sample, are unsurprising given that the snowball sampling technique is a non-probability sample method where initial and ensuing contacts with members of the study group are largely accidental.

The size of my sample, 38 Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees, was partly guided by Glaser and Strauss' (1967) principles of 'theoretical sampling'. Indeed, they maintain that 'the researcher only interviews as many people as are needed in order to "saturate" the categories being developed and then turns to the next theoretical issue and carries out the same process over again' (Bryman, 2000: 117). It felt, during the fieldwork process, that I went beyond Glaser and Strauss' (1967) 'saturation' point, the data from my later interviews in the two cities under study largely containing information that had already been collected and gleaned from previous, earlier interviews. The repetition of ideas and perspectives in the interviews definitely strengthens the conviction I possess concerning the conclusions of my findings. My relatively large sample size is also the product of using the interviews as a semi-formal means of developing and broadening my network of Iraqi Kurdish contacts, the chances of encountering an individual, via

the person interviewed, whose main traits were distinctive from other members of my sample increasing the more extensive my group of contacts became. Undoubtedly, the decision to interview a comparatively large number of Iraqi Kurds somewhat compromised the depth of the personal relationship with each individual. However, as a young, single female researching a predominantly young, single<sup>8</sup> male group, I remained aware of the ambiguous signals I might project if I were to develop closer friendships with those under study and consequently, I opted for a less profoundly personalised approach in my fieldwork. I attempted, in any case, to meet each interviewee two to three times, whenever time permitted.

It is important to stress that the majority of my sample were refugees because they were the group with whom it was easiest to communicate in English, given their greater length of residence in the UK. Refugees were also more confident participating in the research than asylum seekers since the former possess a greater degree of stability in their lives and therefore are more likely to trust a host-community member. The refugees in my sample were a great asset to the research because they were able to reflect on their past experiences as asylum seekers as well as discuss the changes that had occurred in their lives since becoming a refugee.

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<sup>8</sup> In this thesis, those referred to as single are men or women who are unmarried, widowed or married but without their spouse residing with them in the UK.



### **3.1.3 Interviewing national policy makers, local service providers, Kurdish community workers and Kurdish businessmen**

Four national agencies, two London boroughs and one local voluntary sector organisation, based in London, as well as fifteen local organisations, based in Newcastle and Birmingham also participated in this piece of research, members of these entities being interviewed using a semi-structured approach. Six Kurdish community associations and restaurants were also approached in London and Birmingham. As discussed in chapter four, there is a very small Kurdish restaurant in Newcastle as well as a Kurdish community association. The latter, however, has a small membership, no premises and is largely inactive. Thus, in total, I approached twenty-eight organisations, in Newcastle, Birmingham and London, between October 2003 and March 2004, and undertook 36 tape-recorded semi-structured interviews with members of these agencies.

Three high-ranking officials from NASS, the Home Office's Integration Unit and the Local Government Association (LGA) were interviewed because of their organisation's crucial role in formulating and implementing dispersal and integration policy. These individuals provided the researcher with an invaluable official, and at times self-critical, national perspective on the government's NASS and interim dispersal programme as well as its emerging refugee integration scheme. The head of policy as well as a community officer at the Refugee Council's head office in London were also interviewed in order to obtain a national perspective on asylum seeker dispersal and refugee integration, albeit from a more voluntary sector, community-based stance. Two lead housing officers in two London boroughs and one lead provider of a NASS-funded emergency accommodation service for asylum seekers, offered by a voluntary

sector organisation based in the capital, were interviewed. These organisations were approached because of their first-hand experience of the circumstances and events leading up to the government's introduction of the national dispersal programme.

In the dispersal localities, a variety of agencies assist asylum seekers and refugees throughout all the stages of their asylum application and dispersal process. Fifteen local organisations in Newcastle and Birmingham, corresponding to the principle agencies servicing the needs of this group in these two case-study cities, were selected to be involved in this piece of research. It was important to collate the knowledge and views of these organisations, their local perspectives being markedly different to those of the Iraqi Kurds. Indeed, the latter present the standpoint of those directly experiencing the dispersal policy and the process of integration whilst the former portray the point of view of those trying to locally implement the dispersal policy and/or assist those subjected to it as well as foment the integration process. An additional benefit in interviewing members of organisations, as well as asylum seekers and refugees, is that both groups possess different spheres of knowledge. Indeed, discussions with members of the agencies enhance the researcher's understanding of the national and local formulation and implementation of the dispersal policy whilst conversations with the Iraqi Kurds can improve the researcher's appreciation of the importance of accessing local co-ethnic social bonds, for instance. On the occasions when the spheres of knowledge of both groups overlap, there are opportunities to triangulate the various findings (Bryman, 2000: 48).

Thus, four long-standing members of staff at the North East Refugee Service (NERS), in Newcastle, and one at the Refugee Council, in Birmingham, were

interviewed, these two organisations encountering asylum seekers on a daily basis as part of their provision of the NASS-funded One Stop Service. Five lead housing officers at the Asylum Units in Newcastle's and Birmingham's City Council were also interviewed, these two agencies offering public sector NASS-contracted housing to dispersed asylum seekers. In addition, in the case study dispersal areas, a community services refugee advisor from a housing association and the manager of a privately-run housing company were interviewed. Both these organisations provide NASS-contracted accommodation to dispersed asylum seekers and are therefore frequently in contact with this client group. Moreover, four lead advisors were interviewed from three voluntary sector organisations that specialise in supporting asylum seekers and refugees in Newcastle and Birmingham. A further two asylum seeker caseworkers based at more generalist voluntary sector agencies were also interviewed. The opportunity arose, in the North East, to meet a Diversity Officer, based at one of the city councils, who possessed extensive experience of the current race relations situation in Newcastle. Thanks to this opportunity, the researcher developed her appreciation of the community cohesion issues surrounding asylum seeker dispersal and refugee integration in Newcastle. The challenges encountered by asylum seekers and refugees when seeking employment were explored during interviews with two advisors and one economic strategist based at Connexions, at an ESOL provider institute, and a Regional Development Agency respectively, in Newcastle and Birmingham. These organisations are seeking to remove asylum seeker and refugee barriers to work.

Finally, four lead managers or caseworkers of four Kurdish charitable community organisations based in Birmingham and London were interviewed as well as the owners of two privately-run Kurdish restaurants in Birmingham. The semi-



structured interviews undertaken with this group of individuals were very informative and interesting, their perspective on dispersal and integration being different to that of the local service providers and the dispersed Iraqi Kurds. Certainly, they were very deeply involved in the specific circumstances of Iraqi Kurds. Moreover, the Kurdish community workers and businessmen, unlike the dispersed Iraqi Kurds, were able to locate the personal experiences of their co-ethnics within the broader framework of national governmental policy.

#### **3.1.4 A case study: Iraqi Kurds**

The difficulty of studying the experiences of all asylum seekers and refugees, given the national, ethnic and socio-economic heterogeneity of this group encouraged me to adopt a case study approach where I focused my research upon one set of individuals, namely Kurds from Iraq. I chose this group because of my existing knowledge of Kurdistan and Iraq, since I worked as a research officer on a DfID-funded project in Iraqi Kurdistan (1999-2000). I envisaged that having directly witnessed the lives of members of this group as well as encountered their cultural and religious mores in their home-country this would facilitate my understanding of their experiences in the UK. Moreover, I considered that my familiarity with Kurdistan and Iraq would assist the development of a personal rapport between the Iraqi Kurdish interviewees and myself during the fieldwork process. Finally, keeping in mind that the profile of migrant groups is constantly changing, Iraqis, a proportion of whom are Kurds, currently constitute a significant share of the total population of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK and thus, I judged that a study focusing on Iraqi Kurds would be valuable for policymakers and academic researchers alike. Certainly, according to Home Office asylum statistics (Heath, Jeffries and Lloyd, 2003), 17% of all asylum

applications lodged in 2002, excluding dependents, were made by Iraqis, the largest nationality group that year.

### **3.1.5 Comparative research**

#### Benefits of comparisons

I have undertaken comparative research in this study, contrasting the experiences of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees residing in Newcastle and Birmingham. Prior to discussing my choice of fieldwork cities, I first wish to briefly delineate the principal reasons for adopting a comparative approach. Firstly, comparative research enables the researcher to potentially challenge 'background assumptions' through the production of findings located in different socio-economic contexts (Gouldner, 1971 in May, 2001: 208). Moreover, comparisons can be used to elucidate differences, show the uniqueness or similarity of phenomena as well as reveal what is universal (Scheuch, 1990 in May, 2001: 209). In a similar vein, May (2001: 209) notes that 'comparisons enable us to consider the macro factors which influence social and political change and the micro factors peculiar to each social setting'. Finally, Burgess (1984: 181) affirms that comparisons can be used for theory testing. Certainly, as will be illustrated below, the comparative aspect of my research plays a vital role in the testing of my hypotheses.

#### Choice of fieldwork cities

Regarding my fieldwork sites, I chose two dispersal cities that presented contrasting traits and characteristics in all four main domains of integration

chosen for this study, namely housing, employment, social bridges and social bonds, in order to assist the process of testing my hypotheses. Moreover, I sought localities that were typical of a certain cluster of characteristics (Woods, 1979: 268 in Bryman, 2000: 90) in order that 'other researchers can then examine comparable cases which belong to other clusters of characteristics' (Kennedy, 1979 in Bryman, 2000: 90). Thus, I opted for Newcastle which possesses a large amount of vacant dwellings, particularly in the social rented sector and relatively limited employment opportunities. Newcastle also has a small community of recently arrived Iraqi Kurds and host-society members that are generally unaccustomed to residing alongside Black and Minority Ethnic groups and refugee communities. I also chose Birmingham which, in contrast, is typified by a comparatively small proportion of empty housing and a greater degree of work prospects. Birmingham also has a large group of newly settled Iraqi Kurds as well as host-society members that are accustomed to living in a multicultural environment.

Importantly, this piece of research does not seek to analyse the divergences that exist between Iraqi Kurds' experiences of integration in the dispersal localities and their integration circumstances in non-dispersal areas. Instead, the focus of this study is to explore in depth the significantly different integration experiences encountered by Iraqi Kurds in their respective dispersal localities. This particular focus justifies the reason for only choosing dispersal areas as fieldwork sites and also explains the absence of a 'control' sample of non-dispersed Iraqi Kurds residing in London, for instance. Moreover, as is argued in the following chapters, it is very possible that a relatively high proportion of asylum seekers and refugees will be permanently residing outside of their traditional areas of settlement. Consequently, there is a priority need to build a strong knowledge base



surrounding integration for this group in their new settlement localities (see also Castles et al, 2002: 158). As part of this endeavour, studies such as this thesis can be compared to the large amount of existing research on refugee settlement in traditional residential localities such as London and other parts of the South East of England.

### **3.2 Data analysis and presentation**

The data analysis process began as the researcher wrote reflective notes during and after the fieldwork on the emerging themes relevant to the hypotheses. On completion of the fieldwork, the 74 taped semi-structured interviews were transcribed, producing approximately 740 pages of text. An Access database containing the Iraqi Kurds' socio-economic profiles was also created (see Appendix Two). This database was subsequently used as a reference tool to support the analysis of the interview transcripts. Nvivo software was used to ensure the systematic review of the references made in the interview transcripts to dispersal, employment, housing, social bonds and social bridges, the five dominant themes of the thesis. The range of circumstances and perspectives that emerged from the Nvivo searches were then summarised. Similar standpoints were grouped together and the most informative and representative quotes were identified. The writing-up stage constituted a dynamic extension of the data analysis process, the theories continuing to evolve, during the writing.

All the names of the Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees interviewed for this piece of research have been changed. However, the degree of anonymity offered to the policy makers, local service providers, Kurdish community workers and Kurdish businessmen who participated in this study varies depending on

their personal preferences. The names of those interviewed have been removed although, on some occasions, the work posts and the organisations to which they belong are specified (see Appendix Three for further information). Citations from the interview transcripts appear in the text of this thesis followed by the number of the paragraph in the transcript where the citation originates.

### **3.3 The effect of the researcher on their own research**

The personal traits of the researcher, that is their age, gender, ethnic origin and personality, as well as their point of view on the subject under study all exercise an important influence on the varied components of their research, namely the data collection process (interviewing and sampling), data analysis and the interpretations of the subjects' standpoint (Bryman, 2000: 74) and finally, the overall conclusions of the study (May, 2001: 137; Redfield, 1955: 126 in Bryman, 2000: 75). Indeed, as Scott (1990) maintains, it is impossible for the researcher to separate himself as an individual with a particular personality and life experience situated within a specific time-space context, from himself/herself as a supposedly neutral, detached researcher. Indeed, 'one frame of meaning can only ever be understood from the standpoint of another. There can be no presuppositionless knowledge' (Scott, 1990: 31). With this in mind, it would seem beneficial, for the readers of this thesis, to clearly present my view of the effect I am likely to have had on my own research.

In this particular study, it would appear that my gender exercised an impact on the interview exchanges. Certainly, I feel that the intimacy of the relationship between the interviewees and myself could have been more developed had the subjects been, in their majority, women or at least married men accompanied by

their wives. Instead, most of the interviewees, out of opportunism rather than my personal choosing or preference, and because of their percentage in the total Kurdish population, were single men and during the interview process, I occasionally felt uncomfortable, aware, at varying times to varying degrees, of how those being interviewed might wrongly interpret my interest in their personal circumstances. Despite my unease, commonly, the single men I interviewed were respectful, treating me, it seemed, more like a sister than a potential girlfriend. Additionally, I maintain that asylum seekers and refugees often are active agents who are able in creative and surprising ways to modify the constraints they are under to their own advantage rather than always being victims of circumstances beyond their control, a portrayal that is often presented particularly by some voluntary sector organisations working in this field. Finally, I am aware that researchers 'are engaged in interpretations of other people's interpretations' (Geertz, 1973 in Bryman, 2000: 79). Thus, presenting the perspectives of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees on the dispersal policy and integration effectively involves the amalgamated portrayal of the way in which the group under study views this subject, my interpretation of how they view this topic as well as my construction of their interpretation for the academic and social policy community (Wagner, 1981: 3 in Bryman, 2000: 80). I have endeavoured to analyse my interview data keeping these specific concerns in mind.



### **3.4 Ethical considerations**

#### **3.4.1 Interviewing asylum seekers and refugees**

##### **Semi-structured interviews and the researcher-participant relationship**

The use of semi-structured interviews, and the researcher's subsequent 'nearness' or 'closeness' to the subject of study, can place the researcher in an awkward position. Indeed, personal relationships are likely to develop between the researcher and the researched. However these human relationships are not normal ones, they are entered into for a very specific purpose, the collection of data. Furthermore, the researcher is un-naturally powerful, firstly, because she can choose when to withdraw from the participant's 'world' and terminate the relationship and secondly, because it is likely for the participant to divulge more personal information than the researcher, given the initial purpose of the relationship. Unavoidably, the dividing line between 'professional' relationship and friendship often becomes blurred as the researcher is forced to choose whether she will discuss her personal life with the participant. If a friendship does develop, if the exchange becomes more equal, another dilemma appears: to what extent does continuing the research constitute an exploitation of that friendship? The British Sociological Association (BSA) offers a possible solution by stating that research relationships should be based upon, above all, mutual trust and respect (BSA, 1992: 704), emotions I have tried to encourage throughout the fieldwork process.

### Individual rights and freely given informed consent

The BSA states that any research participant has several clearly defined rights. Firstly, s/he has the right to refuse to participate and be excluded from the final product of the research, at any point before, during or even following completion of the fieldwork. Indeed, a person's agreement to participate does not constitute a once-and-for-all consent. Secondly, s/he can demand that the researcher ensures the anonymity of those involved in the research. Thirdly, s/he also has the right to affirm that confidentiality must be respected and any sharing of the data must be previously discussed with the participants. Under the Data Protection Act, the researcher is obliged to use pseudonyms and remove any information, which might identify individuals (BSA, 1992: 707). Furthermore, a research participant has the right to give his/her individual informed consent to participate in the research. Indeed, care must be taken that the 'gatekeeper' does not abuse his/her power and coerce people into participating in the research (BSA, 1992: 704). Finally, given the researcher's experience and understanding of the broader environment she works in, the investigator must be responsible for 'considering the effects of someone's involvement and the consequences of their work or its misuse for those they study and other interested parties' (BSA, 1992: 705). Anticipated problems should be shared with potential participants. The ethical dilemma arises when the researcher desperately requires the co-operation of participants in order for her study to be realised, in which case, despite good intentions, she is likely to bend the rules to her advantage. Furthermore, one cannot ignore the existence of a hierarchy of consent. Indeed, a subordinate refusing to co-operate with a researcher risks angering his/her superior and can thus be coerced into participating (Dingwall, 1980: 878).

Awareness of these issues is important and the researcher must endeavour to create opportunities for individuals to freely decline or consent to participate in their research. Finally, consent must be informed by ensuring that the participants understand the purposes of the research (Bulmer, 1980: 60). Issues raised in this section were respected and no related problems occurred during the research process.

Causing 'unnecessary anxiety' (BSA, 1992: 705)

Interviewing asylum seekers and refugees can be very problematic. Firstly, it is probable that they have already been submitted to numerous interviews by home and host-country governmental officials and these exchanges might have been accompanied with physical, emotional or psychological abuse. It is important, as a researcher, to be aware that the seemingly innocuous setting of an interview might conjure up distasteful past experiences for the interviewee. Whilst the questions I asked in the semi-structured interviews did not refer to the possibly traumatic experiences of the group under study in their host-countries, the subjects discussed were potentially depressing for the interviewee. For this reason, I made every effort to ensure that the interviewee's emotional state at the end of the interview was at least the same as before the interview began. It is important to note that the lack of an answer to a question or an unwillingness to expand on a particular issue is not necessarily a sign of indifference, disinterest or lack of knowledge or understanding on behalf of the interviewee. Instead, it might be the result of fear, suffering or unfamiliarity with voicing thoughts on particular subjects, especially if the language of communication during the interview is not the mother tongue of the interviewee. Finally, the researcher must act sensitively when asking individuals to take part in her research, remembering



that they might feel obliged or forced to participate, out of politeness or fear that their asylum application might suffer negative consequences if they do not show willingness to co-operate. All the points broached in this section were incorporated into the fieldwork process and respected by the researcher.

#### Creating 'false hopes' (BSA, 1992: 705)?

The researcher must be sensitive not to create unrealistic expectations amongst those being interviewed. For this reason, the researcher is responsible for clearly presenting her motives for undertaking the interview, informing the interviewee of the potential impact or non-impact of the research on themselves and on the lives of other asylum seekers and refugees and explaining that the impact of research on society's institutions and people is neither assured nor immediate. It is important to reflect upon who is really helping whom during the research process, whether it is the researched or the researcher, and the extent to which the parties involved are aware of and comfortable with this. I made sure that these concerns were integrated into my fieldwork design.

#### **3.4.2 Undertaking research on an emotionally charged and sensitive topic**

According to the BSA's statement of ethical practice, a researcher is faced with two conflicting responsibilities. On the one hand, she is responsible for protecting the interests of those involved in or those affected by the study she is undertaking. On the other hand, the researcher is responsible for 'accurately' and 'truthfully' presenting her research findings (BSA, 1992: 703). The conflict arises when the publishing of research results has adverse effects on those studied, the problem potentially being all the more severe when the topic is emotionally

charged and sensitive. Indeed, how does the researcher decide what data to consider and what information to disregard, especially when the most interesting material is that which the participants are reluctant for the researcher to publish? The BSA's response to this dilemma is for the researcher to recall that the goal of social science research, like that of any other science, is to improve knowledge but that goal in itself does not enable the researcher to override the rights of others (BSA, 1992: 704). The study I have undertaken has incorporated these concerns into its research design and the research process.

The following chapter, the first of four that focus on the research findings, appraises the short and long term impact of the dispersal policy on Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees' participation in local, co-ethnic social bonding.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **IMPACT OF THE DISPERSAL POLICY ON THE CO-ETHNIC SOCIAL BONDS OF IRAQI KURDISH ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES**

In this chapter, the impact of the dispersal policy on Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees' participation in co-ethnic social bonding is analysed. Social bonds constitute one of the four aspects of the integration process focused upon in this thesis. They are 'connections within a community defined by, for example, ethnic, national or religious identity'. My study of Iraqi Kurds focuses upon co-ethnic social bonds, rather than co-national or co-religious social bonds, given the apparent unifying effect, for this group, of the former over the latter. Importantly, developing social bonds does not lead, on its own, to integration into the wider society. It is also necessary for an individual to engage, amongst other things, in social bridging as well as access adequate employment and suitable housing (Ager and Strang, 2004a).

In this chapter, the following hypothesis is tested: the contemporary UK dispersal policy exercises a negative impact on the social bonds of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees because this policy sends this group to localities where there are no settled co-ethnics. In order to proceed with the assessment of the validity of this claim, the benefits expressed by the Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees interviewed regarding social bond development are presented. Following this, the reasons why Iraqi Kurds bond based on ethnicity rather than nationality or religion are discussed. Next, explanations are given for focusing on the impact of the dispersal policy on the integration of dispersed asylum seekers rather than on asylum seekers in general. The impact of the



dispersal policy on firstly, the local co-ethnic social bonds of dispersed asylum seekers and secondly on those of dispersed refugees is then explored. These two groups have been examined successively rather than together because the relationship of dispersed Iraqi Kurds to the dispersal policy changes both significantly and abruptly on receipt of their refugee status, those possessing the latter status being far less constrained by the policy than those who are asylum seekers. This distinction has also enabled me to consider on the asylum seeker side, the short term impact and on the refugee side, the long term effect of the dispersal policy.

#### **4.1 The value of social bonds**

Social bonds are highly valuable to the successful dispersal of asylum seekers and refugees. For instance, research on the dispersal of refugees to Glasgow recommends that 're-housing should take place with the establishment of viable informal support networks among refugees' (MacFarland, 1994: 22). Similarly, the non-governmental organisations on the government's consultative 'Stakeholders' Group' advocate that the development of co-ethnic communities, in other words, social bonds, is crucial to successful dispersal and settlement (Asylum Rights Campaign, 1999: 24; see also Stg Deb Co, Immigration and Asylum Bill, 16<sup>th</sup> March 1999). Moreover, an asylum seeker or refugee is heading towards integration when s/he is engaging in local social bonding (Hale, 2000). Indeed, the development of a sense of belonging to a sub-set of persons enables him/her to adjust to the different host-country culture (Duke et al, 1999). According to Ager and Strang, without identification to a specific sub-group, integration becomes assimilation (2004a: 19).

#### **4.1.1 Social bonds facilitate initial settlement**

According to Carey Wood et al (1995), one quarter of the refugees interviewed for her study observed that the most useful source of help for new arrivals were members of their own community group. Similarly, 'most asylum seekers do not come to us or anyone else first; they go to their own community. That is where they look for support (Refugee Council at Stg Co Deb, Immigration and Asylum Bill, 16<sup>th</sup> March 1999). This finding is reflected in my own research. Certainly, the development and/or presence of social bonds amongst asylum seekers facilitates their settlement and assists the process of familiarisation with their host-country during the first days and months of their stay in the UK, especially when those who are newly arrived are not familiar with the host-country's national language, system and cultures. Armanc, for instance, went to a friend's house on arrival in the UK because 'if you go somewhere for the first time, you should have someone to guide you to the different places and help you with things. I just stayed with my friend for one month and then my eyes opened' (Armanc, para 187).

#### **4.1.2 Social bonds assist the formation of a familiar cultural and physical environment**

The involvement of individuals in social bonds provides them with support as well as cultural familiarity and continuity in their relationships and in their physical environment (Ager and Strang, 2004a: 7; Wahlbeck, 1999: 167). My interviews with Iraqi Kurds reflect that possessing friends who 'have had the same problems like us' in their country of origin (Casim, para 227 & 343) and also in their host-country constitutes a significant source of emotional and psychological support.

Delav, for instance, emphasises the challenges that asylum seekers face, given the unpredictability of their future, and the comfort they can obtain from local social bonds, remarking that 'during this period of time when you are an asylum seeker, you don't know what your future is, you are struggling from thinking about what is going to happen to you. Am I going to get refugee status or not? What should I do? There is no plan for your life. If you are near your community, you will be less stressed and less depressed because you are talking with your community, your friends, visiting people' (Delav, para 272). Also, the sharing of a common culture can draw friends closer together especially when the pervasive host-society culture is very different to that which the newly arrived asylum seeker or refugee is accustomed to. Social bonding within a community can also stimulate mutual solidarity as well as alleviate poor mental health by lessening an individual's sense of alienation, isolation and depression (Ager and Strang, 2004b: 11). Hazo, for example, notes that 'thanks to the large Iraqi Kurdish community in Birmingham, if I am in hospital here, for three or four months, I will always have two to three people in the hospital with me' (Hazo, para 60-62).

Secondly, as a result of co-ethnic clustering and social bonding, the physical environment of a host-country area can change, as specific needs and preferences are identified and met, resulting in the quasi re-creation of the home-country setting at a local level (Van Kempen and Van Weesep 1997 in Wren, 2003). Indeed, as remarked upon by Bendewar, 'when we are in Birmingham, it's like we're in Iraq' (Bendewar, para 24). Access to areas that resemble the country of origin assists individuals with their settlement process and their identification with their host-society.



#### **4.1.3 Social bonding offers opportunities for employment**

Furthermore, the presence of social bonding supports individuals with the process of searching for employment and securing work (Boswell, 2001: 32; Wilson, 2001: 64; Home Office, 2005a: 54; Wahlbeck, 1999: 167). Indeed, a person can become more aware of his/her employment opportunities and more successful at obtaining a job if s/he is able to seek guidance, from a co-ethnic, regarding the sector of the labour market where s/he can realistically find work. Joining a broader network of co-ethnic contacts who will inform him/her of existing local informal or formal vacancies also helps considerably. In addition, the language barrier can be more easily overcome, thanks to the assistance of the co-ethnics who are proficient in English. Indeed, in my interview with Hazo, he observes that 'with the large Iraqi Kurdish community in Birmingham, if I can't speak English, I can ask one of the Kurds to find me a job somewhere' (Hazo, para 60-62). Certainly, an individual's lack of social bonds tends to lead to his/her isolation, a phenomenon that can foment this person's socio-economic deprivation (Van Mulier, 1982 in Arnoldus, Dukes and Musterd, 2003: 37).

#### **4.1.4 Socially bonded individuals impart advice to one another**

In addition, the existence of social bonds amongst asylum seekers and refugees can help this group address and resolve problems associated with their access to immigration advice, cash-support or benefits and housing, health and education services (Wilson, 2001: 64; Boswell, 2001: 32; Home Office, 2005a: 54; Wahlbeck, 1999: 167). Social bonds are particularly important in this context given that refugees tend to prefer drawing on the resources of their own communities rather than using official agencies (Wren, 2003: 67; Wahlbeck,

1999: 266-267). My research shows that socially bonded individuals with English language skills interpret and translate for those who lack that aptitude. Moreover, the co-ethnics who have already experienced a similar problem empathise, offer guidance and even financially support their fellow countrymen. Kereng, reflecting on the changing character of Birmingham states that 'in 1999 and 2000, sometimes Birmingham didn't have an interpreter and you had to wait a week or two for one to be found in another city. But now lots of Kurds in Birmingham speak English. If a new person comes to this city, it's very easy for him now' (Kereng, para 173).

Moreover, medium to large concentrations of socially bonded individuals facilitate the growth of community charitable associations as well as the development of culturally-specific restaurants and coffee shops, which, respectively constitute formal and informal meeting places where individuals in need of some form of support can meet and seek guidance. Also, the presence of a sizeable socially bonded community in a locality increases the chances of the particular group having co-ethnic contacts working in mainstream agencies and organisations, these individuals potentially offering, at a service provision level, a social bridge between the incoming group and the host-society. Delav, summing up some of the practical support co-ethnics can provide one another, notes that 'through your community, you will be told what to do, how to get education, how to register with a GP. Also each interpreter costs £15 per hour to go with the client to interpret for him. But when you are with your community, someone will come with you voluntarily' (Delav, para 246 & 256).

## **4.2 Social bonding based on ethnicity rather than nationality or religion**

Ager and Strang (2004a: 4) refer to social bonds as being connections within a community defined by an ethnic, national or religious identity. Importantly, according to literature on Kurds from Iraq and my interviews with Iraqi Kurds, it would appear that this group shares, above all else, a common Kurdish identity. Prior to exploring the components of this identity, it is noteworthy that whilst Iraqi Kurds are defined in this thesis as an ethnic group, the ethnic lineage itself is largely imagined (McDowall, 1992).

According to Griffiths (2002: 128-129 & 47), Kurdish identity has been elaborated over the course of centuries and is based on territory and tribal culture. Iraqi Kurds are certainly united by their shared dream of acquiring greater independence from their country of residence, whether in the form of a pan-Kurdish nation-state or federalism. Furthermore, Kurdish identity appears 'reactive in character, stemming from their history of oppression' (Griffiths, 2002: 128). This is apparent in Iraqi Kurds' rejection of their Iraqi national identity, the latter being the product of the pervasiveness of Kurdish nationalism amongst this group but also the result of the persecution they have experienced from the Iraqi state. The most recent form of Kurdish persecution has been perpetrated by the now deposed Iraqi government (Lazier, 1996; McDowall, 1996: 357; Griffiths, 2002: 61). Importantly, the Kurds' feelings of animosity towards the Iraqi state are customarily transferred onto Arab Iraqis, the ethnic group in Iraq which is most closely associated with the Iraqi government. Thus, for many, being Kurdish involves being anti-Arab. Erdehan illustrates this phenomenon noting that 'we are Kurdish, everything is different from Arabic people. All of the Kurds, we don't want to live with the Arabs. Saddam has killed a lot of our people' (Erdehan, para



267). Dijwar, recounting his personal experience of developing friendships with Iraqi Arabs, also exemplifies the close ties that exist, for many Kurds, between being Kurdish, opposing the Iraqi government and being anti-Arab. Indeed, he remarks that 'I went to University for one year and I had the same idea as other Kurds, oh, Arabs are our enemies, I don't want to talk to them. Once, one of my friends introduced me to many Arabs who were opposing the Iraqi government and I realised that they are nice people, and we had good friendships. But I received very strong criticisms from my Kurdish friends because they said that I was a traitor, I had betrayed them' (Dijwar, para 99). Delav, elaborating further on the relationship between Iraqi Kurdish identity and Iraqi Arabs, observes that 'we want to be different from the Arabs because our dream is that by being different from them, we will get our independence. Arab culture feels like it has been imposed upon Kurdish culture' (Delav, para 450).

Following on from this point, Delav also emphasises the apparent relationship that exists between nationalism, violence and Kurdish identity, remarking that 'the only way to practice our culture in Iraq was gun culture. If you want to be Kurd, you should be a *peshmerga*, take a gun and go to the mountains, amongst the fighters, to fight against the enemy. That's the only thing in all my life where I have seen that we are practising our cultural identity. We didn't come in an academic way to practice our culture, our dance, our dress, making our food. We have forgotten all of this because of the occupation, the Arabisation, we have been a second class citizen in Iraq' (Delav, para 356). Significantly, religion is not a fundamental aspect of Kurdish identity. Indeed, 'even though the vast majority of Iraqi Kurds are Muslims, religion is not a truly uniting factor. Kurds have accepted Islam with piousness and devotion to duty, but in a highly personal manner, with little thought given to Islam in a political or socially unifying sense'

(Stansfield, 2003: 38). McDowall even argues that religious belief plays no part in Kurdish distinctiveness (1992: 13).

Whilst Iraqi Kurds share a common Kurdish identity, their co-ethnic friends and acquaintances in the UK tend to originate from the same geographical area of Iraqi Kurdistan and/or the same Iraqi Kurdish political party. Ziryan notes, for instance, that 'my friends are from Suleimaniyah<sup>9</sup>. We have other friends from Duhok but because they have a different accent... This is not something racist but you can't be happy because they don't know you. Sometimes you talk about your city and talk about your life, do you remember that day in Suleimaniyah, oh yes, where were you at that time? He can be more friendly than someone who is from a city far away. He is Kurdish but...' (Ziryan, para 169). This trend reflects the continuing tribal nature of Kurdish society as well as the importance and value of territory for Kurds. Dijwar, further developing ideas of Kurdish identity, notes that 'for Pakistanis, it's religion that ties them together. But for us it is not religion because in general we are not religious because we think that this religion comes from Arabs and we are nationalists and reject them. We don't want to hear anything in Arabic. Few people pray here, and people even make fun of them, which is very surprising. What ties us together is the nationalist idea but even that, it is not mature enough in my country. We are more related to our parties, the KDP or the PUK mainly, and the parties are based on tribes. It's actually not parties, it's modern tribes (Dijwar, para 145). Dijwar continues, linking tribalism to territory and politics noting that 'tribalism, it's related to the

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<sup>9</sup> In Iraqi Kurdistan, there are three main regions called governorates. In each, there is a governorate centre or city. The three governorate cities are Suleimaniyah, under the authority of the PUK, and Erbil and Dohuk, both of which are under the authority of the KDP. The KDP and the PUK also govern their respective governorates.

area. The KDP represents more traditional values and the PUK say that they are more modern but the same principle applies' (Dijwar, para 149).

Dijwar also discusses the meaning, purpose and necessity of tribalism in Iraqi Kurdish society as well as regional variations. He notes that 'tribalism is loyalty to a tribe, it's a necessity in some areas in my country because where there is no law and order, you have to protect yourself. You have to be tied to some families. Some leaders of these tribes, like in Dohuk, they make decisions, they have a Council and this decision is compulsory, like a law. Even when it's against the law. The Council's decision is much stronger than the Court's decision. Sometimes they need to negotiate between the tribes. There is extreme loyalty from people who belong to the tribe towards the tribe. If a person rebels, s/he will be isolated, an outcast. One time a girl and a boy from two different tribes, they had a sexual relationship and they found out so the two tribes said OK, each one should kill his or her 'criminal'. Even they can make decisions of life and death. They are really really strong. If there is a proper police authority, they could not do this. The strength of tribalism varies from area to area. For example, in my city, it's not that strong, but if you go to Dohuk, there are placards above shops and offices that say that the person who owns this is son of the person who is from such a tribe. I went there to see a friend once. When you talk to someone in Dohuk, they ask you which tribe you are from, which family you are from. It's very important. Actually, I am from a very famous tribe but I don't use it' (Dijwar, para 153-159)<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Here, Dijwar appears to be referring to 'traditional' tribalism as opposed to the 'modern' tribalism that is linked to Iraqi Kurdish political parties. Thus, traditional tribalism varies regionally across Iraqi Kurdistan. However, it would seem that the principle of tribal loyalty to one of the political parties is present across all the Iraqi Kurdish regions. Refer to Bruinessen (1992) for further discussions of tribalism and politics in Iraqi Kurdistan.



### **4.3 Focussing on dispersed asylum seekers**

Prior to examining the impact of the dispersal policy on co-ethnic social bonds, it is important to explain and substantiate the reasons for primarily focusing my discussion of asylum seekers on those who are dispersed.

#### **4.3.1 Dispersed and subsistence only asylum seekers**

The centre of my research is dispersed asylum seekers because the impact of the dispersal policy on the integration of this group is direct and significant. Certainly, these individuals are profoundly tied to their dispersal locality, their right to state-funded housing being revoked if they fail to accept the accommodation provided to them in their designated dispersal area. In contrast, the dispersal policy's direct impact on the integration of subsistence only asylum seekers, a population which constitutes, in the case of NASS and as at December 2003, 38% of the supported asylum seekers (Heath, Jeffries and Purcell 2004:18)<sup>11</sup>, is non-existent. Indeed, these persons possess no state-imposed ties to a designated locality, their accommodation being provided, instead, by relatives or friends anywhere in the UK. According to Home Office Asylum Statistics, the majority of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers on NASS subsistence only support (73%) actually reside in Greater London and the rest of the South East, the exact areas that the dispersal policy aims to draw asylum claimants away from.

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<sup>11</sup> The RDS figures for the numbers of asylum seekers in receipt of NASS support include dependants.

It has been observed by the Iraqi Kurds interviewed that some co-ethnic asylum seekers elect to leave their dispersal locality even if they are then obliged to change their support arrangements to subsistence only support and secure accommodation with relatives or friends. An Iraqi Kurd working for an employment advice service in Birmingham raises this issue, noting that 'the dispersal policy doesn't work because people don't like to be forced to live somewhere they don't like. I have seen many people who have left NASS accommodation despite knowing that if they leave that accommodation without NASS' permission they will lose their benefit but still they are willing to move to somewhere where they can find people from their own community' (Connexions, para 267). Certainly, amongst the Iraqi Kurds interviewed for this research, sixteen of the twenty-seven dispersed Iraqi Kurds had moved to another locality within twelve months of their initial dispersal, some exercising their freedom to choose their residential location, others following the granting of their request to relocate by the dispersal authorities or changing their support arrangements. Robinson (2003a) has also undertaken research on this topic. He has concluded that secondary migration rates constitute 18-20% of the cohorts of dispersed asylum seekers who have been waiting 18 months for a decision on their asylum application. Moreover, he asserts that the majority of the secondary migration is to London, Birmingham and Manchester. He claims that it is initiated by 'racist victimisation, a sense of being isolated from their fellow countrymen, the absence of key infrastructure and the feeling that they are exposed and vulnerable because of visible differences' (Robinson, 2003a: 145). In addition, Robinson (2003a) observes that secondary migrants fail to plan their mobility and instead rely upon 'snippets of advice and gossip', being customarily attracted to cities where people from their own country, region and/or culture reside (Robinson, 2003a: 145; Robinson, forthcoming).

Since the inception of the contemporary dispersal policy, some subsistence only asylum seekers will not have kith or kin in Greater London or the South East, their co-ethnic contacts being based instead in a dispersal area. In these instances, the dispersal policy exercises an indirect impact on the integration of subsistence only asylum seekers. For instance, on arrival in Dover, Bendewar contacted a co-ethnic friend asking him for assistance and help. This acquaintance promptly offered him accommodation in his own home in Birmingham, his dispersal city. Having no offers from other acquaintances and having been informed by his friend of the advantages and benefits of residing in Birmingham, Bendewar chose to receive subsistence only support and moved to this city, as a result having access to the same environment that his friend had been given access to via dispersal. Bendewar remarks 'I didn't rely on the name of the cities, I followed what my friend recommended. He said come to Birmingham, it's very nice' (Bendewar, para 60 & 66). Similarly, Cenik and her husband as well as Erdehan moved to Birmingham and Coventry respectively as subsistence only asylum seekers, the former having arranged to live with a cousin (Cenik, para 15), the latter having decided to reside with a friend (Erdehan, para 17).

#### **4.3.2 Self-dispersed asylum seekers**

It was observed in the course of the fieldwork that a trend developed, from 2001 onwards, whereby some newly arrived Iraqi Kurds deliberately applied for asylum in the dispersal areas recommended to them by their relatives and friends rather than regularise their situation in London or at their port of entry. This pattern of behaviour is used as a means for this group to pro-actively influence their place



of residence whilst remaining entitled to dispersed state-funded housing. Although it is not guaranteed that they will receive accommodation in their chosen locality, there is a possibility that they will be successful in affecting at least the regional location of their dispersal. A similar phenomenon has been observed in the Yorkshire and Humberside region (Wilson, 2001: 12).

A Kurdish businessman describes the trend of asylum seeker self-dispersal to Birmingham noting that 'at the start of the dispersal programme, a lot of asylum seekers were trying by any way to persuade the dispersal officers to send them to London. When they found that there was no way for them to go to London and keep hold of their benefit entitlements, they started talking about the West Midlands with its job opportunities. This is why there are two dispersal programmes, one that is done by the government and a second that is done voluntarily by the asylum seekers themselves who are looking for work and they keep coming to the West Midlands' (Kurdish restaurant 2, para 11 &13). He continues, saying 'I can't imagine that a lorry goes as far as Birmingham without stopping. They were coming deliberately, they were hearing through their cousins, their friends who told them to come here. They wanted to make sure that they will be accommodated in Birmingham' (Kurdish restaurant 2, para 89-95). A Kurdish asylum caseworker, substantiating the businessman's standpoint, adds that 'when Iraqi Kurds first started coming to the UK, they were dispersed to Birmingham. After that, when people knew that dispersal also happened from Dover to other cities, all our friends and relatives, they gave us a call and we told them and advised them not to go to Dover immigration, come to Birmingham and from here you have a good chance to stay in Birmingham' (Birmingham Kurdish association, para 444).

The impact of the dispersal policy on the integration of self-dispersed asylum seekers varies depending on the dispersal authorities' response and its outcome. The reaction to this phenomenon can fluctuate substantially any time depending on the changing availability of dispersal accommodation in the dispersal city, its region and in the other dispersal locations across the UK as well as on the particular practice in place regarding the acceptability of dispersing asylum seekers inter-regionally once they have already travelled to a dispersal area. The impact of the dispersal policy on the integration of those who are dispersed inter-regionally closely equates with the impact of the dispersal policy on the integration of dispersed asylum seekers. Indeed, whilst initially exercising their freedom to choose their place of residence, this group's liberty is withdrawn and its effect is annulled as the dispersal authorities relocate them to a designated location far from the dispersal area they initially migrated to, voluntarily. In contrast, the impact of the dispersal policy on those who are dispersed intra-regionally or who succeed in securing state-funded housing in their city of choice strongly compares with the impact of the dispersal policy on the integration of subsistence only asylum seekers. Mogan voluntarily migrated to Birmingham, choosing this city because of the large size of its Kurdish community. He notes 'I arrived near Birmingham in a lorry and after that I was sent to a hostel in Birmingham. I was very happy to come to this city because in Kurdistan, we know that there are a lot of Iraqi people in Birmingham' (Mogan, para 17 & 25). Mogan was scheduled for dispersal to Newcastle from Birmingham, however his poor health and the receipt of his refugee status both released him from the constraints of dispersal. He observes 'they told me, go to Newcastle but what should I do in Newcastle? I was sick, I had backache. I told them, I can't go to Newcastle. They told me if you don't go to Newcastle, and you stay in

Birmingham, you will get no house. Then, I got my refugee status from the Home Office. I was very happy about that' (Mokan, para 3).

#### **4.3.3 Re-dispersed asylum seekers**

It appears that another asylum seeker strategy has developed which also aims to minimise the isolating effects of this group's dispersal without compromising their entitlement to state-funded dispersal accommodation. Indeed, a trend has emerged whereby on arrival in a dispersal destination containing a very small community of co-ethnics, some disappointed and dissatisfied newly arrived Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers take the initiative to return to Dover and re-apply for asylum and dispersal with the hope that on this second occasion they are sent to a more suitable location. A Kurdish businessman explains, remarking that 'on many occasions there were recently arrived asylum seekers who jumped on the bus and arrived at their destination point, for example, Stoke-on-Trent and he found it very grey and he didn't find anyone so he came back to Dover to be dispersed again for a better opportunity' (Kurdish restaurant 2, para 89-93). The impact of the dispersal policy on the integration of these re-dispersed asylum seekers is very similar to that of standard dispersed asylum seekers.

#### **4.3.4 Covert and temporary voluntary migration between dispersal localities**

It would seem that some dispersed asylum seekers residing in the less economically active regions of the UK but who are nevertheless keen to maintain their right to state-funded dispersed housing, covertly migrate five to six days at a time to other UK regions. These individuals travel to localities where employment



opportunities are more widely available, sleeping at the homes of relatives or friends in these economically buoyant areas. In order to avoid forfeiting their entitlement to state-funded housing by leaving a dispersed property totally empty for more than six days, individuals sharing the same dwelling tend to take turns in absenting themselves. Indeed, a community services refugee advisor notes that in Newcastle 'for a number of asylum seekers, we weren't sure whether they were actually living in the accommodation because they seemed to be away an awful lot. They were obviously away working and Birmingham was one of their destinations' (Housing association, para 43). The dispersed asylum seekers who are able to effectively undertake covert temporary migration between dispersal localities, on a regular basis, are less affected by the dispersal policy than those who have followed a more traditional and orthodox dispersal route. Nonetheless, this set of individuals is more affected by dispersal than subsistence only asylum seekers.

The development and practice of these strategies, self-dispersal, re-dispersals, and covert temporary voluntary migration between dispersal areas by some newly arrived Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers is indicative of this group's ability to become empowered. In the process, they overcome, to a degree, the isolating effects of being dispersed on a no-choice basis to a locality containing a small co-ethnic community all the while maintaining their entitlement to state-funded housing. Significantly, an employment advisor remarks upon the effect these various asylum seeker strategies have on the overall distribution of this group across the UK. He notes that 'whereas the largest area of dispersal is the North West of England, the West Midlands is probably the largest region of arrival, including dispersal and arrivals through other means' (Employment, Specialist voluntary agency 2, para 3).

#### **4.4 The impact of the dispersal policy on the co-ethnic social bonding of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers**

##### **4.4.1 Asylum seekers dispersed before 2001 in contrast to asylum seekers dispersed from 2001 onwards**

It would appear that the contemporary UK dispersal policy most negatively impacts upon the local co-ethnic social bonds of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers who were dispersed before 2001. For those dispersed from 2001 onwards, however, the policy exerts an increasingly less negative effect on this group's social bonds. According to the Iraqi Kurds interviewed, preceding 2001, few Iraqis had actually been dispersed and therefore those who were residing in the dispersal localities were small in number and consequently were more susceptible to being isolated from other co-ethnics, particularly since the majority of the more established co-ethnic community traditionally reside in London and the South East. Delav notes, reflecting upon his experiences in Birmingham in 1999, at the beginning of the arrival of new Iraqi Kurds to this city, that 'we couldn't do anything, we would all go to town, to Victoria Square, to see each other and we have been very happy when we saw each other there. Until we find a way amongst ourselves' (Delav, para 272).

However, in 2000, the quantity of new Iraqi applications for asylum rose sharply (from 1,800 in 1999 to 7,475 in 2000) (Heath, Jeffries and Purcell, 2004) and the total number of dispersals taking place increased. The number of new Iraqi asylum applicants also augmented in 2001 (6,705) and 2002 (14,570). The ensuing higher proportion of Iraqi Kurds amongst the total dispersed asylum

seeker population combined with the overall larger number of dispersals occurring led to the formation of spontaneous rather than policy engineered co-ethnic language clusters in many of the dispersal locations. The trend for NASS to concentrate dispersed asylum seekers in a relatively small number of localities, a seemingly unintended consequence of solely using the criteria of housing availability and affordability in the selection of dispersal destinations, also contributed significantly to the development of language clusters in the dispersal areas. Attracted by the benefits of the concentration of Iraqi Kurds in these areas, co-ethnic subsistence only asylum seekers and refugees subsequently began to migrate voluntarily to these areas.

By 2001, the watershed year, groups of co-ethnics were accumulating in the dispersal localities providing the basis for greater social bonding. Kereng, reflecting the views of the other Iraqi Kurds interviewed in Birmingham, notes that 'now you can phone Iraq, you can work, you can see people, you can give presents to people for your family in Iraq. People can help you read the English letters you receive. Everything is easy here. There are restaurants, two/three coffee shops. If you have a problem, you can go there. You can also go to the Refugee Council, there are some Kurdish people working there. There is a Kurdish association. But before there wasn't all this. Now if a new person comes to Birmingham, it's very easy for him' (Kereng, para 69 & 173). Similarly, 'when other Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers came, after us, it was very easy for them because we spent six months to find a college and register. When new asylum seekers arrived, they just slipped in. In two or three days, they knew everything. You want to buy a mobile? OK, the cheapest mobile is in that shop, in that place, I will take you. You want to make a phone call to Kurdistan, OK, that's the way you do it. If they had been somewhere new, with no Iraqi Kurds living there



already, it would take them 6-8 months to find out what to do' (Delav, para 272). This phenomenon, that social bonding and settlement is harder for the first arrivals in a new area than for subsequent co-ethnic groups, has also been noted by Boswell (2001: 32) in her comparative study of the German and UK dispersal policies, migrant networks and the knowledge and experience individual members possess developing and growing over time.

Importantly, it is possible to argue that the impact of the dispersal policy on the co-ethnic social bonding of asylum seekers could also be most detrimental for those who were dispersed via the strictly implemented NASS scheme, rather than via the more lenient interim programme, the former customarily unreceptive to asylum seeker destination preferences. However, the timing of dispersal is actually of greater significance to co-ethnic social bonding prospects than the scheme under which an individual is dispersed, those sent to their dispersal destination prior to 2001, regardless of the programme through which they were receiving support, being more isolated from their co-ethnics than those sent from 2001 onwards.

#### The relative lack of assistance provided by established Iraqi Kurds in the dispersal areas preceding 2001

Significantly, in the cases where there were longstanding settled Iraqi Kurds in the dispersal locality, this group provided relatively little assistance. According to the Iraqi Kurds interviewed, there were approximately fifty co-ethnics who had resided in Birmingham for ten to thirty years. Whilst clearly this group represents a very small proportion of the existing Iraqi Kurdish community in this city, estimated at 10-12,000, in 1999-2000, there were still very few newly arrived co-

ethnics and one would anticipate that the established Iraqi Kurds would have approached and assisted them. Kereng and Rojdar, who were dispersed to Birmingham in 1999, observe that there was no Iraqi Kurd they could rely on who could facilitate their initial settlement by assisting with translating and interpreting, explaining the workings of the labour market or advising on immigration, benefits, housing and English language training (Kereng, para 65; Rojdar, para 127). With lack of English proficiency constituting the most significant barrier to initial settlement, Kereng remarks that in Birmingham, in 1999, 'you had a problem but you could not make progress until you could get an interpreter. Sometimes Birmingham didn't have an interpreter, the authorities had to call London or another city. Sometimes you had to wait a week or two' (Kereng, para 173).

The lack of assistance provided by the settled Iraqi Kurds to the new arrivals in Birmingham, pre-2001, is, in my view, the product of the combination of several factors. Firstly, both groups are likely to have been unaware of each other's presence during the early stages of the implementation of dispersal given the large size of the city of Birmingham and the small numbers of Iraqi Kurds being dispersed to this locality.

Secondly, both sets of individuals originate from different socio-economic backgrounds. Indeed, according to the interviews with Iraqi Kurds, those who came to the UK between the second half of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1990s tend to be well-educated, middle to upper class families, originating from the main urban areas, who were and still might be politically committed to the Kurdish cause. In contrast, those who came from the late 1990s onwards are, in the main, moderately educated, lower class, young single men. They are aged between 16 and 30 years old and originate from the rural areas of Kurdistan.

Some took part in the civil war, between the two main Iraqi Kurdish parties, the KDP and the PUK, for economic reasons rather than political conviction. Regarding the generally low to moderate level of education of the latter group, a Kurdish asylum caseworker explains that these individuals 'had no opportunity to be educated. The Iraqi government wasn't building schools in the villages, because they considered the villages to be part of the army' (Birmingham Kurdish association, para 202). Similarly, a Kurdish organisation in London observes that the high levels of illiteracy amongst the latest group of Iraqi Kurdish arrivals to the UK is a product of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) and hundreds of Kurdish villages being destroyed by the Iraqi government during the *Anfal* campaigns (February to August 1988). This trend is also the consequence of the Kurdish civil war (1994-1997) and generally an emphasis on the value of work rather than education (London Kurdish association 2, para 73). Since the families of the newly arrived Iraqi Kurds differ in their socio-economic background to the families of the more established co-ethnics, it is unlikely for members of either group to be related to or acquainted with one another. Thus, in a culture where support is predominantly provided through family ties and acquaintances rather than by a welfare state backed by an active voluntary sector, it is improbable that large scale informal support that cuts across socio-economic categories is provided.

Thirdly, according to the recently settled Iraqi Kurds, there exists an emotional and cultural distance between both groups of co-ethnics because of the amount of time elapsed since the established Iraqi Kurds last resided in Iraqi Kurdistan. Indeed, 'it's twenty years ago that they have seen your life back home. They have been changed. They help but they are not that interested' (Hazo, para 96). A newly arrived Iraqi Kurd remarks that 'they are Kurdish-English and we are Kurdish-Kurdish' (Birmingham Kurdish association, para 428). Finally, it would



seem that the group of longstanding Iraqi Kurds have their own share of problems and difficulties to deal with, making it harder for them to support others. 'The established families they have their own life, they don't have time to spend with us. They have problems, they couldn't integrate with this society, still' (Birmingham Kurdish association, para 428).

#### **4.4.2 Dispersal areas containing a large versus a small co-ethnic group**

Concerning solely the population of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers who were dispersed from 2001 onwards, it is noteworthy that the dispersal policy still has a varying impact upon this group's social bonds. Indeed, those who are sent to areas possessing a comparatively large co-ethnic group where opportunities for social bonding are plentiful are less detrimentally affected by the dispersal policy than those sent to localities containing a relatively small co-ethnic group, the experience of social bonding being less pronounced. Birmingham and Newcastle have been used to illustrate both types of dispersal localities, the former being characterised by a large community of co-ethnics and the latter being typified by a small group of Iraqi Kurds.

#### The social bonding of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers in Birmingham, a city possessing a large co-ethnic group

Post-2001, newly arrived Iraqi Kurds who reside in Birmingham have access to a large group of recently settled co-ethnic asylum seekers and refugees, who would have arrived in the city a few years or a few months earlier. Certainly, according to the Iraqi Kurds interviewed, this city currently hosts the largest community of recently established Iraqi Kurds in the UK, that is co-ethnics who

have arrived in the last four to five years. The Iraqi Kurdish population in Birmingham was estimated, by the Iraqi Kurds interviewed in 2003/2004, as consisting of between 10-12,000 individuals. Certainly, according to Phillimore (2005: 7, 17), Iraqis constitute the largest group of asylum seekers (19.9%) and the second largest group of refugees (23.3%) in the West Midlands<sup>12</sup>.

Incidentally, the West Midlands appears, in general, to contain large numbers of recently established asylum seekers and refugees. Indeed, Phillimore's research concludes that 9,604 asylum seekers and 44,260 refugees were identified as living in the West Midlands at the end of 2004. The largest concentration of asylum seekers (3,792) and refugees (1,486) was in Birmingham. She has also identified that the number of refugees in the region will increase to 69,865 by the end of 2007 (Phillimore, 2005: 7, 15). Furthermore, Phillimore states that Birmingham's asylum seeker population covers 36 wards with the main populations located in Soho (621), Aston (419), Ladywood (405), Edgbaston (320) and Nechells (282). Birmingham's refugee population is spread across 34 wards with concentrations of population in Soho (188), Nechells (165), Sparkbrook (137), Handsworth (132), Small Heath (103) (Phillimore, 2005: 9, 16). Scott-Flynn (forthcoming) has suggested that there are between 500 and 2,000 failed asylum seekers in Birmingham (Phillimore, 2005: 12).

The significant concentration of Iraqi Kurds in Birmingham can be explained in several ways. Firstly, Birmingham is overall a favoured dispersal destination for NASS, 6% of their dispersed asylum seekers, across all nationalities, residing in

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<sup>12</sup> Importantly, London continues to accommodate the largest concentration of Iraqi Kurds in the UK, regardless of their time of arrival in the country. This population is estimated, according to my interviews, at 30-45,000 individuals. It was also asserted that there are between 100-130,000 Iraqi Kurds in the UK, in total.

this city in 2003 (Heath, Jeffries and Purcell, 2004: 60). In addition, according to the Home Office's asylum statistics, in 2002 and 2003, the region receiving the largest proportion of the Iraqi, NASS-supported asylum seeker population was in fact the West Midlands, hosting 26.5% and 26.6% of this group respectively. In 2001, whilst Yorkshire and Humberside was the region in receipt of the highest amount of this same population, 21% of the Iraqi, NASS-supported asylum seekers were hosted by the West Midlands.

Moreover, Birmingham has become a pole of attraction for Iraqi Kurdish self-dispersed asylum seekers, subsistence only asylum seekers and refugees because of its multicultural atmosphere as well as the employment opportunities located in the West Midlands region as a whole. Both of these subjects, the multiculturalism of Birmingham and the employment prospects in the region, are discussed in more depth in chapters five and six. Furthermore, the existing size of the Iraqi Kurdish community is attractive to other co-ethnics, in itself, given that the more substantial a co-ethnic community is, the more support can be provided. Indeed, access to a sizeable co-ethnic community like the one in Birmingham 'is going to make things much easier for me. But if you are 10 people in Glasgow, you cannot do the parties, you cannot find a job so easily, you cannot get as much help as you can get here. From 10,000 people you can get a lot of help. What can you do with 10 people? They need help themselves, how can I expect them to help me? Whenever there is a large community, people want to go there because there is more support, more is happening there' (Hazo, para 60). Similarly, 'newly arrived Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers jump on the dispersal buses voluntarily, when they go to the areas where they heard that there are other Kurds, like in Birmingham. They can find support, a guide, someone who has been here for longer than them' (Kurdish restaurant 2, para 89-95). Certainly,



common socio-economic backgrounds as well as shared experiences of current Iraqi Kurdish events and crises and migration to the UK help create a strong bond with the recently arrived co-ethnics and instils amongst the newly settled Iraqi Kurds a willingness to assist and help their fellow countrymen. Thus, it has been observed that in Birmingham, recently arrived Iraqi Kurds post-2001 'can find support, a guide, someone who has been here for longer than them' (Kurdish restaurant 2, para 89-95). In addition, in contrast to London where the co-ethnic population is very diffuse<sup>13</sup>, the majority of Iraqi Kurds based in Birmingham reside in several neighbouring wards, making it easier for the Iraqi Kurdish community to provide and seek assistance and help.

Significantly, an important element of co-ethnic support and social bonding in Birmingham, particularly for new arrivals, takes place in the eight recently opened Kurdish restaurants and café bars. Most of these are located in Handsworth, where, according to the Iraqi Kurds interviewed in Birmingham, informal, and on occasions formal, guidance can be sought as well as companionship and friendship. Reflecting the tribal nature of Kurdish society, the restaurants tend to be frequented either by people from the area of Erbil, one of the major cities of Iraqi Kurdistan, or Suleimaniyah, the other principal city. Importantly, tribal identity, territory and politics are closely interlinked in Iraqi Kurdistan. Thus, the restaurants also tend to be frequented either by individuals who identify with the KDP, one of the main Kurdish parties whose regional government in Iraqi Kurdistan controls the Erbil area, or by persons who associate with the PUK, the other principal Kurdish party. The latter controls the Suleimaniyah area. As Ibrahim notes, 'even here in Birmingham, there are special cafes for the people

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<sup>13</sup> Iraqi Kurds in London live primarily, in Hackney, Haringey, Ealing, Manor House, Wood Green (London Kurdish association 3, para 15), Brixton, Islington, Enfield, Wembley, Sheperd's Bush and Acton (London Kurdish association 1, para 55).

from Erbil and special cafes for the people from Suleimaniyah' (Kurdish restaurant 2, para 63).

At the time of my fieldwork, the Salahaddin (the name has been changed to protect the anonymity of the restaurant) was certainly the largest of the Kurdish restaurants / café bars / meeting places in Birmingham. Privately funded by relatives of one of the Kurdish owners, this restaurant offers Kurdish meals in a designated family eating area. It also offers coffee and sweets in a men only, smokers' snooker room as well as formal guidance in a separate office. There is also a shop selling Kurdish music, etc...that is attached to the restaurant and a car park with a capacity for 60-70 cars (Kurdish restaurant 1, para 177 & 185). Since re-opening in October 2003, 'this is a place where people can receive guidance, where the importance of having a driving license, not carrying a knife, not taking drugs and not racketeering can be stressed. There are a lot of Kurds in Birmingham, some of them are still young people, they have no one to guide them. I try to show them how to live. If you leave these people alone, they will do bad things, they need an advisor. The Salahaddin is like a club, if they have nothing to do, they will just chat on the street, they may cause problems' (Kurdish restaurant 1, para 55, 165, 181).

Birmingham also contained a recently formed charitable Kurdish association, the only currently active co-ethnic community organisation in the West Midlands, situated in Handsworth (Gernaz, para 233), where reliable information and formal advice is offered concerning asylum, benefits and social welfare issues. The formation of this association developed from a series of meetings convened by a group of newly arrived Iraqi Kurds to which members of the existing co-ethnic community in Birmingham were also invited. Hazo, the current president of the

organisation, reflects upon these initial meetings, noting that 'it was a new thing even for those who had been here a long time. They had never seen this before, fifty Iraqi Kurds sitting together in the UK, in Birmingham especially' (Hazo, para 5). However, this organisation is in its infancy and severely under funded, despite having received, in the past, financial assistance from HACT and the Midlands Refugee Council (Anik, para 13). At the time of my fieldwork, the Iraqi Kurdish association in Birmingham possessed only one paid employee, a part-time caseworker, the Management Committee being entirely composed of volunteers. Thus, perhaps unsurprisingly, according to the Iraqi Kurds interviewed, it would appear that the current role and significance of this organisation for their co-ethnic community is limited.

Certainly, as implied by Hazo's astonishment, refugee community organisations (RCOs) have customarily been based, until recently, in London. Indeed, Robinson (1999a) notes that in 1998-1999, 88% of all RCOs recognised by the Refugee Council were located in the capital because traditionally, at least in the case of the group under study, it is in London that the majority of the settled Iraqi Kurds are based. Importantly, dispersal and the subsequent residence of some Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees in other parts of the country is not in itself sufficient to ensure the immediate formation of co-ethnic RCOs in these new areas of settlement. Indeed, for a community to be ready to form an association, it is first necessary for at least some of its co-ethnic members to be relatively financially secure, that is, engaged in some form of permanent employment (London Kurdish association 2, para 29). If unemployed or temporarily employed, individuals are likely to be preoccupied with looking for permanent work (Durya, para 167), might suffer from poor mental health and self-esteem and therefore



can find it challenging, both financially and mentally, to spend unpaid time, energy and effort setting up as well as financing a charitable organisation.

It would also appear, according to the Iraqi Kurds interviewed in Birmingham, that the concept of voluntary work is not present in Iraqi Kurdistan and therefore a degree of familiarisation with this form of activity is required. Gernaz raises this particular issue, remarking that customarily, 'when you tell someone that you are working voluntarily for the Kurdish people they won't believe you. They will think – what are you getting from it? Why doesn't he go to the cinema to see a film?' (Gernaz, para 229). Secondly, it is essential for a minimum of a community's co-ethnic members to possess a degree of permanence in terms of their future residence in the UK. Certainly, asylum seekers and even individuals with Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR) possess an uncertain future in their host-country and this lack of security is both worrying and stressful, usually making this group unprepared and sometimes unwilling to invest in their new life, as well as that of their own co-ethnic community. Anik, an asylum seeker who volunteers on the Management Committee for the Kurdish community association in Birmingham, illustrates this phenomenon. She remarks that 'I would like to set up something for women but the problem is that I am not settled and I have a problem with my status so I don't know where I am going to be tomorrow so I can't think clearly' (Anik, para 9). Moreover, it is fundamental that some co-ethnic members of the Iraqi Kurdish community residing in a dispersal locality possess the skills as well as the experience to found and run a charitable association. For instance, the ability to undertake fundraising and to manage paid and unpaid, voluntary staff is important. Finally, it is crucial for a minimum group of co-ethnics in a community to develop an understanding of and commitment to the charitable aims of any association that is set up. Indeed, political and business ventures

need to be channelled into more suitably appropriate projects, activities and endeavours. Unfortunately, at the time of my fieldwork in Birmingham, an insufficient proportion of Iraqi Kurds possessed these necessary skills. Significantly, the difficulty in forming, developing and establishing a Kurdish association must be situated within the broader context of the political fragmentation and division existing amongst Iraqi Kurds in general<sup>14</sup>. Lano, employed by a Kurdish organisation in London explains, stating that 'one problem with the Kurds is that we do not get along together. In the UK alone, there are 33 Kurdish organisations, mainly based in London. If a funding organisation decides to give funding to one Kurdish organisation the whole 33 organisations will apply for it!' (London Kurdish association 2, para 27).

In light of the current relative weakness of the Kurdish community association in Birmingham, it is important to recall, that the restaurants mentioned earlier are primarily run as businesses rather than charitable organisations, their prominence in the city thus not resolving the need for a larger and more influential altruistic Kurdish community organisation. An Iraqi Kurd from one of the community organisations in London, is even wary of some of the recently opened Kurdish restaurants in Birmingham. He notes that 'in this city, there is a large number of Iraqi Kurds earning money but the majority are illiterate, they can't send a fax, they can't reserve a ticket and these restaurants, they operate like agencies, they are multi-purpose, they do all the work for them, they transfer money, they sell CDs, they do everything. Then those running the restaurants might use people as well, some nasty things are going on because there are many people in Birmingham earning money but who don't know the system. A proper community

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<sup>14</sup> For more information on the contemporary political divisions existing amongst Iraqi Kurds, consult Stansfield (2003).

organisation with two to three staff is needed in this city so that people can approach an organisation that is not profit based but rather service based' (London Kurdish association 3, para 99 & 103). It was not possible to test the full validity of these claims. Clearly, however, the Iraqi Kurdish community in Birmingham is potentially vulnerable to abuse by unscrupulous co-ethnic businessmen, the absence of a strong and effective charitable community association presenting them with no alternative but to approach the restaurant and café bar owners for advice and guidance. Reflecting the possible exposure of this group to deceitful co-ethnics, a Kurdish businessman, the owner of another restaurant in Birmingham, observes that 'wherever Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees find someone who can speak English and understand and give them some advice, they come because they don't have any alternative' (Kurdish restaurant 2, para 21).

A further indication of the importance of establishing a stronger Kurdish community association in Birmingham is that, on the basis of my fieldwork, Iraqi Kurds seem to prefer approaching a co-ethnic community association for advice and support rather than arrange an appointment with a service provider working for an unfamiliar mainstream agency or organisation. Indeed, the director of a public housing organisation servicing Kurds observes that 'Kurds come to us rather than going to an organisation which doesn't understand their background. That's why we have a huge demand on our services but we don't have the means of offering them what they need. Community centres are very important' (London Kurdish association 1, para 67). Similarly, the national co-ordinator of the Refugee Integration Forum states that 'refugee community associations seem to be the organisations that refugees know, they trust them and they will go to them' (para 34).



As discussed previously, the longstanding established Iraqi Kurds residing in Birmingham pre-2001 offered relatively little assistance to their newly arrived co-ethnics. However, this pattern changed from 2001 onwards, in response to the large growth in the number of dispersed and settled Iraqi Kurds in Birmingham. The most common type of support now offered by this group to their newly arrived co-ethnics is formal in nature. Indeed, they tend to provide assistance and advice as part of their profession, being either employed as asylum seeker and refugee support workers in local government or voluntary and charitable agencies or self-employed as translators and interpreters. According to the Iraqi Kurds interviewed in Birmingham, practical, advisory and translating support, offered informally on a voluntary and friendship basis, is usually extended to those Iraqi Kurds who are directly related to the longstanding established co-ethnic community.

The social bonding of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers in Newcastle, a city containing a small co-ethnic group

From 2001 onwards, newly arrived Iraqi Kurds who reside in Newcastle have access to a small group of recently settled co-ethnic asylum seekers and refugees, who would have arrived in the city a few years or a few months earlier. According to Yardil (para 123), the current population of Iraqi Kurds in Newcastle totals 700-800 individuals, with people reaching Newcastle via dispersal or as a result of intra-regional migration from more hostile dispersal localities in the North East. At the time of my fieldwork, there existed one small Kurdish restaurant in Newcastle (Yardil, para 103), some Iraqi Kurds also meeting up occasionally in a

Turkish café in the city 'to play pool and hang out' (Ziryan, para 165). There is no longstanding established Iraqi Kurdish community in Newcastle. Finally, there is a Kurdish association. However, at the time of my fieldwork in this city, and based on my interviews with Iraqi Kurds residing there, it appeared that the association had a small membership, no premises and was largely inactive. A community advisor, substantiating as well as elaborating upon these views, notes that 'the Kurdish community organisation does not function particularly well. The group, however, has worked hard. They organised a big party for Newroz, with two famous singers. The war in Iraq broke out three days before Newroz which dampened the atmosphere at the party. But it did go ahead and it was the first self-organised event' (NERS One Stop Shop, para 91). Other activities or initiatives do not appear to have taken place since this event.

*The challenges involved in setting up a Kurdish community association in Newcastle*

It is important to note that the Iraqi Kurdish community and the voluntary sector in Newcastle encountered many difficulties in the process of setting up a community organisation. Firstly, as is the case amongst any group of Iraqi Kurds, there were ideological divisions and conflicts over the role of politics in the running of the community association. Some maintained that the organisation should only provide support to members of their political party, whether this be the KDP or the PUK, whilst others argued that the association should be politically neutral and provide assistance to all Iraqi Kurds in Newcastle, regardless of their political affiliation. It would appear that the latter view has emerged from a feeling of deep disillusionment with the objectives and activities of the main Kurdish parties. Reflecting the view of this sub-group in Newcastle, Naso notes that 'you need to

feel free. The KDP and the PUK made a mess of organising and running Iraqi Kurdistan. Now we are in the UK, why do we have to associate with one of them? Why do we have to have a father to whom we ask for everything? I prefer to be independent. The idea behind the Kurdish association is to have somewhere to just sit down, have a cup of coffee, have a chat, if you have a problem, it can be solved. It's not about exchanging political views, the Kurdish association is not the place to do that' (Naso, para 409-411 & 441). Dozdar, remarking upon the disillusionment of some Kurds with their political parties, observes that 'you see everything going the wrong way, nothing is true in politics. In other places, politics are used for the benefit of the country and of people, but it is not the case in my country' (Dozdar, para 191). Other members of the Iraqi Kurdish community in Newcastle have found it difficult to detach themselves from their identification with one of the main political parties because of their past experiences in their home-country. Rengo illustrates the enmity that exists between KDP and PUK members. He notes that 'I like Kurdish politics but I don't like the KDP, they like money too much. The Kurdish people in Iraq are very very hungry but the KDP have kept their wealth to themselves' (Rengo, para 89-91). Similarly exemplifying the factions that exist within the Iraqi Kurdish community, Dijwar emphasises that 'people will think the association is PUK or KDP; they might be from the PUK so they will say we shouldn't go to the KDP organisation... The nationalist programme is not mature enough, it's fractured' (Dijwar, para 145).

The existing divisions within the Iraqi Kurdish community in Newcastle appear to have been deepened by the prospect of the association acquiring a development fund from the Home Office. A community advisor explains the procedure, noting that 'all the organisations I work with, the first thing we do with them is apply to the Home Office for their RCO development fund which is specifically there for



their start up costs for small organisations. From that, they get £5,000. It's a one off payment' (NERS One Stop Shop, para 29-31). Two of the Iraqi Kurds interviewed in Newcastle have remarked that one of the difficulties encountered when trying to set up the community organisation in this city was tied to the competition that existed amongst the Kurds for this fund. Indeed, Naso remarks that 'it didn't work because they all thought that they could get some money from the Home Office funding, they thought they could get away with it, take the money and run away' (Naso, para 415). Similarly, Dozdar notes that 'there were problems because of money, they thought about the benefits they could get' (Dozdar, para 181).

The challenges involved in setting up an Iraqi Kurdish community association in Newcastle are best illustrated by discussing the two meetings that took place in the lead up to the election or designation of the organisation's Management Committee. The initial meeting, jointly organised by Iraqi Kurds and members of voluntary sector organisations, appears to have ended up with first, a military-style 'coup' and second, a riot. A community advisor, who was present at the meeting, explains that 'the Iraqi Kurds insisted that the police be present. I thought that this was to protect them from local residents, if necessary, but the police were there in fact to maintain order amongst the Iraqi Kurds themselves. One hundred and fifty people attended the meeting. Everyone had brought their supporters. There ended up being a 'coup'. I was asked to leave, and when I came back, the Kurds on the platform that were there when I left had gone, and a new lot were lined up. For the actual elections, there were twelve candidates. All of the election process had to be seen by everyone, it had to be done democratically. As some of the candidates gained an advantage, a riot in the meeting began' (NERS One Stop Shop, para 77-87). An asylum caseworker was

also present at the meeting. She argues that 'Iraqi Kurds, they are full of vision, enthusiasm but they fight amongst themselves, and that's not just arguing. I had to be escorted out of the meeting' (Specialist voluntary agency 3, para 171). Likewise, Naso states that 'I was there but I left. There was a riot. They wanted to settle all their differences and it wasn't the place to settle differences' (Naso, para 247). Dozdar, remarking upon the manner in which the Management Committee was formed, remarks that 'the election of the Committee was all based on relations, it was not an election. I know you and you know me, we come in, we make a deal. They asked me to step forward as a candidate but I said no, when I saw what was happening. Most people left, like Naso, because they could not see any progress. They just walked out. Because of Pishtiwan, I respected him, I stayed' (Dozdar, para 177). It would appear that a second meeting was arranged. A community advisor, emphasising the neutrality of the eventual leader of the association, notes that 'this meeting was supposedly with just the twelve. People seemed to agree on the twelve, the difficulty was electing a portion of those twelve. Everyone was to meet at the Monument, in the city centre, and the meeting would take place in a secret location. At that meeting, those who were eventually elected were politically neutral and independent' (NERS One Stop Shop, para 89).

Unfortunately, it was not possible to ascertain with certainty, based on my interviews, whether the democratic approach was suggested by local service providers and voluntary sector members or by the Iraqi Kurds themselves. Retrospectively, however, the Iraqi Kurds interviewed certainly viewed the adoption of this approach as a mistake. The imposition of this unfamiliar political model onto an already fractured group appears to have fuelled rather than attenuated their divisions, leaving the existing Kurdish association in Newcastle



with minimal support from its co-ethnic population. Dijwar certainly appears to explain that the riot originated from Iraqi Kurds' unfamiliarity and discomfort with democratic principles. He notes that 'someone said to me, we have elections and you have to come because we will support you. I was a solicitor in my country and people know my father. I didn't want to go because I sensed that something wrong would happen. The election was a disaster because we are not coming from a country that is based on democracy and elections. Democracy is not in the political system' (Dijwar, para 139-141). Naso, discussing how leaders are usually chosen in his community, states that 'I don't think it's a good way to do it, to set it up by election. It's never been done. It's about people who are committed' (Naso, para 249). It would appear that members of the voluntary organisations also came to understand and accept the 'Kurdish way'. A community advisor, for instance, remarks retrospectively that 'Pishtiwan is not necessarily a democratically elected representative, but he is able to speak about Kurdish issues and he is an expert' (NERS One Stop Shop, para 95-97).

Interestingly, the difficulties encountered in Newcastle in setting up a Kurdish community association were not apparent to the researcher in Birmingham. It is possible that the presence of the private Kurdish restaurants, for KDP and PUK members, and the support these meeting places offered, diffused the pressing need to have access to a Kurdish association in Birmingham. As a result, those who were committed to setting up a charitable Kurdish association encountered less opposition from the various conflicting camps. Furthermore, the Management Committee in Birmingham might not have been aware of the Home Office's £5,000 development fund available to new organisations. Consequently, the problems surrounding the competition for this resource were not present. Moreover, Iraqi Kurds in Birmingham might have enjoyed greater freedom, from



the voluntary sector and local service providers, concerning the way in which the Management Committee was chosen.

Significantly, in Newcastle, there is no established Iraqi Kurdish community and, according to Arenan (para 61), people who have arrived recently 'are not thinking about forming an organisation, they are more concerned about getting on with their lives or making plans to go back to Kurdistan'. This state of affairs was certainly viewed as stunting the development of a Kurdish association by one of the Iraqi Kurds interviewed in Newcastle. Indeed, Naso recounts the difficulties he encountered in finding an experienced, appropriate and willing leader who would be accepted by the Iraqi Kurds. Incidentally, the following comments reiterate one of the fundamentals of Kurdish identity, namely that being Kurdish involves being anti-Arab. Naso states that 'there is a chap, he was the head of the Iraqi Association in Middlesborough, he has been here since the 1970s, he fled the Ba'ath regime and he has been hunted by members of the Ba'ath party here in the North East. I nominated him, he is the best one, he knows about everything, he can contribute and he is not a person who is doing it to gain some money. But the Kurds in Newcastle, they said that he is Arab and he does not speak Kurdish so how can he represent the Kurd, how can he be the co-ordinator? But we need him to run the association, it's a big responsibility. The one who runs the association should know about fund raising, he has experience. He has stability in his life, he knows about Halabja, why don't we let him? His father sacrificed himself for the sake of the Kurds and now, people turn around and say that he is Arab. That guy was full of motivation. We said he was Kurd, but he can't speak Kurdish. Why? Because in the past he was forcibly moved from the place he used to live to the South of Iraq and there, they all speak

Arabic, it's circumstantial, it's not that he wanted to learn Arabic' (Naso, para 419 & 427).

### *Newcastle's lack of popularity amongst Iraqi Kurds*

It would appear that the overall lack of popularity of Newcastle amongst Iraqi Kurds arises primarily from the North East's low availability of employment opportunities and the antagonism directed towards the group under study from the host communities in this locality. The latter two issues are discussed extensively in chapters five and six. Furthermore, Newcastle is not as favoured a destination for NASS dispersals as Birmingham. The ensuing relatively small size of the Iraqi Kurdish community in Newcastle constitutes, in itself, a disincentive, a Kurdish asylum caseworker observing that 'Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers don't want to go to the North of England, not because we don't like it but because there is no large Kurdish community there and everything is new for us. We have to stay with our friends for a while to become familiar with the system' (Birmingham Kurdish association, para 124). Anik, an asylum seeker living in Birmingham who was initially dispersed to Stockton, in the North East, illustrates the challenges that may be encountered by those Iraqi Kurds who reside in a locality with a small or non-existent co-ethnic community. She remarks that 'it was so difficult for me living in the North because I would never see anyone from my community and I was very new. Even if I wanted to ask about something, I couldn't find a friend or a colleague, or somebody who could speak my language. For example, I didn't know the offices, I didn't know the market, I didn't know anything. They put me in front of a station, I never knew how to use trains because we don't have such things. I speak English but whom should I ask, and ask what? I was given a ticket and I can read and I can speak but still it was difficult. I was so nervous that I

wouldn't reach the place on time, and then I would be responsible because they told me if you don't go there tonight, I will be responsible, I was so scared, I was so nervous. Just imagine if you can't read, you can't speak, he is not educated, he comes to this country and then he has to take care of those things ' (Anik, para 261).

#### **4.4.3 The significance of the gender, marital status and age of those who are dispersed**

The impact of the dispersal policy on the social bonds of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers is increased in some instances and mitigated in others depending upon the gender<sup>15</sup>, marital status and age of those who are dispersed. The impact of the dispersal policy on the co-ethnic social bonding of asylum seekers is made worse by being female and improved by being male. The significant gender imbalance amongst the latest group of Iraqi Kurdish arrivals to the UK (from 1998 onwards), with men by far outnumbering women, placed in the context of an Iraqi Kurdish culture where male-female friendships are firmly proscribed outside of marriage, significantly decreases the chances for women to develop co-ethnic social bonds in comparison to men (Firyal, para 67-71). The other Iraqi Kurdish women interviewed support this view. The more limited opportunities that refugee women possess to socially bond, compared to men, has been previously noted in other research (Refugee Council and British Red Cross, in Home Office, 2005a: 26).

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<sup>15</sup> For information on asylum seeker and refugee women in general, refer to Dumper (2002), Ceneda (2003; 2004), Refugee Council (2005b).



Combining gender and marital status, being a single dispersed woman increases the detrimental effect of dispersal on their social bonds more than being a married woman accompanied by her spouse. This phenomena occurs because the former are less numerous than the already small group of women and tend to associate primarily with other single women. Certainly, according to the single Iraqi Kurdish women interviewed, common ground is difficult to identify with married women accompanied by their spouse given their differing socio-economic and even cultural backgrounds. Additionally, married women accompanied by their spouse benefit from limited spare time to meet and socialise with single women, the former's focus being primarily their life with their children and husband. Indeed, 'mostly the other Kurdish women came with their family and their mind is occupied with their husband and those things. They are not in a position to pay back a visit, go shopping because normally our women, once they get married, they don't have anything personal for themselves' (Anik in Gurzi, para 144-152). Furthermore, single women tend to clash, culturally, with the majority of their co-ethnic community, this phenomenon adding to their sense of isolation. Single female dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers in the UK tend to originate from wealthier families and possess a higher level of education as well as more liberal ideas than the other dispersed Iraqi Kurdish women. Thus, the former maintain that women should be able to rely upon themselves, appear in public places and engage in friendships with women of other nationalities and backgrounds without this having repercussions on their reputation and the honour of their family. Anik, a single woman who lives in Birmingham, notes that 'when I go shopping, I have to watch what I wear. When I was in Kurdistan, I never paid attention to those things because whatever they say, they know my family, it's not like they can misinterpret it. Here, they will say that she is living alone, look at what she is wearing. Who knows what she's doing. They can

misinterpret everything you do. I am very careful here because I don't have my family with me. The single Kurdish women here, in Birmingham, we are afraid, and that's why we are very careful and we just talk to each other and that's it' (Anik in Gurzi, para 158 & 163-176). As a result, Anik adds, 'I have contact with a few Kurdish men, those who I know already and who are educated. But with the rest of the people, I am not so into it. It's so difficult to find a friend here, very rarely can you find a woman and you can't talk to the uneducated men even if you want to, maybe his mentality won't accept it. You just can't be open, you just have to keep everything for yourself. I just take some measures to be careful until I get my asylum decision or know where I am' (Anik, para 45 & 139).

On another occasion, Anik recounts that 'once I had a meeting with a man who came from London, regarding the work of an organisation I volunteer for. I couldn't invite him to my home because of what the Kurdish community might say so I told him that I would meet him in the city centre. I chose a very public bar so that everyone can see that I am sitting seriously with the man. Soon I saw one Kurdish guy, he'd been coming and going just to show me 'I saw you'. He sat down opposite our table for awhile. One hour later I looked up and the Kurdish man was standing there, watching. The man from London noticed that this Kurdish man was looking at me and asked me if he was my boyfriend. I was very embarrassed. Here, there is no one to support me. This guy in the coffee shop that was watching me, I couldn't tell him, stop it, you are not allowed to do this. He could then say bad things, and what could I do?' (Anik in Gurzi, para 163-176).

In turn, being a dispersed married woman accompanied by their spouse augments the harmful effect of dispersal on their social bonds more than being a

single man or a married man accompanied by their spouse. This is tied to the former's experience of the gender-specific division of chores and tasks, particularly common amongst middle to lower class Iraqi Kurds, that mainly confines married women to the domestic sphere of their home. Indeed, married men tend to be tasked with resolving welfare and immigration problems and with looking for and securing work, approaching, in the process, fellow co-ethnics for advice and help whilst married women are commonly responsible for house-bound tasks namely the upkeep of the home and child nurturing and rearing. The way in which the daily tasks are distributed amongst men and women is based upon the premise that a woman's honour is fragile and that it is most effectively protected by secluding her in the home, thereby sheltering her from the potential threats that non-related men circulating in the public arena might pose. This division of labour does not constrain married women's social life in Iraqi Kurdistan, since each resides in an area where they have relatives and existing friends who can visit them in their homes. However, this pattern of work does lead to a pronounced experience of isolation when living abroad, in a locality containing few pre-dispersal relatives or acquaintances. As Firyal notes, 'the women are trying to make friends and relationships with each other but it's not a very public thing. It has to be through meetings and they are not very organised, there is no way for them to meet' (Firyal, para 67-71). Importantly, it would appear that the men tend to oppose women's attempts to break out of their isolation, observing and judging their behaviour and activities if these are situated beyond the expected cultural norms. According to Enwa, women in turn feel observed and socially controlled by their co-ethnic men (Enwa, para 127 & 147). Cenik who lives in Birmingham with her husband states that 'when I go out, maybe one of the Kurdish men sees me, they will say, look, she is going out. I saw her twice today, three times in a week, maybe she is not good. I would like to



work but I can't, maybe the Kurds say something. Everything is limited. In my country, if there is gossip about me, it's not important because my family knows me, they don't believe anyone but here in the UK, my family are not here to see what I do, so if they hear gossip about me, they will not know what to believe' (Cenik, para 193 & 203).

Being a dispersed married man accompanied by their spouse intensifies the negative effect of dispersal on their social bonds more than being a single man<sup>16</sup>. Indeed, the former appear to strongly prefer the companionship of other married men and yet the predominant majority of the Iraqi Kurdish asylum seeking population as well as those dispersed are single men (London Kurdish association 2, para 115 & 119). Interestingly, the finding, in this research, that the negative impact of the dispersal policy on the co-ethnic social bonds of Iraqi Kurdish dispersed asylum seekers is intensified by being a married man accompanied by their spouse and lessened by being a single man is distinctive.

Similarly, albeit to a lesser degree than gender and marital status, the age of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers affects the impact of the dispersal policy on their co-ethnic social bonds. Indeed, being aged 40 and above increases the harmful impact of the dispersal policy on their social bonds, more so than being aged between 21 and 29. The former encounter fewer opportunities for social bonding because of the demographic traits of the dispersed co-ethnic population, in 2002, 74% being aged between 21 and 29 and 20% between 30 and 39

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<sup>16</sup> In this case, the single men category includes unmarried and widowed men as well as married men whose spouse and children do not currently reside with them in the UK. The married men category corresponds to those men who are accompanied in the UK by their spouse, with or without their children.

(Heath, Jeffries and Purcell, 2004)<sup>17</sup>. This finding corroborates anecdotal evidence, the Refugee Council noting that 'from experience we know that older people are more likely to face isolation and loneliness' (Refugee Council, 2004d: 16). These trends regarding marital status, gender and age illustrate that a person's contact with a co-ethnic community does not necessarily overlap with their access to fulfilling co-ethnic social bonds.

In sum, the hypothesis that the dispersal policy wields a negative impact on the social bonds of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers because this policy sends this group to localities where there are no settled co-ethnics categorically applies, in particular to those dispersed before 2001. Significantly, the dispersal policy should also have detrimentally affected co-ethnic social bonding from 2001 onwards. However, in practice, certain unforeseen and unplanned circumstances occurred at this point in time and alleviated the policy's negative effects. Indeed, in 2000, following a significant rise in the quantity of new Iraqi applications for asylum, an increase in the total number of dispersals and NASS' tendency to disperse asylum seekers to a relatively small number of localities, spontaneous, non policy-engineered, co-ethnic clusters began to form in the dispersal areas. Thus, from 2001, the dispersal authorities were increasingly sending asylum seekers, albeit largely unintentionally, to areas containing groups of settled co-ethnics and consequently, for those asylum seekers dispersed from this date onwards, the dispersal policy exercises a less negative impact on their social bonds, relative to its effect pre-2001. Notwithstanding this improvement, for asylum seekers dispersed from 2001 onwards, the impact of the dispersal policy on their co-ethnic social bonding can still be harmful, particularly for those who are sent to areas containing a relatively small Iraqi Kurdish group, Newcastle's 7-

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<sup>17</sup> The percentages are from the total number of Iraqis aged 21 and above.

800 co-ethnics being viewed as insufficient and Birmingham's 10-12,000 Iraqi Kurds as highly satisfactory. It is noteworthy that the impact of the dispersal policy on the co-ethnic social bonds of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers is experienced by individuals as either more or less detrimental, depending on their gender, marital status and age. Certainly, women suffer the negative effect of dispersal more than men; single women, married women and men accompanied by their spouse endure the negative consequences more than single men; and those aged 40 and above as well as those aged between 30 and 39 suffer the negative impact of dispersal more than those aged between 21 and 29.

#### **4.5 The impact of the dispersal policy on the co-ethnic social bonding of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish refugees**

##### **4.5.1 Dispersed refugees who move away from their dispersal locality following the receipt of their authorisation to stay in the UK**

The dispersal policy ceases to affect the local co-ethnic social bonding of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish refugees who leave their dispersal area following the receipt of their authorisation to remain in the UK. Dispersed refugees are freer to leave their dispersal locality than dispersed asylum seekers, the former, unlike the latter, possessing the right to move and choose their place of residence without this decision affecting their welfare entitlements. Significantly, this was indeed the case until July 2004, date when the Asylum and Immigration Act (Treatment of Claimants, etc...) 2004 received Royal Assent. Indeed, section 11 of this Act amends the homelessness provisions in the Housing Act 1999 by stipulating that a refugee develops a local connection with the local authority in the locality he was dispersed to as an asylum seeker. Thus, from July 2004



onwards, dispersed refugees who wish to secure social housing are only entitled to make an application in their dispersal locality. It has not been possible to capture the experiences of those affected by this new measure in my fieldwork, the latter coming to a close in March 2004. Unfortunately, there is no statistical data available on the residential location of dispersed refugees across the UK and therefore it is impossible to quantify the proportion of this group who relocate, and by extension the percentage whose co-ethnic social bonds are no longer affected by the dispersal policy<sup>18</sup>. However, it has been possible, based on my fieldwork, to identify the characteristics and circumstances of the dispersed refugees who are most and least likely to move following the receipt of their right to remain.

Prior to presenting these traits, it is necessary to note that the dispersal policy indirectly impacts upon the local co-ethnic social bonds of some of the dispersed refugees who leave their dispersal locality following the receipt of their permission to remain in the UK. The social bonds of the dispersed refugees who move to another dispersal locality rather than relocate to the South East of England, a non-dispersal region, are impacted upon by the dispersal policy in a similar way as the dispersed refugees who remain in their initial dispersal area. However, the effect is less negative because it is likely that the former group chose another dispersal area as their new residence because, amongst other things, of the greater social bonds available to them there.

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<sup>18</sup> For a discussion on the deficiencies of UK asylum and refugee statistical data, consult Stewart (2004).

The characteristics and circumstances of the dispersed refugees who are most and least likely to move following the receipt of their right to remain

Firstly, concerning age, the dispersed Iraqi Kurdish refugees who are most likely to relocate after the receipt of their right to remain in the UK tend to be under 40 years old, the most mobile group seemingly being those aged between 21 and 29 years. This set of individuals is more prone to move away because psychologically they are ostensibly more responsive to and comfortable with new, unfamiliar environments as well as change. Moreover, it would appear that this age group is more actively searching to rebuild their life and establish themselves in the UK than those aged 40 and above. Additionally, their physical health and energy levels tend to be superior. Significantly, those aged 40 and above are aware that their employment prospects, in their dispersal area as well as elsewhere, are minimal, compared to those aged between 21 and 39 (Refugee Council, 2004d: 16; Refugee Council and British Red Cross, in Home Office, 2005a: 26). Indeed, employers generally prefer younger workers.

Moreover, those aged 40 and above possess greater difficulties in acquiring a good level of English language proficiency. They also find it more challenging to adapt to an unfamiliar labour market and/or accept jobs that lie well below their qualifications and home-country work experience. As a result, this group's reluctance to move is strengthened by knowing that their employment opportunities elsewhere in the UK are no better than in their current dispersal locality. For instance, Mezdar, a refugee living in Newcastle states that 'I can't work here, I cannot re-train, I am too old for that. So that is why the North or the South of England, it is all the same for me' (Mezdar, para 9). Similarly, Nebez has also settled in Newcastle following the receipt of his status because 'I am 41

years old, there isn't any work for me and I am not young enough to work in the pizza shops' (Nebez, para 163).

It is noteworthy that Iraqi Kurdish men who are aged under 40, especially those aged between 21 and 29 years old, are most likely to develop lasting amorous relationships with host-community members residing in their initial dispersal locality. Indeed, significant proportions amongst this age group are single on their arrival in the UK and find it easier to adapt to the host-society. Consequently, some persons who are under 40 are as likely to settle in their dispersal locality as individuals aged 40 and above.

Considering marital status alone, it would seem that all dispersed Iraqi Kurdish refugees possess a propensity to relocate following the receipt of their permission to live in the UK. Certainly, single men may tend to move away from their dispersal locality because they possess no dependents and it is also relatively easy for them to obtain accommodation elsewhere in the UK, temporarily or permanently, in the abode of an acquaintance. Single women may also be inclined to relocate since they benefit from having no dependents and, as discussed earlier, they are likely to possess less social bonds in their dispersal locality. Those members of this group who do leave their dispersal locality most generally settle in Greater London where the majority of the co-ethnics possessing a similar socio-economic background to their own reside. It is notable that single women are liable to encounter more difficulties in securing accommodation with acquaintances than single men because of concerns over their honour being damaged if they reside in a dwelling alongside single men. Anik, for instance, notes that 'I have an aunt who lives in London but it is not possible for me to go there. You know the state of the houses there and she is



living with her son because she needs someone to take care of her, she is about 70 years old, and it's not proper for me to live there with him' (Anik, para 95).

Similar to the case of single women, married men and women accompanied by their spouse, but with no children, tend to experience less social bonding in their dispersal area than single men who have no dependants. Therefore some members of this group have a propensity to leave their dispersal locality, shared accommodation with acquaintances being nevertheless more difficult to encounter than for single men, a married couple, particularly in Iraqi Kurdish culture, requiring more privacy and space. Importantly, married men and women, with no children tend to possess greater chances of acquiring social housing elsewhere in the UK than singles. The latter are prone to reside, when able to obtain their own housing, in a private sector rented dwelling. Entering this part of the housing market constitutes a challenge because of this group's difficulty in finding a landlord who accepts housing benefit claimants as well as raising the funds necessary for a deposit<sup>19</sup>. Importantly, social housing is highly sought after amongst Iraqi Kurds. Qubat, for instance, highly values his opportunity to possess this form of housing. He observes that 'I have been very lucky, I got a council house after waiting for only five months. Normally it is very difficult to get this kind of house' (Qubat, para 7). Similarly, Erdehan refers to his council flat and the accumulation of household possessions when accounting for his settlement in Birmingham, noting in addition, that the Kurds who leave this city tend to do so prior to applying for accommodation. Indeed, he remarks that 'I applied for this flat and they gave it to me within two months, then I bought things

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<sup>19</sup> The Audit Commission suggests that rent guarantee and deposit schemes should be developed in response to these problems (Audit Commission, 2000a: 53).

and I stayed here. But those people who leave Birmingham, they hadn't applied for a house, they left immediately' (Erdehan, para 339).

Finally, married men and women with children, although perhaps less free to leave their dispersal area than the other groups mentioned because their children might be settled in school, may still choose to leave their dispersal area, this set of individuals having less social bonds in their dispersal locality than single men. Significantly, some parents would like their children to grow up in an Iraqi Kurdish Muslim environment, an aim that requires relocating to the principal concentrations of Iraqi Kurds in the UK (Connexions). As in the case of married men and women with no children, sharing an abode with acquaintances living elsewhere in the host-country tends to be difficult because of the greater need this group has for space as well as privacy compared to singles. Concomitantly, this set of individuals is more likely to be entitled to social housing than singles or even married men and women accompanied by their spouse, with no children.

Gender, considered in isolation from age or marital status, does not appear, on the basis of my fieldwork, to influence whether or not individuals are likely to leave or remain in their dispersal locality following the receipt of their refugee status.

Concerning levels of English language proficiency, it would appear that those refugees benefiting from a good standard of English are as likely to settle in their dispersal locality or alternatively move away as those possessing a poor level of English. The determining factors, in this instance, are rather the spatial location of employment opportunities as well as that of co-ethnic English speakers. Those refugees who possess a good level of English will remain in their dispersal area if

jobs are available in the area, regardless of whether or not there are co-ethnic English speakers in that locality willing to help them find work as well as mediate and interpret for them in the workplace. On the other hand, if the work prospects in the dispersal locality are poor, this group will relocate elsewhere: In turn, those refugees who have a poor level of English will only settle in their dispersal locality if labour is in demand in the area and there are locally based co-ethnic English speakers prepared to assist them. In contrast, if the employment opportunities in the dispersal area are limited, this set of individuals will move<sup>20</sup>.

Dispersed refugees' access to formal work whilst being asylum seekers appears to influence the degree to which they are prone to stay in their dispersal area or move away following the receipt of their immigration status, those applying for asylum before July 2002 being permitted to work formally and those registering afterwards being prohibited. Certainly, refugees who as asylum seekers were permitted to obtain formal work and were successful in securing it are more prone to settle in their dispersal area since firstly, they might be able to continue working in the formal job they had when they were asylum seekers. In addition, they are likely to have acquired, throughout the duration of their asylum application, a degree of familiarity with the opportunities available to them in the local labour market. They are also prone to possessing a network of local professional contacts, developed whilst they were working. These factors can facilitate the finding of a future formal job in their current dispersal area. Moreover, this group's overall capacity to become formally employed is significantly enhanced by the opportunity they had, as asylum seekers, to develop a portfolio of formal work experience as well as improve their English

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<sup>20</sup> According to my fieldwork, the dispersal scheme under which refugees were dispersed, as asylum seekers, does not seem to influence their likelihood of relocating or settling in their dispersal locality after receiving their right to remain in the UK.



language proficiency whilst working alongside host-community members, the latter being a far less common occurrence when employed informally. This group's improved employability is likely to enhance their overall ability to obtain formal work locally. In contrast, refugees who as asylum seekers were not entitled to seek formal employment are more inclined to leave because firstly, they are not in formal employment, on receipt of their immigration status. Furthermore, they have not had the same opportunity as the previous group to familiarise themselves with the workings and prospects of the local, formal labour market as well as develop suitable professional contacts. In addition, their employability is customarily low since they possess no formal work experience to date in the UK and have had few opportunities to improve the level of their English language proficiency beyond the classroom environment of the ESOL lessons. As a result, this group tends to be more obliged to relocate and rely on the assistance of more informed co-ethnics residing elsewhere in the UK. It is noteworthy that some of the refugees who accessed formal work as asylum seekers also leave their dispersal locality in search of employment prospects elsewhere, all the while relying upon the formal work experience they gained and the opportunity they possessed to practice their English as asylum seekers.

The date dispersed refugees are granted their permission to remain in the UK influences the extent to which this group is inclined to remain in their dispersal locality or relocate. Those individuals who were granted their refugee status prior to 2001 are most prone to relocating, customarily moving to the South East of England, particularly Greater London, since at that time, the number of Iraqi Kurds living in the dispersal localities was very low. In contrast, those persons who were given their refugee status from 2001 onwards are more likely to stay in their dispersal area given the larger size, by then, of the co-ethnic population in

the dispersal localities. It is notable that some of this latter group of refugees leave their dispersal area, despite having access locally to a sizeable co-ethnic group, because it is difficult to obtain work or they wish to live near a close relative or friend, explore another dispersal locality or experience life in the famous and prestigious capital city.

The traits of the dispersal locality in which dispersed refugees reside affect the degree to which they are prone to stay in their dispersal area or move away. Indeed, dispersed refugees are most likely to relocate firstly, if formal employment prospects in their dispersal locality are low. Reflecting upon the centrality of work, Delav remarks that his place of residence in the UK is purely dependent on the location of his job, noting that 'where I live in the future depends on work. If I continue to have a job in Birmingham, I will stay here. If not, I will go where there is work for me' (Delav, para 69). A Kurdish asylum caseworker, noting that lack of work constitutes a significant driver of migration away from the initial dispersal locality, observes that 'there are too many refugees living in Birmingham and not enough formal work. The employment agencies in Glasgow, the rest of the Midlands, they have a better choice. So, after a few years, once the Kurds know how to travel, how to get accommodation, how to approach the other branches of the employment agencies in Bristol, Manchester or Southampton, when they speak a bit more English and they have their refugee status, some of them, they leave Birmingham because they want to find a job and a better life' (Birmingham Kurdish association, para 54). Similarly, Erdehan remarks that 'there are many jobs in Birmingham but there are also many young men, including refugees, wanting to work. More of my friends who came with me to Birmingham have now left to another city in search of work, only some have stayed' (Erdehan, para 85 & 339). The manager of a voluntary sector agency,

presenting the case of refugees who were dispersed as asylum seekers to Newcastle, observes that 'there is a problem for refugees everywhere in gaining employment but there is high unemployment in the North East so it is even more difficult to get jobs. That is why there is still a drift back to London and other cities where they think there will be more employment opportunities' (Manager, Voluntary agency B, para 65). Naso, referring specifically to Iraqi Kurdish refugees, notes that 'the majority leave Newcastle because they want to find work and there are not many jobs here. They have links all over the country, they go down to Birmingham, Coventry, Southampton, Ipswich, Peterborough. When they hear there is a job in a certain area, they will apply for it' (Naso, para 85 & 339).

Secondly, dispersed refugees are most prone to leave if the group of locally resident co-ethnics is small, the ensuing potential for social bonding, examined earlier, and its accompanying benefits being minimal. Thirdly, dispersed refugees are most inclined to move away if the host-community is monocultural, particularly if the dominant group is white British, because this set of circumstances lends itself most often to host-community antagonism towards refugees. Finally, dispersed refugees most commonly depart when their dispersal locality is relatively small, its size customarily limiting the demand for labour and making this group more visible to potentially hostile host-community members. In contradistinction, dispersed refugees are most prone to stay in their dispersal locality if formal work opportunities in their dispersal area are relatively high, if the set of locally resident co-ethnics is adequately large, if the host-community is multicultural and if the dispersal area itself is relatively large.

Importantly, the level of deprivation in dispersed refugees' residential wards does not appear to affect the geographical mobility of this group, most asylum seekers



and refugees across the UK residing primarily in highly deprived wards. Moreover, whilst Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees express clear housing preferences, namely for under-occupied, well-maintained self-catering shared houses or flats rather than overcrowded, dilapidated, full-board hostels, the housing traits of a dispersal locality do not appear to influence the spatial mobility of this group. Employment prospects, instead, take precedence followed by size of co-ethnic group, ethno-cultural traits of host-community members and size of the dispersal locality.

The location of obtainable social or private sector housing or of accommodation made available by a relative or friend in their home affects the degree to which refugees are likely to stay in their dispersal area or move away. Certainly, refugees who possess housing or accommodation opportunities elsewhere in the UK move there if their dispersal locality's traits are unsatisfactory, in the terms examined above and the characteristics of their area of destination are suitable, particularly with regards to employment opportunities. Similarly, refugees who have housing or accommodation offers in their dispersal locality will contemplate settling there if the latter's characteristics are more satisfactory than the traits of any other areas in the UK where they might be able to obtain an abode.

Finally, the time dispersed refugees spend in their dispersal area as asylum seekers influences the degree to which they are inclined to remain or leave their dispersal locality. Those who resided there as asylum seekers for a short period of time, for six months or less, feel less settled and familiar with the locality and consequently are more prone to relocate, on the condition that employment prospects and social bonds in particular are considered better in the destination locality. Conversely, dispersed refugees who, as asylum seekers, resided in their

dispersal locality for a long period of time tend to experience a greater sense of attachment to this area. As a result, they are less likely to move away, providing that work opportunities and social bonding in particular are viewed as more adequate in the dispersal locality, compared to elsewhere in the UK. Illustrating this latter phenomenon, Hazo notes that 'it is difficult to move from here. I came to Birmingham in 1997. After one year I got my status and I had learnt English. By then, I knew a lot of things about this city. I knew where everything was, the Refugee Council, the shops, the government offices, the colleges. Why should I make the decision to go to London? It will take me another year to know where the places are that I need for my life. If there is no specific reason, why should I move?' (Hazo, para 74). As Lane remarks, 'it's not easy to change again and start from the beginning' in a new city (Lane, para 55).

On the basis of this discussion, it would seem that dispersed Iraqi Kurdish refugees aged between 21 and 29 years old, who resided, as asylum seekers, for a comparatively short period of time, in a relatively small dispersal locality characterised by low employment opportunities, a small co-ethnic group and a monocultural host-community and who have housing available for them elsewhere in the UK in a locality suitable to their needs are most inclined to relocate on receipt of their permission to stay in the UK. As a result, it is likely that the local co-ethnic social bonds of this group cease to be affected by the dispersal policy. Some of the dispersed refugees interviewed left their dispersal area on receipt of their permission to stay in the UK. Gernaz, for instance, states that he moved to Birmingham from Newcastle as a refugee 'because there is a large community of Kurds here' (Gernaz, para 375).

Conversely, it would appear that dispersed Iraqi Kurdish refugees aged 40 and above, who accessed formal work as asylum seekers, who were sent to their dispersal locality from 2001 onwards and resided, as asylum seekers, for a comparatively long period of time, in a relatively large dispersal area typified by comparatively high employment prospects, a large co-ethnic group and a multicultural host-community and who have housing available for them in their dispersal area are most prone to remain in their dispersal locality on receipt of their authorisation to remain in the UK.

Consequently, it is likely that the local co-ethnic social bonds of this group continue to be impacted upon by the dispersal policy. Several of the dispersed refugees that participated in my research remained in their dispersal area following the receipt of their authorisation to stay in the UK. Erdehan, for example, notes that 'Birmingham is good for us now, I feel like it's my country because anything I want, I can do it. I don't have any family in the UK but I have some friends in Birmingham, they are like family, like brothers and uncles' (Erdehan, para 137 & 225). In the same way, Bendewar, remarks that 'we like living in Birmingham, it's got refugees and asylum seekers. When we're here, it's like we're in Iraq, you see lots of people just like yourself, of your own religion. And whatever you do, they don't say anything about it' (Bendewar, para 24). Equally, Sabar notes that 'all my friends in Newcastle help me. We go on holiday together to Scotland. But in Birmingham, there are too many people and it is very dirty, there are also a lot of problems with Kurds. There are also a lot of Afghanis and Albanians, sometimes they are fighting over drugs. Some Kurds are selling and taking drugs. It is not nice. Innocent people are dying for money' (Sabar, para 91).



#### **4.5.2 Dispersed refugees who remain in their dispersal locality following the receipt of their permission to stay in the UK**

The main changes that occur on receipt of an individual's refugee status, for those who stay in their dispersal locality, are as follows: a greater sense of security and permanence regarding residence in the UK, the granting of a formal work permit and the need to obtain alternative housing. Importantly, dispersal accommodation is only provided to new refugees for 28 additional days, following the receipt of their permission to remain in the UK. It would seem, however, that these changes do not affect the local co-ethnic social bonds of dispersed refugees who settle in their dispersal area and consequently, the impact of the dispersal policy on this aspect of integration is identical to the effect the policy had on these same individuals when they were asylum seekers. Thus, the dispersal policy exerts a harmful impact on the social bonds of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish refugees who were dispersed and received their permission to remain in the UK before 2001. However, for those dispersed refugees who were granted their authorization to stay in the UK from 2001 onwards, the dispersal policy has a less negative impact on their social bonds, relative to its effect pre-2001. Despite this amelioration, for the latter group of dispersed refugees, the impact of the dispersal policy on their co-ethnic social bonding can still be negative, especially for those who are sent to localities possessing a comparatively small Iraqi Kurdish group.

It is significant that the impact of the dispersal policy on the co-ethnic social bonds of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish refugees is, as in the case of asylum seekers, experienced by individuals as either more or less damaging, depending on their gender, marital status and age. Indeed, women aggravate the effect of dispersal

more than men; single women, married women and men accompanied by their spouse worsen the influence of dispersal more than single men; and those aged 40 and above as well as those aged between 30 and 39 intensify the negative impact of dispersal more than those aged between 21 and 29.

To sum up, the hypothesis that the dispersal policy wields a negative impact on the social bonds of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish refugees is incorrect if applied to those who depart from their dispersal area following the receipt of their authorisation to stay in the UK. However, the hypothesis is valid for the dispersed refugees who settled in their dispersal locality after they have received their permission to stay in the UK, the impact being identical to that of dispersed asylum seekers.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, the impact of the dispersal policy on dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees' participation in co-ethnic social bonding has been examined. As a means of directing my analysis, the following hypothesis has been tested: the contemporary UK dispersal policy exercises a negative impact on the social bonds of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees because this policy sends this group to localities where there are no settled co-ethnics. It has been concluded firstly, that the dispersal policy wields a negative impact on the social bonds of those asylum seekers who were dispersed before 2001 because at that time, the dispersal authorities were sending this group to localities where there were no settled co-ethnics. However, as a result of changes taking place in 2000, from 2001 onwards the dispersal authorities were increasingly sending asylum seekers, albeit largely unintentionally, to areas

containing groups of settled co-ethnics and consequently, for those asylum seekers dispersed from this date onwards, the dispersal policy exercises a less negative impact on their social bonds, relative to its effect pre-2001. Notwithstanding this improvement, for asylum seekers dispersed from 2001 onwards, the impact of the dispersal policy on their co-ethnic social bonding can still be harmful, particularly for those who are sent to areas containing a relatively small Iraqi Kurdish group. It is noteworthy that the impact of the dispersal policy on the co-ethnic social bonds of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers is experienced by individuals as either more or less detrimental, depending on their gender, marital status and age. Secondly, it has been concluded that the dispersal policy ceases to affect the local co-ethnic social bonding of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish refugees who leave their dispersal area following the receipt of their authorisation to remain in the UK. Finally, it would appear that the main changes that occur on receipt of an individual's refugee status do not affect the local co-ethnic social bonds of dispersed refugees who settle in their dispersal area. Consequently, the impact of the dispersal policy on this aspect of integration is identical to the effect the policy had on these same individuals when they were asylum seekers.

Importantly, the way in which time shapes the Iraqi Kurds' experiences of social bonding constitutes a recurring theme in this chapter. Firstly, over time, an individual's immigration status may change, from being an asylum seeker to being a refugee. The latter phenomenon transforms an individual's capacity and potential for social bonding, the right to move away from his/her dispersal locality and closer to relatives or friends being granted on receipt of his/her refugee status. Conversely, over time, an individual's sense of belonging in and attachment to a particular dispersal area may increase, as his/her network of co-



ethnic contacts grows and the quality of his/her co-ethnic relationships deepens. Iraqi Kurds' co-ethnic community building, in the form of Kurdish restaurants and associations, may also develop substantially over time. Furthermore, it is necessary to be aware that the type of co-ethnic companionship that Iraqi Kurds require fluctuates over time, intensive advisory and explanatory support customarily needed at the beginning of their stay in the UK followed, for instance, by company and camaraderie later on. Significantly, the effects of the passage of time are not automatically experienced in a uniform manner amongst Iraqi Kurds, women seemingly having less time than men to put down roots in their dispersal locality as well as build co-ethnic friendships and participate in co-ethnic group gatherings. Similarly, the length of time co-ethnics reside in proximity to one another, in the UK as in their home country, does not necessarily strengthen their bonds. Indeed, certain class or socio-economic cleavages existing within the group remain unaffected by the passage of time.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **IMPACT OF THE DISPERSAL POLICY ON THE SOCIAL BRIDGES OF IRAQI KURDISH ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES**

In this chapter, the impact of the dispersal policy on dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees' social bridging is examined, social bridges being one of the four features of the integration process centred upon in this thesis. As reviewed in chapter two, social bridges consist in constructive, friendly and respectful relationships with non-co-ethnics (Ager and Strang, 2004a: 4). An asylum seeker or refugee is on course towards integration when, in addition to developing local, co-ethnic social bonds, s/he is also contributing to the building of social bridges.

In the subsequent discussion, the following hypothesis is examined: the current UK dispersal policy wields a negative impact on the social bridges of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees because this policy sends this set of individuals to areas where the perceptions and attitudes of host-community members towards them are hostile. To facilitate the appraisal of the soundness of this assertion, the actual prevalence of hostility and enmity rather than social bridging between host-community members and Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees is presented. Next, the impact of the dispersal policy on firstly, the social bridges of dispersed asylum seekers and secondly on those of dispersed refugees is investigated. My reasons for focusing on dispersed asylum seekers rather than on asylum seekers in general and my justifications for examining the impact of the dispersal policy on asylum seekers separately from its effect on refugees are presented in chapter four.

### **5.1 The prevalence of hostility and antagonism over social bridges**

On the basis of my fieldwork, it would seem that the interactions Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees experience with non-co-ethnics are customarily characterised by hostility or indifference. The enmity they witness varies from outright physical aggression and verbal abuse to antagonistic jokes. Hostility towards the group under study is most frequently expressed by teenagers, who are perhaps less socialised into polite behaviour, whilst the inhospitality of adults is most usually carried out, although not exclusively, in a state of drunkenness. The most welcoming non-co-ethnic group tends to be the elderly, possibly because they have more time and value the opportunity to interact socially with others.

Sabar recounts a series of unfortunate encounters with host-community antagonism that originated from the owner of the hotel where he was residing in Blackpool, noting that 'every day she asked me why have you come to England? You are a problem. You come for money, you must stay in the hotel if not you will be deported' (Sabar, para 5). He continues, observing that one night, 'at 10.30pm, the owner called the police and told them that asylum seekers were a threat to her hotel. The police booked a ticket for me to go to Newcastle at 12am the next morning and told me to leave the hotel. This happened mid-January 2000, so it was very cold. We asked the police where we could stay, we could not sleep the rest of the night on the street. In the end we slept at the train station' (Sabar, para 5). Similar incidents have been reported to the House of Lords. Certainly, Baroness Howells of St David's (Equal Opportunities Director, Greenwich Racial Equality Council) notes that 'sometimes it is claimed that



alleged discrimination on racial grounds and acts of racial harassment have been committed by the hotel or bed-and-breakfast owners who receive asylum seekers' (HL, 7<sup>th</sup> July 2000, col.1758). Importantly, the Home Office recorded 2,000 racial attacks between April 2000 and September 2002, one hundred of which were in Sunderland (Burrell, 2002 in Robinson, 2003a: 146). Sustained violence was also recorded in Hull in August 2000 and the Sighthill area of Glasgow witnessed seventy recorded attacks in the previous fourteen months. Moreover, the BBC (2001) reported that six hundred asylum seeker residents in Birmingham in November 2001 had moved to this city in order to avoid harassment in Scotland and the North of England (Robinson, forthcoming in Robinson, 2003a: 146).

The enmity expressed by non-co-ethnics towards Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees can be viewed as the product of resentment felt towards this group for their residence in the UK and the ensuing rights and benefits they are entitled to. Alternatively, according to the Iraqi Kurds interviewed, it can constitute a response to this group's perceived and/or real distinctive political and religious home-country views and beliefs. A lack of standardisation, nationally, regarding asylum seeker entitlements, particularly prior to the introduction of NASS, combined with inaccurate media reporting confuses members of the host-community and compounds the latter's feelings of being treated unfairly by local or central government (Audit Commission, 2000c). As Wren remarks, antagonism arises when 'small, previously ethnically homogeneous communities are presented with groups of asylum seekers and refugees who are perceived to be benefiting from preferential resource allocation whilst using facilities funded through the local taxation system' (Wren, 2003: 65). Boswell clearly summarises the origin of host-community hostility directed towards the group under study,

noting that it can 'be attributed to a combination of underlying socio-economic insecurity generated by economic modernisation and social fragmentation, and the channelling of these insecurities into racism and xenophobia, mainly through media coverage and political mobilisation' (Boswell, 2001: 28). Alternatively, since asylum seekers reside overwhelmingly in some of the most deprived cities and wards of the UK, the aggressive or violent behaviour perpetrated against Iraqi Kurds can, on some occasions, be part of a more widespread phenomenon directed to all and sundry. Indeed, a service provider in Newcastle observes that 'a lot of our problems are with harassment from locals, sometimes it's not specifically racist, just harassment in general, everyone is getting it. But then at other times, some people are saying 'go back to your own country' (Support worker, Housing, City Council 1, para 29). The Iraqi Kurds interviewed for this research have referred to this ambiguous phenomenon, some perceiving every act of hostility addressed towards them as targeted antagonism. Dijwar remarks 'we became very sensitive to this issue, so if anything happens, even if it is a normal thing, we just interpret it as racism' (Dijwar, para 79). Some Iraqi Kurds respond negatively to the host communities' apparent and/or genuine unfriendliness, thereby potentially fuelling further acts of hostility from the receiving society.

Importantly, members of the dominant ethnic group, that is white British<sup>21</sup>, are not the sole perpetrators of the antagonist acts. Indeed, members of the various BME groups are also implicated. It would seem, according to the local service providers interviewed in Newcastle, that these individuals resent the renewed hostility extended towards them from the white British community as a result of the latter's failure to distinguish between asylum seekers and refugees on the

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<sup>21</sup> As opposed to white Irish or white Other, categories identified for use in the 2001 Census.

one hand and BME communities on the other. Alternatively and/or in addition, they dislike the shift in attention, amongst governmental and charitable agencies as well as some members of the public, from BME issues to asylum seeker and refugee concerns.

Finally, it is necessary to stress that the existing relative lack of social bridging is seemingly self-perpetuating, the original obstacles to its growth being strengthened by its ongoing limited development. Stereotypes are perpetuated because of the absence of opportunities for asylum seekers/refugees and host-community members to meet in constructive places and at effective times. This trend deepens the misunderstandings, misconceptions and feelings of enmity towards one another. A regional economic strategist in Newcastle notes that 'you have people who don't necessarily look like you, that you've read things about in the newspaper. If there are no opportunities for people to meet and talk to one another, then it breeds fear, misunderstanding and ignorance. Host-community members have said I don't like asylum seekers living anywhere near me but they have actually never met them and talked to them' (Regional Development Agency, para 87).

## **5.2 The impact of the dispersal policy on the social bridging of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers**

### **5.2.1 Asylum seekers dispersed from 2001 in contrast to asylum seekers dispersed before 2001**

It would seem that the dispersal policy impacts more detrimentally upon the social bridging of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers who are dispersed from 2001



onwards rather than before 2001, the dispersal localities that asylum seekers are sent to from 2001 onwards containing host-community members whose perceptions and attitudes towards the group under study are more antagonistic.

Prior to 2001, the impact of the dispersal policy on the social bridges of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers is less harmful, the hostility directed towards them at this time, in the dispersal localities from host-community members, being less prominent and tied primarily to their nationality. Indeed, before 2001, there were relatively small numbers of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees in the dispersal areas and the negative local and national media stories regarding this group were low-key. Gernaz notes, for instance, that 'when I went to Newcastle in May 1999, I was amongst the first twenty new refugees. Some locals didn't understand when we said that we are refugees. They didn't hate us because they didn't know what was going on and the media wasn't like it is now' (Gernaz, para 27). Instead, the hostility originated from the nationality of the group under study. Gernaz, reflecting the perspective of the Iraqi Kurds interviewed, remarks that 'pre-2001, the locals were asking us where we were from and when we said that we were Iraqis they thought we were like Saddam Hussein. We needed time to explain to them that we are not like that. Some people didn't listen, some people didn't believe us. Some people actually were scared of us' (Gernaz, para 27).

From 2001 onwards, however, the effect of the dispersal policy on the social bridges of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers is more negative, given the greater degree, in the dispersal localities, of antagonism directed towards this group by host-community members concerning their immigration status, their religion and their nationality. Certainly, in 2000, as discussed in chapter four, the number of Iraqi Kurds coming to the UK increased substantially as well as the

total number of dispersals. Negative media coverage subsequently soared and by skewing reality, it misinformed many host community members, leading to the development of widespread inaccurate views regarding the group under study. For instance, it became accepted by some that asylum seekers 'are getting everything whilst we locals are suffering in terms of getting access to our services' (Manager, Housing, City Council 1, para 39). Alternatively, 'asylum seekers are given a car, they own their house, they get free mobile phones' (Gernaz, para 363), 'they get £150 per week' (Kurdish restaurant 2, para 233). The role the media has played in damaging the reputation of asylum seekers amongst host communities should not be underestimated. As Gernaz notes, reflecting the views of the Iraqi Kurds interviewed, 'it is very difficult for us to defend ourselves, to make people not believe the media and their daily negative stories about asylum seekers' (Gernaz, para 363 & 107). Moreover, from 2001 onwards, in response to growing public concern, central government introduced several measures, most notably the removal of asylum seekers' right to work which aimed at curbing the number of new arrivals coming to the UK. This restrictive stance towards further asylum immigration, intentionally or unintentionally, strengthened host-community member enmity towards asylum seekers, helping the former feel justified in their perception that asylum seekers are 'living off tax payers money'.

The combination of these factors led, from 2001 onwards, to an overall intensification across the UK, including in the dispersal localities, of host-community hostility directed towards asylum seekers. Gernaz, for instance, stresses, in keeping with the perspectives of the Iraqi Kurds interviewed, that 'the words refugee and asylum seeker became like swear words' (Gernaz, para 107; Kinyaz, para 63). Similarly, Dijwar remarks that 'asylum seekers are compared to

gypsies, they are completely stigmatised, they are seen as people who come to abuse the English system, they are a germ, like a disease that has to be gotten rid of. It is shameful to say that you are an asylum seeker' (Dijwar, para 31). In the case of Iraqi Kurds, the increased antagonism from 2001 onwards from the host communities is not only based on the immigration status of this group, it is also related to their nationality and the latest war in Iraq as well as to their religion, 9/11 and the current worldwide fear of terrorism. Indeed, Dijwar argues, supporting the standpoint of the Iraqi Kurds interviewed, that 'since the last war, there is a double discrimination, being an asylum seeker and from Iraq' (Dijwar, para 33). Similarly, Rojdar has observed that 'nowadays when I say I am from Iraq, they think you are Osama Bin Laden or Saddam Hussein. They think that you are Arab, that you are religious' (Rojdar, para 355 & 359).

Potentially, given that opportunities for social bridging tend to be more numerous in ethnically diverse areas, the impact of the dispersal policy on the social bridging of asylum seekers could also be most detrimental for those who were dispersed via the interim dispersal scheme. The latter sent individuals to regions containing a high proportion of white British, namely the North West (92.17% white British according to ONS, 2001a) and Yorkshire and Humberside (91.67% white British) (Audit Commission, 2000c: 17; Robinson, 2003a: 122). The NASS dispersal system, in contrast, whilst sending persons to regions containing a high percentage of this ethnic group, also disperses a significant number of individuals to relatively more multicultural regions. For instance, the West Midlands received 18% of all dispersed asylum seekers, as of December 2003 (Heath, Jeffries and Purcell, 2004)<sup>22</sup>, the white British population totalling 86.15% of the total regional

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<sup>22</sup> Regional distribution of asylum seekers (including dependants) in receipt of NASS accommodation, by government office region and local authority



population. However, the timing of dispersal is essentially of superior importance to social bridging than the scheme under which a person is dispersed, those sent to their dispersal destination prior to 2001, regardless of the programme through which they were receiving support, possessing greater potential for social bridging than those sent from 2001 onwards.

### **5.2.2 Asylum seekers dispersed to monocultural areas compared with asylum seekers dispersed to multicultural localities**

It would appear that the dispersal policy impacts more detrimentally upon the social bridging of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers who are dispersed to monocultural rather than multicultural areas, host-community enmity in the monocultural dispersal localities being perceived by Iraqi Kurds as more offensive. Indeed, in this instance, it is not so much the presence of hostility that inhibits social bridging but rather the traits of the host-community members it originates from, the reasons upon which the antagonism is founded and the degree of ethno-cultural diversity in the dispersal area. My fieldwork in Newcastle and Birmingham has been used to exemplify both kinds of dispersal areas, the former being characterised by a monocultural host-community and the latter being typified by a multicultural host-community.

The view that Newcastle is worse than Birmingham in terms of host-community enmity towards asylum seekers is widespread, even amongst Iraqi Kurds who have not resided in these two cities. Moreover, Iraqi Kurds who have resided in both Newcastle and Birmingham argue that host-community antagonism towards them tends to be worse in the former than in the latter.

Low ethno-cultural diversity in dispersal areas leads to high host-community hostility towards asylum seekers

The relationship between low ethno-cultural diversity and high host-community hostility towards asylum seekers seems relatively straightforward. Indeed, individuals residing in a highly monocultural locality will be relatively unaccustomed to living in proximity to people who originate from a different ethno-cultural background to their own and they will possess fairly limited knowledge and experience regarding other ethno-cultural groups. Consequently, they are more likely to firstly, feel fearful and threatened by the settlement, in their area, of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees and to secondly, react in a hostile or unfriendly manner to their new neighbours. This set of individuals is also more susceptible to believing the sensationalist, negative media stories given that their personal and direct interactions and friendships with ethno-cultural groups different to their own are limited. Certainly, 'where communities are relatively ethnically homogeneous, a sudden and visible increase in the numbers of asylum seekers can provide a trigger for resentment and aggression' (Boswell, 2001: 26).

Newcastle constitutes an accurate illustration of a monocultural city. Indeed, 90.65% of its total population originates from the white British ethnic group, with Dene (89.5% white British), Elswick (72.27% white British), Fenham (87.73% white British), Grange (88.65% white British), Heaton (87.89% white British), Jesmond (87.23% white British), Moorside (75.66% white British) Sandyford (86.87% white British), South Gosforth (88.65% white British), West City (87.35% white British) and Wingrove (72.04% white British), being the only wards of the city where the BME population (including white Irish and white Other) exceeds

10% (ONS, 2001a). As would be expected in a monocultural locality like Newcastle, service providers note that there have been difficulties with some of the long-term residents. This has been the case, for instance in the Byker ward (93.24% white British) where 'they haven't had a big population of ethnic minorities before and locals aren't used to seeing people from different countries in their streets' (Support worker, Housing, City Council 1, para 9). The relatively more ethnically diverse areas of Newcastle, in the West End, that include parts of the Elswick, West City and Fenham wards are, according to the Iraqi Kurds interviewed in this city, more welcoming and accepting. Indeed, in these localities, 'people feel more secure and freer because the majority are from Asia or are refugees. They go out, their own shops are there' (Naso, para 405 & 239). Nevertheless, the overall experience of host community hostility for the Iraqi Kurds residing in these more ethno-culturally diverse wards is not diametrically different to that of their co-ethnics living in the more monocultural areas of Newcastle. Indeed, whilst the former might feel accepted in the immediate vicinity of their home, they remain the target of host community antagonism when they spend time in the centre or elsewhere in the city. According to the Kurdish community workers interviewed in London, it would seem that Iraqi Kurds have been confronted with similar experiences in Hull. Illustrating this phenomenon, one of the Kurdish community worker remarks that 'Kurdish youngsters they call this city Hell. Really, I know people who say me and my friends, we couldn't go out in the streets. People used to beat them with stones or spit on their face' (London Kurdish association 3, para 45).

Incidentally, whilst Newcastle's host-community is viewed as hostile, it would appear that this city is also considered the most multicultural locality of the North East region. Indeed, as noted by a regional economic strategist, 'Newcastle's



attitude is much more multicultural, it's relatively more tolerant than other places in the North East. Newcastle is probably the furthest we have got' (Regional Development Agency, para 91). It is especially the existence of two Universities in this city and their consequent cohort of foreign students 'who are relatively well accepted by the locals' (Manager, para 41 Housing, City Council 1) that seems to have attenuated, in relative terms, host-community enmity towards Iraqi Kurds. Certainly, the former have made the latter slightly less conspicuous to local residents. An indication of the attractiveness of Newcastle, as the capital of the region but also as the least hostile dispersal locality in the area, is the significant levels of intra-regional migration that take place, by asylum seekers with the permission of the dispersal authorities, from various nearby dispersal towns and villages. For instance, when Naso was dispersed to the North East in 1999, 'ten to fifteen asylum seekers were being transferred from Sunderland to Newcastle every day' in response to the antagonistic climate from the host communities in this dispersal locality (Naso, para 195 & 261). Sunderland, a town that hosts the BNP headquarters is renowned in the region for the antagonism with which its host communities have received asylum seekers (Support manager, Housing, City Council 1, para 13 & 33). Warzan, for instance, observes that the majority of 'people in Sunderland weren't very nice to us. At school, our children were told why are you in England, why are you getting our houses, why don't you sleep on the streets? It was just like being in Iraq again, with Saddam Hussein' (Warzan, para 29 & 69).

High ethno-cultural diversity in dispersal areas leads to low host-community hostility towards asylum seekers

Following the logic ascribed to in the previous section, one can maintain that high levels of ethno-cultural diversity in dispersal areas lead to low degrees of host-community hostility towards asylum seekers. Birmingham is certainly highly ethno-culturally diverse, in relation to the other cities of the UK, 34.36% of its total population originating from different BME groups (including white Irish and white Other) (ONS, 2001a), with one quarter of its wards being populated, in the majority (50% or more), by various BME communities. In keeping with the multicultural environment in Birmingham, host community antagonism in this dispersal locality appears to be less pronounced. For instance, Bendewar, reflecting the perspective of the other Iraqi Kurds interviewed in Birmingham, remarks that this city 'is multicultural, there are a lot of refugees and foreigners here. Whatever you do, they don't say anything about it' (Bendewar, para 24 & 62). Warzan, who was originally dispersed to Sunderland and then relocated to Manchester, notes that he and his family 'love Birmingham because no one is knocking on our door or breaking our windows' (Warzan, para 239, 267). Similarly, Birwaz stresses that 'because of the multicultural situation in Birmingham, nobody hates you, there are very few racist people in this city. We got a warm welcome here' (Birwaz, para 189).

The apparent empathy Iraqi Kurds receive in multicultural Birmingham is increased, at least for some co-ethnics, by the presence in this city of individuals of Pakistani origin. Indeed, some of the members of the group under study have an instant sympathy with this BME community because of Islam, their shared religion and culture. Incidentally, the other ethno-cultural groups with whom the

Iraqi Kurds possess an immediate affinity (Persians/Iranians, other Kurds from Iran, Turkey and Syria, as well as some Arabic speakers) are in a minority in Birmingham.

Whilst social bridging in monocultural locations is viewed by Iraqi Kurds as more difficult than in multicultural areas, at the same time, the group under study recounts, in the interviews, numerous experiences of host-community enmity in Birmingham.

#### Host-community hostility in Birmingham is predominantly from the BME groups

A Kurdish businessman offers an alternative depiction of Birmingham that contrasts with the idea of this city being a harmonious multicultural melting pot, as mentioned earlier. Indeed, he notes that 'when you mix yoghurt, salt, sugar and rice together it does not taste good. It is the same in Birmingham, there is a whole mix of people from everywhere and the product of the mixture is not good' (Kurdish restaurant 1, para 197). There certainly exists a relatively low degree of Iraqi Kurdish interaction with the white British community in Birmingham because of the predominance of ethno-culturally diverse wards in the city. An indication of this lack of contact is illustrated in this joke about Handsworth, one of the main residential areas of this group in this city, a Kurdish asylum caseworker remarking that in this area 'when you are just getting on the bus, there are no English people in the bus. When we see one English person in the bus, we say, look at this refugee, they have come to our area. Because in Handsworth, we are all foreigners, black, Asians, etc... You have to apply for asylum to come to Handsworth' (Birmingham Kurdish association, para 282). Consequently, the host-community hostility experienced by the group under study tends to originate



from members of BME communities. Indeed, the owner of one of the Kurdish restaurants remarks, reflecting the perspective of the Iraqi Kurds interviewed in Birmingham, that 'there are tensions between the different ethnic communities in Birmingham rather than between them and the main UK society' (Kurdish restaurant 2, para 111). Some members of the BME communities in Birmingham dislike the arrival and settlement of asylum seekers in the UK as well as the subsequent rights and benefits that this group is entitled to. For instance, Delav recounts hearing 'on an Asian radio, people saying why is it that asylum seekers dress better than us, they have a job, we don't have one?' (Delav, para 236). Others are averse to competing with asylum seekers and refugees for the attention and resources of government and charitable agencies as well as the general public. Delav stresses that 'there is some tension with the more established communities, they feel that those who are newly arrived take the position of the more settled ones, there is a competition between them' (Delav, para 226-228).

More specifically, it would seem in Birmingham that host-community animosity is primarily undertaken by members of the Asian community<sup>23</sup>, the friction tied specifically to perceived and/or real conflicting political and religious views with Iraqi Kurds. Erdehan explains, supporting the standpoint of the majority of the other Iraqi Kurds interviewed in Birmingham, that 'we don't like Pakistanis. We hate Saddam, we know what he is doing but Pakistanis, when they are Muslim, they respect Saddam because he is Muslim but they don't know that Saddam doesn't pray. Pakistanis like Saddam because he is anti-American, anti-England. Pakistanis see Kurds as Americans, they don't like us because we don't like

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<sup>23</sup> Iraqi Kurds refer to this group as 'Pakistanis' but it seems it includes all Asians who are Muslim and sometimes other non-Muslim Asians.

Saddam' (Erdehan, para 359). Gernaz exemplifies this phenomenon, remarking that 'a friend of mine, on the Friday before the rally in London organised by the Stop the War Coalition, went to the mosque and prayed. He is the only one in his family to survive the chemical bombing done by Saddam. When he came out of the mosque, they told him that you have to come with us to the rally. My friend told them I want there to be a war, I want Saddam to be removed. An Asian guy said you are not a Muslim. My friend said, I just prayed, why are you accusing me of not being a Muslim? He said, you are not a Muslim because you are not against America and the UK. My friend does his praying from home now' (Gernaz, para 323). Based on my fieldwork, there exists a similar enmity between Iraqi Kurds and Arabs over the same issue. Politics aside, some Iraqi Kurds and individuals of Pakistani origin clash regarding the different ways in which they practice Islam, a phenomenon that foments antagonism between these two groups. A Kurdish asylum caseworker, for instance, remarks that 'Pakistanis are closer to us, we share the same religion and they are a bit familiar with our culture. But we are totally different from them. For me it is easier to integrate with English society rather than with Pakistani society. In order to be friendly with Pakistanis and their family you have to be a very strict Muslim' (Birmingham Kurdish association, para 274).

The tense relationship that Iraqi Kurds have with, in particular, Asians in Birmingham is exacerbated by the relatively high status in UK society that the latter group has in contrast to the lower and lesser role they played in Iraqi society. Indeed, Asians tend to be the landlords for and employers of the Iraqi Kurds in Birmingham whereas in Iraq, it would have been the reverse. Erdehan notes that 'we are used to seeing Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, they came to Iraq to do low level work. Now, we see people from those same nationalities in

this country in a better position than us' (Erdehan, para 334). Moreover, those Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers who secure informal work in Birmingham are most likely to be employed by Asians given the ethno-cultural make-up of the city and in a context where undeclared work most commonly involves exploitation, working long hours for a salary below the minimum wage, resentment amongst the Iraqi Kurdish workers promptly develops towards their Asian employers. Whilst some Iraqi Kurds recognise that informal workers are exploited because of their vulnerable position in the labour market rather than because their employer is Asian, others take a different view. Delav, for instance, notes that 'Pakistani people are selfish. They want to get benefit from you. You should work and work very hard, 12 hours to pay you £15-20. The way they talk to you, brother, we are Muslims, but they use you, that makes a Kurd not recognise them as a Muslim' (Delav, para 366).

Incidentally, the data relating to the interactions between Iraqi Kurds and individuals of Caribbean origin is minimal. There is no unequivocal relationship pattern between these two groups, some of those interviewed stating that these two sets of individuals lead separate and distinct lives, geographically overlapping in the same residential areas but not interacting extensively whilst others argue that they regularly quarrel.

#### Birmingham, a city perceived by some Iraqi Kurds as monocultural

It is important to note that half of the wards where the majority of asylum seekers in Birmingham reside are more than one third Asian<sup>24</sup>. For some Iraqi Kurds, the

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<sup>24</sup> Main wards where asylum seeker population constitutes more than 6% of the total number of residents, according to Birmingham City Council data, May 2002 – Lozells and East Handsworth;



demographic predominance of this ethnic group in their residential area leads them to view Birmingham overall as monocultural rather than multicultural. This in turn directs some of the Iraqi Kurds interviewed to prefer those Birmingham areas that have a lower proportion of Asians or alternatively, they favour very ethnically diverse localities like some of those encountered in London. For instance, Jan, a recently arrived asylum seeker residing in Birmingham, prefers his current locality, Oldbury, which has a relatively low BME population compared to Handsworth 'where there are Pakistanis and Indians' (Jan, para 111-113). Similarly, Erdehan observes that 'there are people from lots of other countries in Handsworth and Bayswater, I don't like it, you don't see one English person, I prefer Edgbaston' (Erdehan, para 197 & 201). Likewise, Kereng notes 'I like Harborne, everything is English. You don't have lots of people from different countries' (Kereng, para 109).

Opportunities for social bridging are still less numerous in monocultural dispersal areas than in multicultural dispersal localities

Despite the existence of host-community hostility in Birmingham directed towards the group under study and notwithstanding the perception of this city, by some Iraqi Kurds, as monocultural, the overall experience of Iraqi Kurds' social bridging with the host-community in Birmingham appears more fruitful than that experienced by their co-ethnics residing in Newcastle.

Firstly, enmity concerning Iraqi Kurds' right to live and claim asylum in the UK is far easier to dismiss when instigated predominantly by members of BME groups.

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Aston; Soho; Handsworth Wood; Nechells; Ladywood; Edgbaston; Perry Barr; Stockland Green; Selly Oak. The first five are one third or more Asian, according to Census 2001 data analysed by Birmingham City Council.

Certainly, the latter are viewed by Iraqi Kurds, regardless of the length of time they or their family have resided in the UK, as foreigners with as much of a right to reside in the UK as Iraqi Kurds. Similar hostility deriving primarily from white British individuals, however, who in contrast, are regarded as UK citizens, *par excellence*, is more difficult to bear. Secondly, antagonism between Iraqi Kurds and individuals of Pakistani origin is less threatening than the outright rejection of Iraqi Kurds' right to live and claim asylum in the UK by host-society members. Indeed, the hostility that exists between Iraqi Kurds and individuals of Pakistani origin is more based upon divergent politico-religious views as well as resentment of the former towards the latter's attainment of a higher socio-economic status in the UK compared to that customarily held by this group in Iraq. Finally, overall, Birmingham is not as demographically dominated by one majority ethno-cultural group as is the case in Newcastle. Rather, as Gernaz notes, reflecting the views of the other Iraqi Kurds interviewed in Birmingham, 'when you go out in this city, you see so many different colours, faces' (Gernaz, para 87 & 368). Indeed, several groups share the symbolic ownership of Birmingham and the divide between the 'outsiders' and the 'insiders' is less clearly and exclusively defined than it is in Newcastle. Gernaz states that in the latter 'every step of the way you need to watch out, you feel more like a stranger, out of the circle than you do in Birmingham' (Gernaz, para 87 & 368). It would appear that Iraqi Kurds consequently feel more empowered and invited to partake in belonging to Birmingham. Indeed, Gernaz, mirroring the perspective of the other Iraqi Kurds interviewed in Birmingham, observes that in this city 'you feel that you can say with the other groups the town that you are living in is my town as well because there are so many different people that nobody can say it's just my town' (Gernaz, para 87 & 368). As a result, the host-community hostility experienced by Iraqi Kurds in Birmingham decreases in significance, as the group under study's

sense of belonging to this city grows. A similar phenomenon has been observed in Islington where 'refugees felt that there were so many different groups and nationalities in the area that difference was not conspicuous, rather it was accepted as the norm' (Ager and Strang, 2004b: 5).

### **5.2.3 Asylum seekers dispersed to small areas versus asylum seekers dispersed to large localities**

It would seem that the dispersal policy impacts more negatively upon the social bridging of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers who are dispersed to small rather than large localities. Certainly, the arrival of new individuals in a locality characterised by a small cohesive population has a greater perceived and real impact on local service provision and community dynamics than it would have in an area typified by a larger and less unified population. A similar trend has been encountered in Sweden where '75% of the hostile events directed towards asylum seekers and refugees were recorded in smaller towns and communities, not in the cities where most refugees live' (Bjorgo, 1995 in Wren, 2003: 71). Remarking upon this phenomenon, a Kurdish businessman notes that 'life is more individualistic in the bigger cities so if you go to the smaller towns, you get more problems because you are more obvious. Small communities are always more together so they are having more phobias of having foreigners around them. But in a bigger town, you don't see that reaction as clearly. There are maybe individual reactions but not a lot' (Kurdish restaurant 2, para 229). Similarly, Hazo notes that 'the dispersal policy will not affect the big cities as much because if the population is five million, if you put ten refugees there, no one can see them. If you put one hundred asylum seekers in a village where the total population is two hundred, you can see them. It affects the other people's lives because the new people



need facilities, services, work. You have two hundred people in the village, you have one hospital, one doctor, two nurses but for three hundred people, you need to have two doctors, four nurses, a bigger hospital' (Hazo, para 52).

#### **5.2.4 Housing in overcrowded, full board hostel accommodation or housing in normally or under-occupied self-catering shared abodes**

It would appear that the dispersal policy impacts more detrimentally upon the social bridging of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers who are housed in full board hostel accommodation rather than self-catering shared housing because the former housing type customarily separates asylum seekers from the host-society. As noted by a local service provider in Newcastle, 'you don't shop in local shops because it's full board. You don't have any money to spend in the local community or to go out or to do anything that might help you integrate' (Manager, NERS One Stop Shop, para 115). In addition, when hostels accommodate large numbers of individuals, asylum seekers become highly conspicuous to host-community members, making the latter feel more fearful of the effect this new population might have on their access to local services and jobs. Certainly, in Newcastle, it has been observed that 'having people living in a hostel in large numbers does damage with the local population who tend to be fearful of large numbers in any one place, it flies in the face of all the efforts for integration' (Manager, NERS One Stop Shop, para 101).

Similarly, it would seem that the dispersal policy impacts more negatively upon the social bridging of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers who reside in overcrowded abodes rather than in under or normally occupied dwellings, a phenomenon customarily experienced in some private-sector dispersal housing,

overcrowding leading to more neighbourhood noise and more household refuse. Overcrowding in asylum seeker properties foments antagonism from host-community members, as remarked upon by an asylum seeker housing lead officer who states that 'in Handsworth, in the Soho area in particular, there is a significant concentration of properties used for asylum seekers and overcrowding occurs there. Over-crowding means more noise, more rubbish and generally puts a strain on certain physical aspects of the services. Because the asylum seekers and refugees living there are perhaps not able to communicate, there is a break down of neighbourly type relations. Also, they are by definition transitory, they are not putting roots down and they are all single. It can be quite a significant blight on the area and it certainly feels like that to some of the settled BME groups in that area' (Housing, City Council 2, para 275). The origin of the overcrowding of some asylum seeker dispersal properties is fully discussed in chapter seven.

### **5.2.5 Dispersal to predominantly deprived wards**

The harmful effect of the dispersal policy on the social bridging of dispersed asylum seekers is increased by this set of individuals being largely dispersed to highly deprived wards where residents experience a significant degree of generalised, untargeted harassment. The trend of sending asylum seekers to deprived wards is a product of the dispersal authorities prioritising housing availability and affordability over and above any other criteria when selecting the dispersal localities. Certainly, according to my fieldwork, almost half of the wards where asylum seekers tend to reside in both Newcastle and Birmingham are amongst the top 10% most deprived wards in England, the asylum seeker wards in the former overall being more deprived than those in the latter (DETR, 2000). This trend has already been identified in previous research, Boswell remarking

that 'asylum seekers have often been placed in hard-to-let properties, in inner-city areas characterised by high levels of unemployment and deprivation' (Boswell, 2001: 25-26). Moreover, Wren, remarking upon the violent incidents that took place in Sighthill in Glasgow, stresses that 'accommodating significant numbers of asylum seekers in areas already experiencing social deprivation constitutes a high risk strategy and should be avoided' (Wren, 2003: 73). Reflecting upon his experience of living in a deprived ward, Arenan observes that the Elswick ward in Newcastle, amongst the top 1% most deprived wards in the UK 'is like Palestine sometimes, for every breath you take a brick is thrown through your window, there is fighting, robbery' (Arenan, para 17 & 53).

#### **5.2.6 Possessing or lacking a work permit**

Interestingly, the negative effect of the dispersal policy on the social bridges of dispersed asylum seekers is heightened when this group possesses a work permit as well as when this set of individuals lacks a formal right to work. Asylum seekers who possess a right to work, that is those who applied for asylum before July 2002, have attracted host-community enmity because this set of individuals is perceived to be stealing jobs. Incidentally, during a period of economic growth, the formal workplace can constitute an effective cross-ethnic meeting site more suited to social bridging than *ad hoc* encounters on streets and in shops, pubs or nightclubs where interactions are most likely to involve antagonism or indifference.

Asylum seekers who lack a formal right to work, that is those who applied for asylum after July 2002, have also been the targets of host-community hostility because, by relying on state benefits, they are viewed as 'scroungers'. Anik,



reflecting upon this trend, remarks that 'when they spend millions of money on asylum seekers, it makes people in the UK angry against asylum seekers. They have every right to be angry because they pay tax and the government spends their tax on asylum seekers. (...) But that's the government's fault, not the asylum seekers' fault. If they let asylum seekers have a job, (...) I can study, I can have a job, I can pay for my house, for anything. I don't need their benefits' (Anik in interview with Gurzi, para 45). Likewise, Ziryan notes 'we can't work, we have to be on benefits and the taxpayers have to hate us and spit at us and say, what the hell are you doing in this country?' (Ziryan, para 107). Alternatively, asylum seekers without a work permit may enter the informal workplace, where the non co-ethnic interactions that occur are usually located within a context of exploitation, between the host-society employer and the asylum-seeking employee. Additionally, their participation in the informal economy can stigmatise this set of individuals, amongst members of the host-community, as criminal and immoral, a phenomenon that constitutes a further obstacle to the process of social bridging. Naso, remarking upon the phenomenon of informal work amongst asylum seekers, notes that 'I know many English people, they are on benefits and they work in the black economy but for asylum seekers it is forbidden, it is taboo. (...) For asylum seekers, according to English people, it's twice as dishonest. Look at the hypocrisy of the system' (Naso, para 211).

### **5.2.7 The significance of the gender, marital status, age and English language proficiency of those who are dispersed**

The impact of the dispersal policy on the social bridges of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers is amplified in some cases and alleviated in others depending

upon the gender, marital status, age and English language proficiency of those who are dispersed.

Indeed, amalgamating gender and marital status, being a dispersed married woman accompanied by her spouse augments the harmful effect of the dispersal policy on their social bridges more than being a dispersed single man or a married man accompanied by his spouse. This phenomenon is tied to the married woman's participation, as examined in chapter four, in a gender-specific division of family chores that limits her spheres of interaction to the home. Single and married men, for whom social connecting in public areas is overall more culturally permissible, engage, when possible, with the host-community in the workplace or socially. Moreover, being a dispersed married woman accompanied by her spouse increases the negative impact of the dispersal policy on their social bridges more than being a dispersed single woman, the latter possessing more opportunities for social bridging. These connections most commonly take place within the confines of the home, the small number of single Iraqi Kurdish asylum seeking women in the UK leading to their placement, by dispersal housing providers, in accommodation with female, asylum seeking non co-ethnics who customarily originate from the Middle East or Africa. Social bridging is difficult on the occasions when Iraqi Kurdish single women share their abode with non-Muslim women. Anik remarks, for instance, that 'I am not a very religious person but at the same time, it's my culture. I can't have a man in the house, I can't walk very freely, wearing anything, it's not acceptable. If you are from the same religion and the same area, even if you have differences still you can understand each other. Somebody coming from Africa, how can I expect her to know what my religion is about and how my society will look at things' (Anik, para 87-89). Single female relationships with host-community members outside

of the home are not always fully accepted by the broader Iraqi Kurdish community and therefore appear to remain relatively minimal. Enwa, for instance, remarks that 'there are a lot of Kurdish people in Birmingham but I don't like to be with them because even if they saw me with you, or a lady like you, they may explain it in a bad way. They want us to be just with the Kurdish community, not to have any relationship, even as a friend, with foreigners. They are observing Kurdish ladies here and it's a bad thing, it's difficult' (para 127 & 147). Significantly, it would seem that Iraqi Kurdish women's amorous relationships with non co-ethnics are more strictly censored by co-ethnics than Iraqi Kurdish men's romantic ties. Enwa explains this trend, stating that 'the main reason is that we are stateless until now as Kurds. The Kurdish men, they are so scared. If they find every woman in Kurdistan has a relationship with a foreigner, maybe after a few years, there are no Kurdish people at all. It's honour. They think that Kurdistan, the geographical area, is their honour. To defend their land and their women is the same' (Enwa, para 127-147).

In turn, being a dispersed married man accompanied by his spouse amplifies the detrimental effect of the dispersal policy on their social bridges more than being a dispersed single man. According to the Iraqi Kurds interviewed, this trend is the product of the latter seemingly being more inclined to interact with host-society members of the opposite sex, given the virtual absence in the UK of unmarried co-ethnic women who originate from the same socio-economic and cultural background as themselves. Importantly, those Iraqi Kurds who possess the most opportunities for social bridging, single and married men accompanied by their spouse, are also most likely to become the targets of host-community hostility. Indeed, this group possesses greater exposure overall to host-society members, the younger male age groups, 29 and below, usually experiencing the most host-



community enmity because they are most easily identifiable by the general public as asylum seekers, given their age and gender, and are also most likely to be perceived as threatening. Supporting the view that those aged 30 and above, especially those aged 40 and above, are less identifiable as asylum seekers, Mezdar notes that 'I have not had any problems with racism myself, perhaps because I am an older man and therefore I don't look like a refugee' (Mezdar, para 33). This phenomenon aside, age does not appear to significantly modify the impact of the dispersal policy on the social bridges of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers. Incidentally, irrespective of the image of asylum seekers and refugees amongst the public, in any society, individuals who combine youth, singleness and masculinity are generally perceived as more threatening than other demographic groups and therefore are more likely to attract enmity and hostility. Finally, possessing a poor standard of English and being able to communicate less effectively with host-society members magnifies the negative effect of the dispersal policy on the social bridges of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers more than having a good standard of English (Audit Commission, 2000c).

In sum, the hypothesis that the dispersal policy exercises a negative impact on the social bridges of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers because this policy sends this set of individuals to areas where the perceptions and attitudes of host-community members towards them are hostile is most accurate:

- a. from 2001 onwards
- b. in small & monocultural dispersal areas
- c. where significant numbers of dispersed asylum seekers are housed in full-board hostel accommodation and/or
- d. in overcrowded dwellings

In contrast, this hypothesis is less accurate:

- a. prior to 2001
- b. in large & multicultural dispersal localities
- c. where considerable numbers of dispersed asylum seekers reside in self-catering shared housing and/or
- d. in under or normally occupied abodes.

It is striking that the impact of the dispersal policy on the social bridges of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers is made worse by this set of individuals being primarily sent to significantly deprived wards. Moreover, asylum seekers' possession as well as lack of a work permit can fuel host-community hostility towards them, thereby stunting their social bridging. Finally, the impact of the dispersal policy on the social bridges of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers is experienced by persons as either more or less harmful, depending on their gender, marital status, age and level of English. Certainly, married women accompanied by their spouse worsen the effect of dispersal more than single women and men; those aged 29 and below aggravate the influence of dispersal more than those aged 30 and above; and those possessing a poor level of English intensify the impact of dispersal more than those who have a good level of English.

It can be observed from this discussion that some of the conditions that foment social bonds discourage the development of social bridges or *vice versa*. For instance, the period from 2001 onwards is most propitious for the social bonding of dispersed asylum seekers but also the most inauspicious for the social bridging of this group. Similarly, a real or perceived large co-ethnic community in a dispersal locality is most favourable for social bonding whilst being most unfavourable for social bridging. Nevertheless, whilst some states of affair work

against the development of either social bonds or social bridges, there are some instances where, given the right conditions, both forms of social connections can grow. A large co-ethnic community in a sizeable multicultural city constitutes a more promising setting for both social bonding and bridging than a large co-ethnic community in a small monocultural town.

As mentioned in chapter four, exceptions exist, demonstrating the difficulty in offering a definitive appraisal of the impact of the dispersal policy. For instance, it has been suggested that the impact of the dispersal policy on social bridging is most negative post-2001, partly as a result of the war in Iraq and the stereotypical belief amongst many host-community members that all Iraqis are like Saddam. However, for a portion of the host-society, the televised reporting of the war in Iraq and the subsequent development of an awareness of Iraqi Kurds' persecution in that country re-established the reputation of this particular group as having genuinely experienced hostile discrimination. Qubat remarks that 'before the war in Iraq, English people didn't believe me when I talked about the bad things that Saddam had done. During and after the war, they were watching what was happening in Iraq on TV and they started to see what Saddam had done and they started to believe me' (Qubat, para 39). Moreover, it has been asserted that the impact of the dispersal policy on social bridging is most detrimental in monocultural compared to multicultural dispersal areas. However, Gernaz, for instance, who has lived in both Newcastle and Birmingham, observes that his favourite home in the UK was in Newcastle because of the friendly neighbourly relationships that developed whilst he resided there (Gernaz, para 267 & 275). He notes that 'there was an old lady, she used to come to visit me, she needed someone to talk to. It started when she was at the front door, she had two bags that she wanted to carry into her house and she couldn't do it. I



went and helped her out. The day after she brought me some cake. There was also a family, they had three teenage boys, they were so nice, coming to my house and watching TV' (Gernaz, para 271).

### **5.3 The impact of the dispersal policy on the social bridging of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish refugees**

#### **5.3.1 Dispersed refugees who move away from their dispersal locality following the receipt of their authorisation to stay in the UK**

As in the case of social bonds, the dispersal policy stops directly affecting the social bridges of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish refugees who relocate following the receipt of their authorisation to remain in the UK. Certainly, dispersed refugees possess more freedom to depart from their dispersal area than dispersed asylum seekers, the former, in contrast to the latter, having the right to move and choose their place of residence without this choice influencing their welfare entitlements. Regrettably, there is no statistical data existing on the residential location of dispersed refugees across the UK and consequently, it is difficult to quantify the proportion of this set of individuals who move away, and by extension the percentage whose social bridges are no longer influenced by the dispersal policy. Nevertheless, it has been possible, thanks to my fieldwork, to demarcate the traits and circumstances of the dispersed refugees who are most and least likely to move following the receipt of their right to remain. These are outlined in detail in chapter four.

Significantly, and similarly to social bonding, the dispersal policy indirectly influences the social bridges of some of the dispersed refugees who move away

from their dispersal area following the receipt of their permission to stay in the UK. Indeed, the social bridges of the dispersed refugees who relocate to another dispersal area, rather than move to the South East of England, a non-dispersal region, are influenced by the dispersal policy in a comparable way to the dispersed refugees who remain in their original dispersal locality.

### **5.3.2 Dispersed refugees who remain in their dispersal locality following the receipt of their permission to stay in the UK**

The impact of the dispersal policy on the social bridges of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish refugees is similar to that of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers

The impact of the dispersal policy on the social bridges of dispersed refugees who remain in their dispersal area is similar, as in the case with social bonds, to the influence the policy had on these same persons when they were asylum seekers. This is partly the case because there is no immediately apparent or visible difference between an asylum seeker and a refugee. As Gernaz notes, reflecting the views of the majority of the Iraqi Kurds interviewed, 'there is no change in the treatment you receive on the street, people don't know that your status has changed from asylum seeker to refugee' (Gernaz, para 367). In the cases where host-community members distinguish between asylum seekers and refugees, the latter status has been so discredited, by the media in particular, that the idea of genuine, deserving refugees actually existing is effectively very rarely encountered. As a result, limited respect from host-community members is generated by asylum claimants becoming recognised by the state as possessing a valid right to asylum and residence in the UK. Certainly, the following changes that Ziryan anticipates when he obtains his refugee status are unlikely to be

realised solely on the basis of his change in immigration status. Ziryan notes that 'once I have my refugee status, when I get married with an English woman, her family won't tell me it's because you want permission to stay in the UK. If I have some friends in town, they can't tell me anymore you are here to work. I can say I don't need you to believe me because the Home Office has already believed me. When you work and you pay tax, they will be happy, they will sit you down next to themselves and give you coffee and say you are British now' (Ziryan, para 179). Finally, as discussed earlier with regards to asylum seekers, the granting of the right to work, to which all refugees are entitled, and resulting formal employment can still foment host-community antagonism as much as the lack of a work permit.

#### Refugees' efforts to be less conspicuous to host-community members

However, over time, the negative impact of the dispersal policy on the social bridges of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees who stay in their dispersal locality is lessened. Indeed, with the passage of time, according to the vast majority of the Iraqi Kurds interviewed, this group tends to increasingly conceal their ethnic origin and immigration status, adjusting their appearance and behaviour to fit the white British norm. As the group becomes more communicative with and less conspicuous to host-community members, the latter's perceptions and attitudes also become less antagonistic and hostile. It is important to emphasise that the occurrence of this phenomenon is primarily tied to the length of time the Iraqi Kurd has been living in the UK rather than his/her immigration status. Moreover, according to my fieldwork, this experience is tied to the Iraqi Kurd's attitude towards Islam, the more publicly devout an individual is, the less s/he will change his/her appearance to match the white British norm.



Certainly, the small proportion of the Iraqi Kurds interviewed who did not practice or adhere to the view that over time, this group tries to be less conspicuous to host-community members were those individuals who identified themselves and were identified by their co-ethnics as the more outwardly devout Muslims amongst my sample. The ways in which Iraqi Kurds tend to conceal their ethnic origin and immigration status over time are now presented.

Whilst an Iraqi Kurd who possesses a good knowledge of English might still be the target of host community enmity, co-ethnics who over time improve their level of spoken English can more easily conceal the fact that they are relatively new to the UK. Instead, they can pass as a member of an established, southern European BME community, a group that currently is less vehemently harassed by members of the host society. The strategy of hiding one's ethnic origin and immigration status is one that has been widely and pro-actively adopted by the vast majority of the Iraqi Kurds interviewed for this research as a means of attenuating host-community hostility. Gernaz remarks that 'the good thing about the way we look is that you can say you are a student from Latin America, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece' (Gernaz, para 31 & 87). Felemez expresses the personal cost of adopting this tactic, noting that 'asylum seekers have a bad reputation, I say that I am a student and then people are sociable, nice. You lie to survive, I don't like doing it but sometimes it is necessary' (Felemez, para 19).

Likewise, over time, the group under study adjusts their appearance and behaviour to match the white British norm, in order to be less obtrusive and noticeable. Indeed, Delav, states 'we don't want to be recognised as Kurds because we are afraid of racism. We want to be like other English people' (Delav, para 73). Consequently, Iraqi Kurdish men tend to shave their moustaches

because 'this will make us closer to the main host community' (Gernaz, para 331). They also change the type of clothes they wear and walk around town in twos and threes rather than in larger groups, as they would habitually in Iraqi Kurdistan (Dijwar, para 79). Erdehan points out that 'when we see each other in the city centre, when we are kissing on the cheek, we say only two times! I also don't hold on to my male friend's hand anymore when we go walking' (Erdehan, para 268). Dijwar remarks that 'even the colour of our face is lighter now, we are not so obvious' (Dijwar, para 79).

It is noteworthy that, in the long term, whilst the outward appearances of Iraqi Kurds might converge towards the white British norm, making them less conspicuous, the cultural values and norms of Iraqi Kurds remain. A Kurdish businessman, remarking upon cross-cultural male-female relationships, notes that 'you can find a Kurdish man with an English woman. But how much do they understand each other? How long can they stay together? It's very confusing, the Kurdish man will remember his own values and his own culture and they will get into clashes and because he hasn't got any idea about his partner's culture and background, it is very difficult for him to cope' (Kurdish restaurant 2, para 155 & 157). Similarly, Erdehan observes, regarding cross-cultural male friendships, that 'English men don't spend a lot of time together, like we do. In my country, I have many male friends, they sleep over at my house. In the UK, if this happens, people think you are a homosexual. This and other differences make it difficult to make friends with English men' (Erdehan, para 268). Finally, Hazo bringing to the fore a further significant difference, suggests that 'you are not interested in your family that much to live with them for the rest of your life, not in the same house. But in my country, I am interested to have the big house, me living upstairs, mum and dad living downstairs' (Hazo, para 86).

It is also striking that Iraqi Kurds' adjustments can be far less constructive to social bridging, the modifications to their social activities at times isolating them from host-community members. For instance, in response to negative experiences, some of the Iraqi Kurds interviewed have decided not to go to pubs and nightclubs. Dijwar, living Newcastle, states that 'I used to go out on weekend nights but I had some problems, people were not nice. You go to a club, you spend money, you expect to have a good time but you are all the time afraid that somebody will say something. Even if you swear back, at the end of the day, the night is spoilt so there is no point in going out. Now, I spend time with friends in our homes, in safety zones. We have been forced to isolate ourselves. Because the social life in this country is mostly in the pubs and clubs and in these two places, there are drunk people and when the people are drunk, they cannot control themselves, they say something, they look at you in a bad way' (Dijwar, para 79 & 83). Similarly, Gernaz in Birmingham observes that 'some of us don't go to pubs. When we go and people start to get drunk then we need to leave because then the racism will come' (Gernaz, para 307).

In conclusion, the hypothesis that the dispersal policy exercises a negative impact on the social bridges of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish refugees is incorrect if applied to those who leave their dispersal locality following the receipt of their permission to stay in the UK. However, the hypothesis is valid for the dispersed refugees who remain in their dispersal locality after they have received their authorisation to remain in the UK, the impact being very similar to that of dispersed asylum seekers. Nevertheless, over time, it would appear that the negative impact of the policy on social bridges decreases somewhat as more Iraqi Kurds conceal their ethnic origin and immigration status as well as adjust



their appearances and behaviour to fit the white British norm, host-community views and behaviour towards this group becoming, in the process, less hostile and antagonistic.

Significantly, several factors that may further influence the effect of dispersal on social bridging in both the short and long term have not been examined in this discussion, primarily because they were beyond the original scope of this thesis. It is important to note, for instance, that the extent to which host-community members feel informed and consulted regarding the life circumstances and arrival of asylum seekers in their area affects their perceptions and attitudes, namely their hostility towards or receptiveness of, the group under study. Overall, it would appear, at least in the early stages of the dispersal programme, that the community work undertaken with members of the receiving society by local and central government was insufficient and in many instances non-existent. The Audit Commission's fieldwork, for example, found that 80% of local authorities failed to notify local residents that asylum seekers were about to be resettled in their neighbourhoods (Audit Commission, 2000c). It is believed that a symptom of this lack of community preparation is the extent of racial harassment recorded in the dispersal localities, over 1,000 reports being submitted to NASS in the first eighteen months of dispersal (Refugee Council, 2004d: 21). Incidentally, since 2003, NASS has devolved key functions from its headquarters in Croydon to the dispersal areas. This process of regionalisation has, according to the Home Office, 'allowed NASS to provide a more effective system of support. The regions are able to advise NASS on local dispersal issues, for example increased tensions against asylum seekers, allowing NASS to take appropriate action, which might include suspending dispersals to a particular area. By responding to the concerns of the regions, NASS can reduce the risk of conflict between asylum

seekers and the dispersal area community' (Home Office, 2005a: 52). Moreover, the policy of replacing asylum seekers' monetary allowance with vouchers in the autumn of 1999, a measure that was actually withdrawn in the autumn of 2002, can affect the potential for social bridging by emphasising this group's belonging to an immigration status that, amongst many host-community members, is associated with illegality and 'scrounging'. Indeed, 'the introduction of vouchers, whilst being the cornerstone of the government's policy on deterring economic migrants, draws significant attention to asylum seekers by making them highly visible in their new community and this contributes to their marginalisation' (Transport and General Workers' Union, Oxfam GB and Refugee Council, 2000: 21-23).

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, the impact of the dispersal policy on dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees' social bridging has been studied. The following hypothesis has been tested: the current UK dispersal policy wields a negative impact on the social bridges of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees because this policy sends this set of individuals to areas where the perceptions and attitudes of host-community members towards them are hostile. Firstly, it has been concluded that the dispersal policy exercises a negative impact on the social bridges of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers because this policy sends this set of individuals to areas where the perceptions and attitudes of host-community members towards them are hostile. This is particularly the case for those asylum seekers who were dispersed from 2001 onwards to small and monocultural dispersal areas where significant numbers of this group are housed in full-board hostel accommodation and/or in overcrowded

dwellings. The hypothesis is less accurate for the asylum seekers who were dispersed prior to 2001 to large and multicultural dispersal localities where considerable numbers of dispersed asylum seekers reside in self-catering shared housing and/or in under or normally occupied abodes. Moreover, the impact of the dispersal policy on the social bridges of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers is made worse by this set of individuals being primarily sent to significantly deprived wards. Furthermore, asylum seekers' possession as well as lack of a work permit can fuel host-community hostility towards them, thereby stunting their social bridging. Finally, the impact of the dispersal policy on the social bridges of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers is experienced by persons as either more or less harmful, depending on their gender, marital status, age and level of English.

It is noteworthy that some of the conditions that foment social bonds discourage the development of social bridges or *vice versa*. For instance, the period from 2001 onwards is most propitious for the social bonding of dispersed asylum seekers but also the most inauspicious for the social bridging of this group. Nevertheless, whilst some states of affair work against the development of either social bonds or social bridges, there are some instances where, given the right conditions, both forms of social connections can grow. A large co-ethnic community in a sizeable multicultural city constitutes a more promising setting for both social bonding and bridging than a large co-ethnic community in a small monocultural town.

Secondly, it would seem that the dispersal policy ceases to exercise any impact on the social bridges of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish refugees who leave their dispersal locality following the receipt of their permission to stay in the UK.



However, the hypothesis is valid for the dispersed refugees who remain in their dispersal locality after they have received their authorisation to remain in the UK, the impact being very similar to that of dispersed asylum seekers. Significantly, over time, it would appear that Iraqi Kurds' defence mechanisms, in response to host-community hostility, improve. This phenomenon can facilitate social bridging. Indeed, Iraqi Kurds who learn to conceal their ethnic origin and immigration status as well as adjust their appearances and behaviour to fit the white British norm positively affect host-community views and behaviour towards them, this latter group becoming more friendly. Conversely, Iraqi Kurds' defence mechanisms can also obstruct social bridging. Certainly, the withdrawal of Iraqi Kurds from non co-ethnic interactions to protect themselves from host-community hostility lessens their potential for social bridging. Thus, the passage of time can be both beneficial and disadvantageous for the development of Iraqi Kurds' social bridging relationships.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **IMPACT OF THE DISPERSAL POLICY ON THE EMPLOYMENT OF IRAQI KURDISH ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES**

In this chapter, the impact of the dispersal policy on dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees' employment is studied. As discussed in chapter two, access to suitable employment constitutes a key marker of and means to integration. It provides financial security, the potential for economic advancement and facilitates the development of social bridges (Ager and Strang, 2004b: 12-13; Ager and Strang, 2004a: 14). Certainly, securing work can foment a greater degree of acceptance from host-country members. An asylum seeker or refugee is heading towards integration when, in addition to developing social bonds and bridges, s/he is also accessing suitable employment.

In the subsequent discussion, the following hypothesis is tested: the contemporary UK dispersal policy exercises a negative impact on the employment of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees because this policy sends this group to localities where suitable employment opportunities are limited. With the intention of evaluating the validity of this statement, an analysis of the nature of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seeker and refugee formal and informal employment is presented. Following this, the impact of the dispersal policy on the employment of dispersed asylum seekers is evaluated. Finally, the impact of the dispersal policy on the employment of dispersed refugees is analysed.

## **6.1 The formal and informal employment of asylum seekers and refugees**

It is important to reiterate, from the outset, that asylum seekers who lodged a claim for asylum prior to 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2002 possess a formal work permit whilst asylum seekers who submitted an application for asylum from 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2002 onwards have no right to work formally. Refugees, however, are all allowed to work. Consequently, employed asylum seekers may be working formally or informally whilst employed refugees most generally work formally.

### **6.1.1 Informal work**

Informal work constitutes 'the paid production and sale of goods or services which are unregistered by, or hidden from the state, for tax and/or benefit purposes, but which are legal in all other respects' (Small Business Council, 2004: 3; Leonard, 1998: 11). With regards to those Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers who work informally, it would seem that they tend to be employees on irregular, short-term contracts, paid below the minimum wage, working more than the normal number of hours in labour intensive, unskilled, low-status jobs with unsocial working conditions and where opportunities for exploitation are pronounced (Leonard, 1998: 6 & 78). Indeed, those interviewed for this research note that informal workers are usually paid £2.50-£3 per hour, working 8-10 hours per day most commonly in food factories, farms, restaurants and take-aways, construction sites and hotels with an average roundtrip travel time to work, for those residing in the West Midlands, for instance, of four hours. Moreover, individuals can be employed temporarily and irregularly, five to seven days a week or part-time, depending on the varying demand for their labour. Phillimore



(2005: 24) has also noted that there is evidence of many asylum seekers currently working in the informal economy.

The informal work that Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers are engaged in can be accompanied by serious risks, the most severe being their personal safety. This is exemplified by the incident in July 2004 where 'three migrant workers who had travelled from Birmingham that morning to pick spring onions, were killed when the van in which they were travelling collided with a train at an unmanned level crossing in Worcestershire' (House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, 2003). An additional hazard for this group, when opting to work informally, is their powerlessness when an employer fails to provide them with their wages. Significantly, the type of informal employment undertaken by Iraqi Kurds tends to be distinct from illegal business activity such as, for instance, human trafficking, drugs and prostitution (Small Business Council, 2004: 4). There is evidence from my fieldwork, nevertheless, that some Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers in Birmingham are involved in the buying and selling of contraband cigarettes, cars and telephones (Kereng, para 47 & 75; Housing, City Council 2, para 101). In sum, the type of informal work that Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers are engaged in tends to lie within 'the peripheral exploitative forms of organised informal employment rather than the core more rewarding autonomous types of such work' (Williams and Windebank, 1998: 87).

Importantly, it appears from my fieldwork that Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers are not financially indebted to their human traffickers given that their relatives customarily pay upfront, up to \$15,000, for the cost of their journey. Instead, according to the Iraqi Kurds interviewed, this group is usually socially and culturally obliged to send remittances to their family residing in their home-

country. These payments constitute a means of reimbursing the debt incurred and constitute, for some, a way of financially supporting their relatives in the medium to long term. As Welan explains, 'ethically you have to send money back home because our families they have spent a lot of money on us. We are not slaves to the human smuggler, like in the Chinese community, but we are slaves to honour, to some moral criteria' (Welan speaking in Polat's interview, para 301).

Basing myself upon my fieldwork, it would seem that Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers are relatively accepting of informal work. This is because of their personal current circumstances, namely their wish and for some, their need, to promptly send remittances to their relatives in their home-country, despite their lack of a work permit. Moreover, as recently arrived immigrants, the practices and the attitudes they possessed in their country of origin remain very much at the forefront of their behaviour and perceptions in their new and significantly different host-country. Consequently, the customary less pronounced stance towards the division between informal and formal work in Iraqi Kurdistan is transferred, at least in the short-term, to their life in their country of reception. Using as a home-country example the regional trade undertaken, despite international sanctions, across national borders, Gernaz explains that 'on both sides of the border are Kurds so, for us, there is just some sort of imaginary border between Iraq and Iran. We do not see it as illegal work' (Gernaz, para 83). Gernaz continues, reflecting the standpoint of the Iraqi Kurds interviewed, observing that 'there is no formal or informal work in Iraq. The only illegal work that you could do is if you are selling drugs' (Gernaz, para 79).

### **6.1.2 Formal work**

As noted earlier, both asylum seekers and refugees may work formally. According to those interviewed for this thesis, Iraqi Kurds 'are willing to start off anywhere' (Regional Development Agency, para 81). They tend to be underemployed in temporary, low-paid, relatively unskilled, manual, unpopular and strenuous jobs, working during the day or at night in restaurants, hotels, factories, warehouse depots and farms. Some of those who possess a good knowledge of the English language are successful in obtaining work as interpreters, translators or caseworkers in agencies or organisations whose client group includes asylum seekers and refugees. Importantly, however, at a national level, refugees possess low levels of economic participation (29%), lower even than ethnic minorities (60%) (Bloch, 2004:7). At a more regional level, it has been estimated that 63% of refugees residing in Birmingham and Solihull, for instance, are unemployed (Phillimore and Goodson et al, 2004). Moreover, according to these authors, the rates of remuneration for the employed refugees are low.

## **6.2 The impact of the dispersal policy on the employment of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers**

### **6.2.1 Asylum seekers dispersed before 2001 compared to asylum seekers dispersed from 2001 onwards**

It would appear that the dispersal policy impacts more negatively upon the employment of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers who are dispersed before 2001 rather than from 2001 onwards. Indeed, the dispersal localities that asylum seekers are sent to prior to 2001 contain few co-ethnics, as discussed in chapter



four, and consequently less opportunities to obtain work via the invaluable assistance and support of fellow Iraqi Kurds. Similarly, the impact of the dispersal policy on the employment of asylum seekers who are sent from 2001 onwards to a dispersal locality is most harmful when they are sent to localities possessing a small rather than a large co-ethnic group. The larger and denser the co-ethnic network, the greater the help it can provide (Jordan and Duvell, 2002) in securing work for one of its members. For instance, the numerous Kurdish restaurants that have opened in the last five years in Birmingham provide an ideal meeting place, where newly arrived and more established co-ethnics can exchange experiences, offer advice and pass on information regarding current work opportunities. Hazo, advocating the benefits of large co-ethnic networks, notes that 'if they dispersed me to Glasgow, when I know that there are 10,000 Kurds in Birmingham, I will try to come to Birmingham because it is going to be much easier for me. If I can't speak English, I can ask them to find me a job somewhere. But if you are 10 people in Glasgow, you cannot find a job so easily' (Hazo, para 60). Bendewar, illustrating the linguistic and communication benefits of residing in proximity to a large co-ethnic group, observes that 'there are a lot of factories in the West Midlands and there are already a few people from my own country there so you don't need to know how to speak English' (Bendewar, para 124). In contrast, in Newcastle, the other case study dispersal site for my research, it would appear that the group under study has less contact with employers because of the smaller size of its co-ethnic network. Moreover, there are far less English-speaking Iraqi Kurds residing in Newcastle, perhaps because those who are fluent in the host-country language have migrated to regions with greater work opportunities.

The harmful impact of the dispersal policy on the employment of asylum seekers dispersed prior to 2001 is altered by the dispersal programme under which these persons are dispersed, the more lenient interim scheme lessening the policy's negative impact and the more strictly implemented NASS scheme worsening the policy's detrimental effect. Certainly, those dispersed under the interim scheme, that is, those asylum claimants who generally lodged their application for asylum before April 2000, experience a more soft form of dispersal. Their preferences to reside near co-ethnics or live in proximity to greater work prospects are more commonly taken into account, without this affecting their entitlement to state-funded housing. Gernaz remarks, for instance, upon the imaginary difficult mental health circumstances of some interim dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers. He notes that in Newcastle he became friends with a doctor who would provide the authorities with 'false' evidence of mental health problems in order to facilitate the transfer of his asylum seeker patients to Birmingham, their preferred dispersal locality because of its employment opportunities (Gernaz, para 59). Gernaz notes, in jest, that 'my doctor friend in Newcastle said that the Kurds have got some sort of illness called Birmingham' (Gernaz, para 59). Similarly, a community services refugee advisor in Newcastle recounts that 'initially, there were a lot of dispersed asylum seekers drifting away from Newcastle. There were some people who arrived, they moved into the housing and the next day they had gone. We subsequently heard that they were receiving support in Birmingham and they were saying that they had been racially harassed' (Housing association, para 59). This phenomenon was also noted by a refugee employment adviser based in Birmingham (Employment, Specialist voluntary agency 2, para 3). Under NASS, the relocation of an asylum seeker to another dispersal locality is rarely granted and is only permitted in instances of extreme and proven poor mental health and/or racial harassment.

Other evidence supports the principle that the interim scheme is more lenient than the NASS programme. Indeed, some asylum seekers who had been dispersed to Newcastle by NASS appear to have been able to transfer their support arrangements over to the interim dispersal scheme, thereby enhancing destination flexibility and subsequently arranging for their move to Birmingham, without their right to state-funded housing being affected. A community services refugee advisor notes, commenting on this strategy, that 'their new support arrangements were provided by a local authority in East London, like an out-of-borough arrangement, with landlords in Birmingham. They were doing this by stretching a point, that even if you had come during the NASS period, you could still get interim support if you were a dependent of someone who was eligible for interim support. It was all eventually exposed' (Housing association, para 55). Importantly, the vast majority of asylum seekers who were dispersed from 2001 onwards are sent to their dispersal locality under the NASS programme and consequently, the discussed distinction that exists prior to 2001 between interim and NASS dispersed asylum seekers no longer exists from 2001 onwards.

### **6.2.2 Regions containing limited labour market opportunities in contrast to areas typified by relatively extensive labour market prospects**

The impact of the dispersal policy on the jobs of asylum seekers is more harmful for those sent to dispersal regions characterised by limited formal and informal employment prospects than for those sent to dispersal areas typified by relatively superior formal and informal employment opportunities. The prevalence of informal work in the West Midlands and the North East, the two dispersal regions



used as case studies in this research, is examined below. Following this, the incidence of formal work in these same regions is discussed.

### Informal work

The West Midlands and the North East vary significantly with regards to the occurrence of informal work prospects, the former seemingly typified by a higher demand for organised informal employment. A Kurdish asylum support officer notes, supporting the view of the Iraqi Kurds interviewed, that 'for asylum seekers looking for informal work, the West Midlands is better than the North East' (Birmingham Kurdish association, para 54 & 68). Similarly, Delav remarks that 'when an asylum seeker arrives in Birmingham, in the first week, someone will come to knock on his door asking him if he wants to work' (Delav, para 23). Gernaz even argues that the recent development of a very large community of Iraqi Kurds in the West Midlands is a fundamental consequence of the informal work opportunities available to this group in this region combined with the dispersal policy's restrictions on residing in London and the rest of the South East (Gernaz, para 59). An employment adviser remarks that 'there's been a Londonisation of the employment situation in the West Midlands' (Employment, Specialist voluntary agency 2, para 23).

Incidentally, the high levels of informal employment in the West Midlands appear to have led to the demand for and eventually the development of an extensive transport network to and from places of work. Indeed, Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers residing in Birmingham benefit from a daily operating mini van transport system, run by informal employers (Kurdish restaurant 2, para 181). According to the Iraqi Kurds interviewed in this city, these vans shuttle the informal workforce

back and forth, from their place of residence to their workplace, departing early in the morning and returning late in the evening. This feature is particularly advantageous for those recently arrived asylum seekers who are seeking informal work first of all because members of this group possess a limited knowledge of the precise location of the factories and fields where labour is sought. As a Kurdish asylum support officer observes, 'the problem is how to find a job. Asian people take them to the job in the mini vans. These people have been here for quite a long time and they have a very good knowledge about the factories' (Birmingham Kurdish association, para 64 & 76). Moreover, it is less common for this set of individuals to possess or have access to their own mode of transport, given the difficulties, as an asylum seeker, in obtaining a driving license and the costs involved in purchasing and maintaining a car.

Informal employment amongst Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers in the North East does take place, although not to the same degree as in the West Midlands. An asylum caseworker observes that 'quite a few Kurdish lads in the North East seem to get jobs in Italian restaurants probably because they look Italian, they have these nice accents. Quite a lot of them are cleaners on night shifts in hotels or factories. Some work at the amusement arcades' (Generalist voluntary agency 1, para 147-151). Naso, illustrating the limited informal employment opportunities in the North East, observes that 'we have a lot of people who want to move down to Birmingham, whilst they are still asylum seekers, to Southampton, to Portsmouth, to the South. They emphasise the lack of job opportunities in Newcastle and the North East' (Naso, para 89). Thus, it would appear that Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers who are dispersed to the West Midlands experience a greater and easier access to informal work than those sent to the North East.

Given the lower levels of employment overall in the North East, a transport system to and from work has not developed. Previously in the North East private bus companies would transport employees to work. However, with the overall slump in demand for labour in the region, employers now rely on owner-drivers (Morris, 1995: 6). This change in the regional transport arrangements is compounded by the difficulty asylum seekers encounter when trying to obtain their own car and secure a driving license. The early starting and late finishing times of this group's potential jobs makes the current absence of suitable transport facilities in the North East a significant impediment to accessing informal employment. Ziryan remarks upon this problematic trend noting that 'once you get a job in Consett, in Washington, in Stanley, outside of Newcastle or even in Tyne Valley, when you have to be there at 6am in the morning, how do I get there at that time? There is no bus. You can't pay for a taxi all the time. If you have no transport, you won't get a job' (Ziryan, para 89).

Importantly, it is debatable whether informal work is actually adequate enough to promote economic integration. Certainly, informal work can provide a source of self-fulfilment and self-esteem, particularly for young single healthy men who are fully able, willing and used to working, who feel ashamed to be in receipt of state benefits and whose relatives in their home-country are expecting remittances. As a Kurdish asylum support officer notes, 'even they pay them very little money but for the first time, when they come here, they are working, they don't care because they are single, they have energy to work' (Birmingham Kurdish association, para 64 & 68). Moreover, working informally can assist individuals with their future search for formal jobs. Indeed, as an informal employee, they are able to develop a pool of co-ethnic and host community acquaintances and contacts in the workplace that can then be used as a network through which they can first



enquire about and eventually obtain a formal job. However, on the other hand, working informally involves a significant degree of risk and can threaten one's personal safety. If the authorities discover that a person has been employed informally, their asylum application might be detrimentally affected. In addition, the experience gained whilst working informally cannot be included on a CV. Whilst some informal jobs are more beneficial for an individual's mental health than prolonged periods of inactivity, other informal work posts can be counter-productive, resulting in greater levels of stress, fatigue and frustration. Moreover, although working informally provides a person with the opportunity to broaden their social network of co-ethnics, it can reduce contact with the host-community by trapping them in co-ethnic networks. Finally, engaging in this form of employment can lead exclusively to the development of exploitative and manipulative relationships. In conclusion, informal work cannot be considered as adequate enough to stimulate the process of economic integration. Consequently the latter can only begin to develop when an individual is granted a work permit and once s/he is able to acquire a formal work post, a state of affairs that might occur whilst a person is an asylum seeker or alternatively once s/he has obtained his/her refugee status.

### Formal work

Birmingham and Newcastle vary with regards to the occurrence of formal work prospects, the former offering, relative to the latter, greater formal employment opportunities. However, it is important to locate this trend within the context of the broader formal employment prospects of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers, the benefits of Birmingham over Newcastle equating in practice to slightly less unemployment in the former compared to the latter rather than full employment in

the former and complete unemployment in the latter. Indeed, overall, formal work opportunities for Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers in both cities are generally low. The absolute conditions of the labour markets in both cities are presented and the limited formal work prospects in Birmingham and the shortage of employment opportunities in Newcastle are noted. Following this, the reasons for Birmingham offering relatively more work opportunities than Newcastle are presented.

*Low formal work opportunities overall for dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers*

It is difficult to gauge from my interviews whether the formal employment prospects for those residing in Birmingham are significantly worse than elsewhere in the UK. However, formal work is definitively perceived by refugees as being scarce in this city primarily because the supply of unskilled, low paid formal workers, seemingly significantly inflated by the presence of a substantial refugee population, appears to outstrip demand. As a Kurdish asylum support officer observes, 'there are too many refugees living here and not enough formal work. The employment agencies in Glasgow, the rest of the Midlands, they have a better choice' (Birmingham Kurdish association, para 54 & 58). Similarly, Erdehan, supporting the perspective of the Iraqi Kurds interviewed in Birmingham, remarks that 'there are many jobs in Birmingham but there are also many young men, including refugees, wanting to work. We can't find a job. When you go to an employment agency here, there are many people registering but there is no job' (Erdehan, para 85 & 339). An additional reason for the scarcity of formal work for Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers in Birmingham seems to be the trend of formal employment posts being replaced by informal job positions. Certainly, the increased supply of informal workers in the region, since the

introduction of dispersal and the removal of asylum seekers' right to work, might be encouraging some employers to reduce their production costs by employing greater proportions of cheap labour. Bendewar illustrates this phenomenon noting that 'I was working legally in a factory in Birmingham making cushions and pillows. Then one day, some people came without a national insurance number asking for work, so the employer said, that's it, you need to make 100 cushions in ten minutes. If you don't do it, I have got other people who will work for less than the minimum wage and you can leave if you want. I didn't want to work illegally, so I left. I haven't found another job yet' (Bendewar, para 112-114).

The lack of formal employment opportunities for Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers in Newcastle appears to reflect a more structural trend, namely the overall shortage of work amongst the indigenous population residing in this locality. As discussed more extensively in the section on informal jobs, the North East's 2001 figure of 5.2% unemployed remains the highest in the country, standing at 2.2 points above the British rate of 3% (Stone and Braidford, 2002: 54). A voluntary agency manager, supporting this argument, observes that 'there is a problem for refugees everywhere in gaining employment but there is high unemployment in the North East so it is even more difficult to get jobs' (Specialist voluntary agency 1, para 65). This assertion is supported by other local service providers interviewed in Newcastle (Manager, NERS One Stop Shop, para 55; Diversity, City Council 3, para 25). Significantly, Williams and Windebank (1998: 93) observe that Black and Minority Ethnic groups and recently arrived immigrants encounter greater obstacles when endeavouring to secure work in areas with high unemployment levels. Indeed, the widespread trend, in this environment, is for a greater proportion of the existing jobs to be filled by the majority white population. Illustrating this point with reference to the formal work prospects of



asylum seekers in Newcastle, a caseworker remarks that 'this is a high unemployment area. If you are competing for jobs with not much English, no recognisable qualifications or skills and limited UK work experience then it is necessarily going to be harder to find a job' (Generalist voluntary agency 1, para 63).

*Relative to the North East, the West Midlands offers greater formal employment prospects for asylum seekers*

It would appear, in relative terms, that the West Midlands offers Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers greater formal employment opportunities than the North East.

Firstly, as discussed in the section on informal work, the West Midlands offers, overall, more jobs than the North East. Thus, if an asylum seeker residing in Birmingham is unable to obtain work in the latter, s/he can broaden his/her search to the other dynamic West Midlands cities without having, necessarily, to move house. Whilst it is not guaranteed that this person will find employment in Evesham or Worcester, for instance, his/her success potential is greater than if s/he were to reside in the North East. Indeed, if an asylum seeker is failing to acquire work in Newcastle, it is less likely that the surrounding cities will be able to offer him/her a job because of the less active nature of the economy in this region. Reflecting this trend, Hazo notes, 'I see that the Kurdish people are interested in the West Midlands because it is a very large space. If you cannot find a job in Birmingham, you can find a job in Coventry, in Dudley, in Stoke-on-Trent, in Solihull' (Hazo, para 68).

Secondly, there exists in Birmingham several specialised privately-owned employment agencies, a number of which are owned and managed by Kurds themselves, that actively and strategically attempt to overcome the employment barriers that asylum seekers face, namely their poor English language proficiency, their lack of UK work experience as well as recognised professional qualifications and skills. A Kurdish asylum support officer describes the approach of one of these agencies, noting that 'they send refugees to a very difficult job. It doesn't require English and the white people don't want to do it, and when the refugees get this job, they accumulate experience and it's easier for them to get another job' (Birmingham Kurdish association, para 326).

Thirdly, the West Midlands seemingly hosts larger numbers of co-ethnic English-speakers than the North East who can help those asylum seekers possessing less knowledge of the English language into employment. In some workplaces, hierarchical structures exist whereby some of the foremen are English-speaking Iraqi Kurds and the employees managed by them are non-English speaking co-ethnics. Indeed, a Kurdish employment advisor, reflecting upon this particular trend, remarks that 'some employers have just one ethnic group as their workforce and a whole arrangement is set up with bilingual foremen who can communicate with the English bosses as well as with the non-English speaking co-ethnic employees. By doing this, there is that level of communication which you wouldn't have in a very multi-ethnic workforce. Some factories, they give jobs just to Kurdish people' (Connexions, para 123 & 135).

It can be observed from this discussion on formal and informal work in Birmingham and Newcastle that the degree of available informal job posts varies more substantially between both case study cities / regions than the extent of

formal work posts. This suggests that the informal work prospects of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers are more affected by the dispersal policy than the formal employment opportunities of this group, the latter being relatively limited, regardless of the dispersal location.

### **6.2.3 Asylum seekers' possession or lack of a work permit**

The harmful impact of the dispersal policy on the employment of dispersed asylum seekers is modified by their ownership or lack of a work permit, the latter making the effect of the policy worse, informal employment, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, providing a lower wage and poorer working conditions than formal employment. Importantly, asylum claimants who lodged their application for asylum before 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2002 are entitled to a work permit whilst those who placed their claim for asylum after 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2002 are forbidden to work until their claim has been processed.

Significantly, networking amongst family, friends and acquaintances is very important for individuals in search of informal work as well as for those recruiting informal employees, the public advertising of this form of employment logically drawing the unwanted attention of the authorities. It has been noted that 'as the need for informal workers grows, the onus is placed on current informal employees to bring in other members of their families or communities' (Leonard, 1998: 138, based on Sassen, 1996). According to Morris (1995: 28-29), it is beneficial for the employer to resort to this method of recruitment particularly because it can avoid employing people with an unknown background who might become 'troublemakers', that is individuals who are likely to encourage other employees to organise themselves and request improved working conditions.



Moreover, this approach draws on established relationships that involve a degree of trust and loyalty, which can be bolstered by offering work as a personal favour to the recruit or to the individual supplying the contact. From an employer's perspective, the greater quality of trust existing amongst the employees taken on via this method can aid with workforce control through the indebtedness the recruit feels towards their informant. Consequently, the negative impact of the dispersal policy on the employment of dispersed asylum seekers who do not possess a work permit is increased for those sent to localities containing a small co-ethnic group.

#### **6.2.4 The significance of the gender, age and English language proficiency of those who are dispersed**

The negative impact of the dispersal policy on the employment of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers is amplified in some cases and diminished in others depending upon the gender, age and level of English of those who are dispersed. Certainly, the harmful impact of the dispersal policy on the employment of asylum seekers is increased by being female and lessened by being male. Women are less susceptible to securing work because, as alluded to in previous chapters, in Iraqi Kurdish culture, it is men who overwhelmingly tend to fulfil the wage earner role whilst women usually take responsibility for the upkeep of the home and childrearing. Amongst dispersed Iraqi Kurdish men, the detrimental effect of the dispersal policy on asylum seeker employment is heightened for those aged 40 and above, and to a lesser extent those aged between 30 and 39. This group encounter the most barriers to employment, their motivation and ability to learn English, an important facilitator for participation in the labour market, as well as convert their existing qualifications and skills or retrain being less pronounced

than for those aged 21-29. Incidentally, the marital status of Iraqi Kurdish men does not influence the impact of the dispersal policy on their employment. Finally, the harmful impact of the dispersal policy on asylum seeker employment is increased for those possessing a poor level of English. This group finds work less easily as well as less independently from their co-ethnic support networks, members of the latter providing, on occasions and, in some cases, at a financial cost, interpretation or assistance in the workplace for those who require it. In contrast, the negative impact of the dispersal policy on asylum seeker employment is reduced for those benefiting from a good level of English. Significantly, in terms of informal employment, those with greater English language proficiency can earn higher wages than their colleagues. Certainly, the former tend to manage groups of co-ethnics on behalf of their employer, selecting new recruits and providing any necessary interpreting and translation services in the workplace.

The negative impact of the dispersal policy on the employment of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers does not seem to augment or decrease according to individuals' home-country education, qualifications and work experience. Indeed, the formal and informal jobs available to asylum seekers are sought primarily through a process of networking rather than via an application procedure based on educational achievement, qualifications and experience. Moreover, given the fundamentally different industrial structures of Iraq and England, it is unlikely for home-country work experience, if it does indeed exist, in similar labour intensive, unskilled, low status jobs to be of significant added value in the course of recruitment. However, there does appear to exist a correlation between an asylum seeker's proficiency in English in the host-country and the level of their home-country education and qualifications, the more schooling they have

received, the more skilled they appear to be at promptly acquiring an adequate level of English language proficiency.

In sum, the impact of the dispersal policy on the employment of Iraqi Kurdish dispersed asylum seekers varies depending firstly, on the employment and co-ethnic group characteristics of the dispersal locality. The scheme under which individuals are dispersed is also significant, as are other related governmental policies, namely the Home Office's position on asylum seekers' access to a work permit. The personal traits of the individuals dispersed are equally important. The hypothesis that the dispersal policy yields a negative impact on the employment of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers because this policy sends this set of individuals to areas where suitable employment prospects are limited is most accurate:

- a. prior to 2001 when few co-ethnics had been sent to the dispersal localities,
- b. for asylum seekers dispersed under the strict NASS programme that excludes the clients' residential preferences
- c. to dispersal localities characterised by overall low formal and informal employment opportunities.

The hypothesis is least accurate:

- a. from 2001 onwards when more co-ethnics were settling in the dispersal areas,
- b. for asylum seekers sent to dispersal localities typified by overall high formal and informal employment prospects and a large co-ethnic community.

The lack of a work permit for those asylum seekers who claimed asylum from July 2002 affects the suitability of the employment they can obtain, informal work being more detrimental for them than formal work. Finally, the impact of the dispersal policy on the employment of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers is



experienced by individuals as either more or less detrimental, depending on their gender, age and level of English. Women suffer the effect of dispersal more than men; those aged 30 and above, but especially those aged 40 and above aggravate the influence of dispersal more than those aged 29 or less; and those possessing a poor level of English intensify the negative impact of dispersal more than those who have a good level of English.

It can be noted from this discussion that the shared conditions that stimulate the social bonds and employment of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers in the dispersal areas are virtually identical. Being male is generally more helpful than being female. Moreover, regarding men specifically, those aged between 21 and 29 and dispersed from 2001 onwards to a locality containing a large co-ethnic support network benefit both from greater social bonding and work opportunities than those aged 30 and above and dispersed prior to 2001 to an area containing a small co-ethnic group. In addition, it would seem that the conditions that stimulate social bridging prospects and employment opportunities are much less similar. For instance, the timing of dispersal is divergent, being sent to a dispersal area preceding 2001 being most conducive to the social bridging of the group under study in the dispersal areas whilst being least propitious for obtaining employment.

### **6.3 The impact of the dispersal policy on the employment of Iraqi Kurdish refugees**

#### **6.3.1 Dispersed refugees who move away from their dispersal locality following the receipt of their authorisation to stay in the UK**

The dispersal policy ceases to affect the employment of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish refugees who leave their dispersal area following the receipt of their permission to remain in the UK. Certainly, dispersed refugees are freer to leave their dispersal locality than dispersed asylum seekers, the former, unlike the latter, possessing the right to move and choose their place of residence without this decision affecting their welfare entitlements. Unfortunately, there is no statistical data available on the residential location of dispersed refugees across the UK and therefore it is impossible to quantify the proportion of this group who relocate, and by extension the percentage whose employment is no longer affected by the dispersal policy. However, it has been possible, on the basis of my fieldwork, to identify the characteristics and circumstances of the dispersed refugees who are most and least likely to move following the receipt of their right to remain. These are outlined in detail in chapter four.

It is necessary to note, as in the case with social bonds and social bridges, that the dispersal policy indirectly impacts upon the employment of some of the dispersed refugees who leave their dispersal locality following the receipt of their permission to remain in the UK. The employment of the dispersed refugees who move to another dispersal locality rather than relocate to the South East of England, a non-dispersal region, are impacted upon by the dispersal policy in a similar way as the dispersed refugees who remain in their initial dispersal area,

albeit less negatively. Indeed, it is likely that the former group chose another dispersal area as their new residence because, amongst other things, of the greater employment prospects available to them there.

### **6.3.2 Dispersed refugees who remain in their dispersal locality following the receipt of their permission to remain in the UK**

One of the principal changes, relevant to employment, that arises on receipt of the refugee status is the universal granting of a formal work permit to this group. As a result, the negative impact of the dispersal policy on the suitable employment of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish refugees who stay in their dispersal area following the authorisation of their stay in the UK is, in theory, reduced, for this set of individuals since all, potentially, have access to the form of employment that eventually leads to economic integration.

A further change that occurs on receipt of the refugee status is the implementation of the 28 day notice period measure which leads new refugees to lose their entitlement, within 28 days theoretically and within seven days in practice, to the financial subsistence supplied to them by the interim or NASS dispersal authorities. Unfortunately, the transfer from benefits provided by the dispersal authorities to mainstream benefits, a process that begins on receipt of the refugee status, tends to take six weeks (Move-on officer, Housing, City Council 1, para 11). In addition, whilst refugees are allowed to work, they cannot acquire employment or Job Seekers Allowance until their application for a national insurance number has been processed, a procedure that also takes approximately six weeks to resolve. Consequently, the negative impact of the dispersal policy on the employment of these refugees is augmented, at least in



the short term, since this set of individuals is confronted with significant financial difficulty and as a result, they customarily have to postpone their search for work until they possess a degree of financial security and stability. The negative impact of the policy is significantly increased if the individual concerned resides in a dispersal locality containing a small co-ethnic community and is moderately amplified if the person concerned lives in a dispersal area possessing a large co-ethnic group, his/her access to the potential financial support of acquaintances in the former being lower than in the latter.

Under this same measure, new refugees also lose their dispersal accommodation, as discussed in chapter seven, being given theoretically a 28-day notice and in reality a seven day grace period within which they have to obtain alternative housing. The harmful impact of the dispersal policy on the employment of refugees is deepened by this measure, at least in the short term, since the lack of a permanent (and personal) abode tends to further delay this group's ability to seek and secure work. Rojdar, reflecting upon the distractions involved in finding suitable accommodation and the difficulty in simultaneously searching for work, remarks that 'the Job Centre pushes refugees to work, and the refugees say we have nowhere to stay, we live in a different place every day, how can we get a job?' (Rojdar, para 267).

Apart from these primarily short-term differences, the impact of the dispersal policy on the employment of this group is indistinguishable from the effect the policy wielded on this set of individuals when they were asylum seekers. Significantly, the extent to which dispersed Iraqi Kurdish refugees become economically integrated is highly debatable. Firstly, significant proportions of refugees are unable to secure formal work and remain unemployed for long

periods of time not because of the constraining effects of the dispersal policy but rather because of the powerful influence of certain employment barriers. These include low levels of English language and literacy, lack of UK work experience, lack of (recognised) qualifications, unfamiliarity with the UK system and employer discrimination (Bloch, 2004: 26). Secondly, for those refugees successful in obtaining work, their jobs are formal but usually of a temporary nature and generally well below the person's level of qualifications and prior professional experience. This type of job places the individual one step closer to economic integration, relative to being employed informally. However, significant progress is required before these individuals can be considered economically integrated.

In sum, the hypothesis that the dispersal policy exercises a negative impact on the employment of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish refugees is incorrect if applied to those who leave their dispersal locality following the receipt of their authorisation to stay in the UK. However, the hypothesis is applicable to the dispersed refugees who settle in their dispersal locality after they have received their permission to stay in the UK, the impact being virtually identical to that of dispersed asylum seekers.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, the impact of the dispersal policy on dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees' employment has been examined. The following hypothesis has been tested: the contemporary UK dispersal policy exercises a negative impact on the employment of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees because this policy sends this group to localities where suitable employment opportunities are limited.

It has been concluded that this hypothesis is most accurate prior to 2001 for asylum seekers dispersed under the strict NASS programme to dispersal localities characterised by overall low formal and informal employment opportunities. This hypothesis is least accurate from 2001 onwards, for asylum seekers sent to dispersal localities typified by overall high formal and informal employment prospects and a large co-ethnic community. Moreover, the lack of a work permit for those asylum seekers who claimed asylum from July 2002 affects the suitability of the employment they can obtain, informal work being more detrimental for them than formal work. Certainly, the former involves a significant degree of risk. It can threaten an individual's personal safety and, for asylum seekers, it can potentially be detrimental to their asylum application. Moreover, the experience gained whilst working informally cannot be included on a CV. Informal work can also cause high levels of stress, fatigue and frustration. In addition, this type of employment can reduce contact with the host-community and can lead exclusively to the development of exploitative and manipulative relationships. Finally, the impact of the dispersal policy on the employment of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers is experienced by individuals as either more or less detrimental, depending on their gender, age and level of English. It is noteworthy that the conditions that stimulate the social bonds and employment of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers in the dispersal areas are virtually identical whilst the set of circumstances that fuel social bridging prospects and employment opportunities are much less similar.

A further conclusion drawn from this chapter is that the dispersal policy fails to exercise any impact on the employment of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish refugees who leave their dispersal locality following the receipt of their authorisation to stay in



the UK. Nevertheless, for those refugees who remain in their dispersal locality, the employment hypothesis is applicable, the impact of the dispersal policy being virtually identical to that of dispersed asylum seekers.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **THE IMPACT OF THE DISPERSAL POLICY ON THE HOUSING OF IRAQI KURDISH ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES**

In this chapter, the impact of the dispersal policy on dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees' housing is studied. As discussed in chapter two, access to adequate housing represents a central marker of integration as well as being a launching pad for the growth of other means to integration (Ager and Strang, 2004b: 12, 14). An asylum seeker or refugee is heading towards integration when, in addition to developing social bonds and bridges and obtaining suitable employment, s/he is also accessing adequate housing.

In this chapter, the following hypothesis is tested: the current UK dispersal policy yields a negative impact on the housing of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees because this policy houses this set of individuals in inadequate dwellings. With the intention of evaluating the validity of this statement, an analysis of the impact of the dispersal policy on the housing of dispersed asylum seekers is presented. Following this, the impact of the dispersal policy on the housing of dispersed refugees is evaluated.

## **7.1 The impact of the dispersal policy on the housing of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers**

### **7.1.1 Living in a shared room in a hostel compared to residing in a room in a shared house or flat**

The impact of the dispersal policy on the housing of asylum seekers is more detrimental for those accommodated, by the dispersal authorities, in a shared room in a hostel than for those housed in a room in a shared dwelling, the latter offering greater overcrowding, threats to personal safety, levels of poverty and mental health problems.

#### **A shared room in a hostel**

One of the forms of accommodation that asylum seekers obtain, on arrival in their dispersal area, is a room in a hostel that they have to share with one or several other individuals (Refugee Council One Stop Shop, para 85). They might occasionally be provided with their own individual room, its relative size, nevertheless, being significantly reduced as a result. The hostel itself tends to be occupied by both men and women, these are asylum seekers who originate from a variety of countries and ethnic groups as well as host-country citizens who are homeless. It would appear, according to my fieldwork, that this particular type of dwelling is unpopular amongst Iraqi Kurds, especially when occupied for several months, partly because it offers individuals limited personal as well as shared space. Indeed, hostels are portrayed by Iraqi Kurds as busy, noisy and cramped places where opportunities for private as well as collective relaxation are scarce. In addition to the existence of standard overcrowding in some of the hostels,



Kereng notes that hostel managers can also be intimidated by residents and, in order to appease them, offer more personal space than has been planned for, at the cost of creating a more cramped living area for the more passive occupants. Indeed, in one of the hostels he resided in, Kereng observed this exact phenomenon and remarks that five people were sharing one bedroom whilst in other bedrooms there was only one person (Kereng, para 33).

Importantly, in this kind of housing, when overcrowding occurs, it is usually accompanied by moderate to high degrees of risk to personal safety, the larger the hostel, the greater the threat to physical security. Indeed, according to the Vice-Chair of NERS, in hostels of 200 bedspaces or more, it seems difficult to effectively protect occupants from the risk and occurrence of theft, vandalism and physical violence, even rape (Vice-Chair, NERS One Stop Shop, para 13). The other local service providers interviewed in both Newcastle and Birmingham also support this view. In response to the known problematic nature of large and crowded hostels, the European Council for Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) recommends that the accommodation of asylum seekers in these types of establishments is avoided wherever possible (ECRE, 2001: 9).

Moreover, hostel accommodation for asylum seekers is usually full board, residents customarily being provided with less financial support in kind, customarily a £10 weekly allowance, than those living in houses or flats. According to interviews with Iraqi Kurds, the meals offered appear to be average on the whole and the eating times rigid. Reflecting the approach adopted by various hostel accommodation providers, one organisation has stated that some 'gave asylum seekers curry on the basis that if they weren't English they must eat curry' (Generalist voluntary agency 1, para 85). Occasionally, following repeated

complaints from asylum seekers, opportunities arise where residents can influence the type of food provided (Cenik, para 39; Community advisor, NERS One Stop Shop, para 57; Private housing company, para 97). Incidentally, ECRE recommends that provisions should be made for residents to prepare their own food, following their religious beliefs and practices (2001: 16).

In addition, as stated earlier, asylum seekers residing in full-board hostel accommodation receive less financial subsistence than those living in self-catering houses or flats, the risk of poverty therefore being most acute in the case of the former. Indeed, in some instances, the monetary allowance is insufficient for the needs of asylum seekers, despite their residence in full board dwellings. Kinyaz, for example, observes that he lacked satisfactory finances to purchase winter clothes (Kinyaz, para 3). Importantly, for those living in full board hostels, a shortage of money can also be detrimental to their mental health. Certainly, according to the interviews with Iraqi Kurds, the dearth of pecuniary resources impedes this group's ability to spend time away from their accommodation, thus compelling them to remain in the company of other hostel residents, who are likely to have concerns and problems of their own. As a caseworker notes, 'you can only walk round the local park so many times, you can't go into town much with no money for a bus pass so you really are in the hostel most of the time' (Refugee Council One Stop Shop, para 85). Clearly, the inadequate level of financial support distributed by local or central agencies to asylum seekers in full board hostels, when occurring over a prolonged period of time, encourages some individuals to seek informal work. It is worthwhile noting that the government's decision to provide asylum seekers residing in full-board hostel accommodation with limited benefits was not intended to push this group into the informal labour

market. Rather, this phenomenon constitutes an unexpected and unintentional consequence of the dispersal programme.

Furthermore, in many cases, the services and facilities offered to the asylum seekers residing in the hostels are inadequate and the ensuing inactivity of the occupants can be significantly detrimental to their mental health. Naso, for instance, describing his experience in a hostel in Sunderland, remarks that he had 'a sense that it was hopeless, I was useless, just stay there, sleep and eat. I felt like a druggie, I didn't feel myself, just in four walls' (Naso, para 193). Certainly, the absence of a communal relaxation area in a hostel in Newcastle appears to have been one of the reasons behind the clashes that occurred there between resident asylum seekers and hostel managers. A London-based service provider, involved in trying to resolve the issue, remarked that 'there were huge numbers of young Iraqi Kurds, 200 people, and they wanted to have somewhere to spend time because there was nothing in the hostel for them. There was a big riot, they started smashing all the windows, some people were arrested and put into prison. Clearly, you could see that the people had been left there, nothing to do, just arrived in the country, no direction, not even something to keep them busy. That was a typical case of unplanned dispersal with no thinking about provision of services and having a proper plan for these people' (Borough Council 1, para 87). Reflecting upon this particular incident, the Chief Executive of NERS emphasised in a newspaper article, that 'the level of support is not there. The hostel residents are totally isolated, not allowed visitors, to consume certain foods, or to smoke. There is no money to socialise or mix with the outside world. They don't have the means to integrate into the community'. Despite this trend, there also exist cases from my fieldwork where hostel managers do organise leisure as well as purposeful activities for asylum seeker residents. For instance,



the manager of one of the privately-run hostels in Birmingham ensures that 'people are registered for the English course that is set up for people in the hostel' (Private housing company, para 19). Also, a seemingly successful 'Afghan night' was recently organised 'with food, a drama group, toys, musicians, a competition with prizes, children's activities. About 500 people turned up. We are organising an Iraqi night at the moment. And we will also be organising an African night' (Private housing company, para 99). It is valuable to note, as in the previous paragraph, that the riots in the Newcastle hostel constituted an unanticipated and inadvertent consequence of an overly harsh aspect of the current UK dispersal programme.

A final, and unpopular, aspect of this type of accommodation, amongst the Iraqi Kurds interviewed, tends to be its relatively old age, poor state of repair and mediocre cleanliness.

#### A room in a shared house or flat

Alternatively, dispersed asylum seekers acquire a room in a shared house or flat, where they reside, most commonly, with other same sex co-ethnics. Families usually obtain access to several rooms in shared housing or instead are offered a dwelling for their sole use. In this type of housing, there continues to exist a risk of overcrowding as well as a potential for threatened personal safety. Nevertheless, living in a room located in a self-catering shared house or flat, where the individual is in receipt of the asylum seeker's full subsistence allowance, offers, overall, the potential for as well as the reality of a more suitable place of residence than a shared room in a full-board hostel. Kereng, for instance, supports this view, justifying his position by observing that 'in a house

you don't see lots of people. It's just space for yourself, you do what you want in your room. In the hostel, there might be five people in one room' (Kereng, para 45). Despite the general trend presented above, there exist instances where significant overcrowding occurs in shared houses or flats. Cenik, for example, recounting her experience of residing in a shared dwelling with her husband, remarks that 'there were six bedrooms with one family per bedroom and we all shared one small living room, one kitchen and two bathrooms (Cenik, para 59 & 63).

Furthermore, according to the interviews with Iraqi Kurds, the quality of the shared houses and flats appears marginally superior to that of the hostels. In some instances, the dwellings tend to be old, dirty and neglected whilst on other occasions the abodes tend to be new, clean and well-maintained. Incidentally, ECRE (2001: 9) advocates that the basis of a national reception system for asylum seekers should be independent housing coupled with community development rather than hostel accommodation.

### **7.1.2 Living in private sector accommodation versus residing in public sector housing**

The impact of the dispersal policy on the housing of asylum seekers is more detrimental for those accommodated, by the dispersal authorities, in the private sector rather than in the public sector, the former type possessing a greater risk of overcrowding as well as poorer dwelling quality than the latter primarily because this sector is less rigorously regulated and monitored. On the occasions when local public housing providers are aware of the poor quality of some of the local private sector accommodation, it is difficult for them to challenge the private

providers. Indeed, the contracts between the latter and NASS are confidential, the exact terms of the agreement remaining thus largely unknown. Some hostel managers, in the private housing sector, take advantage of this relative lack of accountability coupled with the limited knowledge of their residents concerning the minimum living standards they are to expect in the UK. Indeed, Kereng notes that, in one hostel he lived in, 'your friends are not allowed to come to see you because the hostel manager doesn't want someone who has been in the UK one or two years to see what is your life like and tell you your rights' (Kereng, para 39). The complaints procedure, in the private housing sector, can also be relatively ineffective (Boswell, 2001: 34) and asylum seekers, themselves, are customarily reluctant to draw attention to their poor housing conditions since they are concerned that this might affect their asylum claim or alternatively, they feel ashamed of being ungrateful. Furthermore, some asylum seekers lack the necessary language skills to communicate their complaint effectively. Illustrating the situation of asylum seekers residing in unsatisfactory accommodation, Birwaz recounts being placed in a very small room in a hostel, stating that 'when I complained about the size of my room, the hostel manager threatened to withdraw my support altogether' (Birwaz, para 117). Finally, in some dispersal localities, the characteristics of the private dwellings procured for asylum seeker occupation lend themselves more to overcrowding than the traits of the social accommodation. For example, in the case of Birmingham, the City Council primarily houses asylum seekers in small properties, such as flats located in tower blocks, whilst private sector contractors tend to procure larger homes consisting mainly in pre-1919, three to four bedroom Victorian properties intended for use as multiple occupation (Housing, City Council 2, para 49 & 91).



The lower standard of private sector dispersed housing has been documented in other dispersal localities. In Manchester, for instance, 'the quality of NASS commissioned private accommodation inspected by Manchester's Private Sector Housing Team, found high levels of disrepair and unfit properties' (House of Commons Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Select Committee, 14<sup>th</sup> July 2003). This trend has also been noted in other research where private sector NASS procured accommodation is described as sub-standard, with problems of overcrowding and buildings in disrepair, some private landlords exploiting the government's need to disperse asylum seekers promptly (Robinson, 2003a: 137). Garvie (2001), in a survey undertaken between January and March 2000, notes, for example, that 17% of the private dwellings designated for asylum seekers are unfit for human habitation, 28% accommodating more occupants than the number of bed spaces contained with 10% possessing inadequate facilities (Garvie, 2001: 9).

### **7.1.3 Dispersal via NASS in contrast to dispersal via the interim programme**

The impact of the dispersal policy on the housing of asylum seekers is more harmful for those dispersed via the NASS scheme than for those dispersed via the interim programme. Indeed, the former is customarily characterised by a delay in the transfer of asylum seekers from emergency accommodation to their dispersed dwelling as well as being typified as more strict in its allocation of dispersal housing than the interim programme.

Transfer rate of asylum seekers from emergency accommodation to their dispersed dwelling

The pace at which asylum seekers are relocated from their emergency accommodation to their dispersed dwelling varies, depending on the policy under which the transfer is taking place. Importantly, the role of emergency accommodation, under both dispersal regimes, is to provide new asylum claimants who have applied for dispersed state-funded housing with basic shelter. This form of housing is offered for seven to fourteen days in an asylum seeker's current residential area whilst the authorities firstly assess his/her eligibility to support and secondly secure suitable housing for him/her in a dispersal locality. Emergency accommodation consists customarily in a shared room in a full board hostel.

Whilst this particular aspect of the dispersal process is largely unproblematic under the interim programme, in the NASS system, asylum seekers tend to reside several months rather than a number of days in this form of housing. Consequently, not only does the quantity of emergency accommodation required grow in a somewhat unmanageable manner but also new asylum claimants are compelled to live for a prolonged period of time in dwellings and under arrangements that are in effect unintended and therefore unsuitable for medium to long term residence. The suitability of full board hostel accommodation has already been discussed above, the detrimental import of the factors examined growing in significance the longer an individual is compelled to reside in this form of dwelling. In addition, residing in emergency accommodation, unlike living in dispersed full board hostels or self-catering houses or flats, involves less permanence and greater levels of unpredictability. Indeed, dispersal from

emergency accommodation can take place at a day's notice, within a week or six months of residing in the dwelling whereas asylum seekers living in dispersed housing tend to remain in the same dwelling until they receive their final decision from the IND on their asylum case. As a result, it is rare for asylum seekers living in emergency accommodation to undertake the primary aspects of settlement such as registering with a GP or enrolling their children at a local school, the trend being to postpone these activities until dispersal is completed. In support of this argument, a caseworker remarks that emergency accommodation is 'very insecure, you don't know when you're going to be moved. You know that you won't be permanently in the area so it's actually very hard to start setting yourself up if all you are anticipating is moving elsewhere. People hold off' (Refugee Council One Stop Shop, para 51).

Several factors account for the slower than projected transfer of new asylum seekers from their emergency accommodation to their dispersed dwelling. Firstly, NASS procured dispersed housing is itself vacated at a slower rate than anticipated since, until recently, the duration of the asylum application process significantly exceeded the IND's projected time schedule, lasting one year or more rather than the intended six months. Secondly, it would appear that the dispersed dwellings obtained by NASS fail to match the variety of the asylum seeker household sizes, the supply of large family accommodation in particular falling significantly below the demand for this size of dwelling (EA provider, para 33). Indeed, an asylum housing officer remarks that 'there is a shortage of suitable accommodation and difficulty matching, particularly large families. NASS has great anxieties about having over-procured accommodation so they are very very reluctant to procure anymore. NASS ought to be taking steps with the providers to turn some of that single accommodation into large family



accommodation' (Housing, City Council 2, para 35). An additional element contributing to the delayed transfer of some asylum seekers from their emergency accommodation to their dispersed abode is the implementation of Section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 on 8<sup>th</sup> January 2003. This particular aspect of the Act states that the Home Secretary is legally permitted to deny asylum seekers access to apply for housing and financial support from NASS if they fail to claim asylum 'as soon as reasonably practicable' (s.55.1), as long as this does not result in the breach of a person's Convention rights (within the meaning of the Human Rights Act 1998) (Refugee Inter-agency Partnership, 2004: 6). Under this new measure, whilst the outcome of applications for NASS support is processed, asylum claimants reside in emergency accommodation. However, these individuals cannot be dispersed until a decision is made on their entitlement to the welfare support packages and the final verdict on their case might take several months. The manager of an emergency accommodation provider service, for instance, remarks in March 2004 that 'currently, 50% of the asylum seekers living in our emergency accommodation are Section 55 cases, they are waiting to hear from NASS' (EA provider, para 31). Similarly, an asylum housing officer notes in January 2004 that 'over half of the asylum seekers living in emergency accommodation in Birmingham are section 55 cases' (Housing, City Council 2, para 23).

It is noteworthy that the transfer rate of asylum seekers from emergency accommodation to their dispersed dwelling tends to be lower in the dispersal areas than in London and the South East. This is primarily tied to the dispersal of new asylum claimants residing in the latter areas being prioritised over that of recent asylum applicants living in the former localities (Refugee Council One Stop Shop, para 19). It even appears, for reasons of political expediency, that

dispersal from Dover's relatively new, high profile induction centre to other regions of the UK takes precedence over dispersal from London and all other UK areas. Indeed, the manager of an emergency accommodation provider in London remarks that 'Dover gets more coaches to disperse their people than we do. If you don't get the coaches to put people on, you can't disperse. The politicians obviously want to see the Dover induction centre work' (EA provider, para 73). Reflecting upon the impact of this form of dispersal prioritisation on Birmingham, an asylum housing officer states 'all the other emergency accommodation around the country got second take so dispersal from those other areas reduced and the emergency accommodation filled up. You got to 5-6,000 in Birmingham, for example. Then NASS began to procure more emergency accommodation in Birmingham, purchasing it blind, with no clue where people were being put. Once it started doing this, Birmingham became an overspill for the whole country so all the other regions started to send the people that they couldn't accommodate in their emergency accommodation down to Birmingham because of the Dover 'success' or problem' (Housing, City Council 2, para 17).

Extent of freedom to choose place of residence within dispersal locality as well as co-sharers in dispersed housing

Significantly, asylum seekers under the interim policy tend to possess, overall, a greater degree of residential choice than those dispersed by NASS. This appears to be the result of the decentralised management of the former combined with the smaller number of applications for asylum in the UK in addition to the presence of less media hype and public opinion pressure at the time of the policy's introduction. Whilst it is difficult for individuals dispersed via the interim measures to influence the location of their city of residence, many actively participate in

determining the site of their dwelling within the dispersal area as well as take part in electing the persons they share their accommodation with. The involvement of asylum seekers in these decisions can enhance the suitability of their housing to their needs. Indeed, the personal physical security of this group can be enhanced, as efforts are made by local service providers to follow the residential preferences of those dispersed. Furthermore, the opportunity of sharing a dwelling with relatives, friends or acquaintances rather than strangers, albeit usually co-ethnics, can greatly ameliorate the social interactions in the home as well as increase the offering and receiving of practical and emotional support on a daily basis. In contrast, asylum seekers dispersed through NASS are considerably more constrained, often unable to take part in any of the decisions undertaken regarding both the location of their abode in their allocated dispersal area and the individuals with whom they share their housing.

#### **7.1.4 Living in localities with scarce available accommodation in comparison with residing in areas typified by an abundance of available housing**

The impact of the dispersal policy on the housing of asylum seekers is more detrimental for those sent to areas where available accommodation is scarce than for those dispersed to localities where available housing is abundant, asylum seekers in the latter more customarily experiencing overcrowding in their dwelling. Newcastle and Birmingham have been used to illustrate both types of dispersal areas, the former being characterised by the existence of substantial vacant properties and the latter being typified by the presence of limited void abodes.



## The housing traits of Newcastle

As discussed in chapter six, the North East is characterised by relatively low employment prospects for its population as a whole. This phenomenon is largely the product of the collapse of the heavy industries in the 1970s and 1980s and the difficulty in recovering from this structural change in the region's economy. The long-standing limited availability of work, the subsequent increase in migration from the North to the South (Mumford and Power, 2002: 12) combined with a slightly more recent trend towards localised counter-urbanisation (Mumford and Power, 2002: 13) have all led to significant reductions in Newcastle's population from the 1970s onwards (DTZ Pinda Consulting, 2003: 5). Significantly, urban population decline tends to accelerate in cases where there exist high concentrations of social housing, individuals commonly preferring to buy and consequently perceiving the former as a poor dwelling choice (Unpopular Housing Action Team, 1999 in Mumford and Power, 2002: 15). In comparison with the national tenure profile, Newcastle possesses a lower level of owner occupation and private rented accommodation than the rest of England and instead has a higher level of social renting (DTZ Pinda Consulting, 2003: 8).

An assessment of the current situation, in a review of mid-year population estimates for 1998-1999 and 1999-2000, reveals that Newcastle's population is continuing to decline, dropping more quickly than any other English city (Newcastle Community Housing Directorate, 2001 in Mumford and Power, 2002: 79). Certainly, according to Newcastle City Council, 'the population of the city has been in decline for decades, having fallen from over 340,000 in 1951 to 276,000 in 1999, with predictions that it will fall by another 17,000 over the next 20 years' (Newcastle Council, 2000a in Shaw, 2001: 2). Importantly, the majority of the net

loss of population in Newcastle consists now in the movement of individuals from the city to the surrounding areas (DTZ Piedad Consulting, 2003: 6).

The progressive and continued decrease in the population size of Newcastle has led to an over-supply of housing in this city (Mumford and Power, 2002: 106; Manager, Housing, City Council 1, para 11). Indeed, the North East as a whole possesses the highest proportion of low demand housing stock in England, after the North West, 22% of its local authority properties, 16% of its Registered Social Landlords' estate and 2.8% of its privately owned housing falling into this category (Bramley et al, 2000 in Mumford and Power, 2002: 11). The proportion of void properties in Newcastle itself is high (Mumford and Power, 2002: 98), particularly in the Byker ward, a locality dominated by social housing, where in June 2001, 6% of all its housing was vacant (Newcastle City Council, 2001g in Mumford and Power, 2002: 93). Incidentally, and expectedly, Byker tends to accommodate the majority of the asylum seekers dispersed to Newcastle, 2% of its population in 2000-2001 consisting of asylum seekers compared to 0.8% in 1995-1996 (Neighbourhood Manager, 2001 in Mumford and Power, 2002: 95). It is noteworthy that the city's average applicants to lets ratio for social housing is low, consisting in 1.6: 1 (DTZ Piedad Consulting, 2003: 35).

The over-supply of dwellings in Newcastle can be beneficial for those asylum seekers residing in this city. Indeed, the under-occupation of some abodes can occur whereby two or three individuals share a four bedroom house instead of a three bedroom dwelling (Mumford and Power, 2002: 106). Certainly, occupancy levels in the private rented sector in Newcastle are good, only 3% of households experiencing overcrowding, defined as having an occupation level of more than one person per room, and only 20% of those residing in overcrowded conditions

considering their arrangements as problematic (DTZ Pineda Consulting, 2003: 89). This trend appears to be reflected in the interviews, the group under study commonly remarking upon the relatively spacious housing available to them in the North East. Kanyaw, for instance, who resides in Newcastle, was able to move to a larger public sector property along with her husband and two children when she became pregnant with her third child (Kanyaw, para 21). The policies in place for asylum seekers housed by Newcastle City Council reflect the relative over-supply of housing in this city. Indeed, the Council's practice is to offer abodes to this group, where no more than two single people have to share and where families can reside in self-contained properties (Support manager, Housing, City Council 1, para 65).

Importantly, as part of a city-wide regeneration strategy, commenced in January 2000, significant demolition is planned in Newcastle, particularly in the Scotswood, Benwell, Rye Hill, Cruddas Park and Walker localities (Shaw, 2001: 1-3). Whilst the Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers interviewed for this research appear to reside primarily in non-demolition areas, with the exception of an individual living in Elswick ward, it is probable that other asylum seekers inhabit dwellings that are in proximity to these localities. Significantly, areas where demolition has been undertaken or where demolition is scheduled, as well as the surrounding localities, can experience severe degradation, schools and shops closing and the service infrastructure declining (Mumford and Power, 2002: 107). Moreover, once demolition is completed, area repopulation and infrastructure improvement both develop at a relatively slow pace (Mumford and Power, 2002: 108). On the other hand, some asylum seekers' housing might benefit as a result of the regeneration strategy, particularly those who are accommodated in tower blocks near the city centre. Indeed, the latter are experiencing, in an attempt to increase demand for



this type of housing and avoid their costly demolition, rejuvenation projects, with improvements being undertaken in the fields of security, caretaking and social support (Mumford and Power, 2002: 91).

### The housing traits of Birmingham

As examined in chapter six, the West Midlands is typified by comparatively high formal and informal employment opportunities for its population as a whole. It is possible that the work prospects in the region have contributed to reducing population decline in the West Midlands, Birmingham, for instance, experiencing a population change of -3.4 compared to -7.4 in Newcastle between 1982 and 2002 (ONS, 2005)<sup>25</sup>. Certainly, with regards to the Iraqi Kurdish asylum seeker population in the UK, the work opportunities in the West Midlands, in addition to the chances for social bonding and social bridging, appears to have attracted significant numbers of failed asylum applicants, subsistence only, disbenefited and voluntarily dispersed asylum seekers as well as new refugees to Birmingham.

In addition, as mentioned with regards to Newcastle, urban population decline has a propensity to gather speed in instances where there exist significant concentrations of social housing. It might be that the relatively lower proportion of publicly owned dwelling stock in Birmingham (27.99%), compared with Newcastle (34.26%) (ODPM, 2005a)<sup>26</sup> for example, has further contributed to reducing the

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<sup>25</sup> The Office for National Statistics (ONS) generates annual estimates of the resident population as at 30th June each year. The data used here show the change in population estimates between 1982 and 2002. A negative value signifies a decline in the population over the twenty-year period.

<sup>26</sup> The figures presented here provide a snapshot of the dwelling stock by tenure at 1 April 2003. The data were taken from the Housing Investment Programme (HIP) 'Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix' (HSSA) and the 'Housing Revenue Account Business Plan Statistical Appendix' (HRA

scale of the city's population decline. In turn, the relatively less substantial population decline in Birmingham, compared to Newcastle, has led to a lower proportion of difficult to let and low demand local authority and housing association dwellings. As an example, low demand local authority dwellings in Birmingham constitute 29.4% of the total local authority dwelling stock whilst in Newcastle it comprises 52.2%. Similarly, difficult to let local authority dwellings in Birmingham represent 7.6% of the total local authority dwelling stock whereas in Newcastle it makes up 12.9% (ODPM, 2005b)<sup>27</sup>.

The limited over-supply of dwellings in Birmingham can be disadvantageous for asylum seekers living in this city. Overcrowding amongst the population as a whole is more pronounced in Birmingham than it is in Newcastle, for example, with 6.42% of households in the former lacking one additional room in their dwelling and 3.14% missing two rooms compared to 5.9% and 1.85% respectively in the latter city (ONS, 2001b)<sup>28</sup>. Housing overcrowding amongst the Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers in Birmingham is compounded by the relatively high proportion of failed asylum applicants, disbenefited asylum seekers and new refugees in the total co-ethnic population in this city. Understandably, disbenefited asylum seekers as well as those failed asylum applicants who remain in the UK, possessing no entitlement to state-funded housing, financial subsistence or a work permit, are in need of some form of accommodation.

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BPSA) for each year. Ownership of this dataset is with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM).

<sup>27</sup> This dataset provides details on difficult to let and low demand dwellings by tenure and are taken from the Housing Investment Programme (HIP) 'Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix' (HSSA). The figures presented are drawn from a snapshot taken at 1 April 2003. Ownership of this dataset is with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM).

<sup>28</sup> This data on occupancy rating is from one of the set of Univariate tables produced as part of the Census Area Statistics from the 2001 Census. A household is defined as one person living alone, or a group of people (not necessarily related) living at the same address with common housekeeping - that is, sharing either a living room or sitting room or at least one meal a day.

Likewise, new refugees, given the limited time period they possess to acquire housing (28 days), require lodgings.

There exists a correlation between the number of individuals who form part of the groupings discussed above, that is those in need of shelter, and the level of overcrowding in co-ethnic lodgings because Iraqi Kurds, regardless of their own housing arrangements, usually offer accommodation within their dwelling to those community members who are in need of an abode. As a national liaison officer notes 'the government is saying, where are these people? They are not on your rough sleepers headcounts. It's because they are sleeping on people's sofas, on people's floors, possibly in NASS accommodation. These communities are financially already very stretched and yet they are still finding enough to potentially support quite a large population of failed and disbenefited asylum seekers' (LGA, para 23 & 117). The other service providers interviewed in Birmingham and London support this view. Importantly, those portions of the Iraqi Kurdish community whose dwellings will be most overcrowded are those who possess the greatest ties with the groups of individuals described above, namely the co-ethnics who have arrived in the last six years. Anik, exemplifying the effect of the growth in the number of disbenefited asylum seekers on the overcrowding of Iraqi Kurdish housing, notes that 'there wasn't such a problem of overcrowding before because accommodation was provided for everyone, but they changed the regulation. Now, if someone is not applying for asylum at the port, then that's it' (Anik, para 181).

Presenting the three different categories of individuals in need of shelter, an asylum housing officer describes the phenomenon of overcrowding in Birmingham, stating that 'in some streets, there are some medium sized Victorian



terraces with three or four bedrooms and there are supposed to be 5-6 asylum seekers in there. But there may be 15-20 people instead. These are people who have got the right to remain but who have not yet managed to access the housing market yet, people who have been refused asylum, who are illegals and then there are the Section 55 cases' (Housing, City Council 2, para 91). Similarly, Erdehan, reflecting the perspective of the Iraqi Kurds interviewed in Birmingham, note that 'most of the people come from other cities to Birmingham. I was living in a house with two people, each of them they brought two to three friends or relatives and they would sleep there until they found a job. Most of them they found a job and when they did that, they would just stay there. There was about six or seven of us in a three bedroom house' (Erdehan, para 246). Significantly, an asylum housing officer maintains that approximately 50% of Birmingham's NASS subsistence only cases are residing in NASS dispersal accommodation. Indeed, 'this is accommodation that I am contracted to provide to NASS and there is a family there of three and then there is another family in there as subsistence only. It's just not being picked up. NASS doesn't know what it's right and left hand are doing' (Housing, City Council 2, para 155).

Significantly, the proportion of failed asylum applicants and new refugees in the total population of Iraqi Kurds has grown, primarily, as a result of a rise in co-ethnic asylum applications. The UK, for instance, experienced two substantial rises in the number of Iraqi<sup>29</sup> asylum applications, first in 2000 (from 1,800 in 1999 to 7,475 in 2000) and then in 2002 (from 6,705 in 2001 to 14,570 in 2002). These increases led to a growth in the number of failed asylum applicants and refugees as a proportion of the total Iraqi population and subsequent growths in the extent of overcrowding in this community in 2001 and 2003. The share of

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<sup>29</sup> Figures for Iraqis are used as a proxy because there are no figures for Iraqi Kurds.

disbenefitted asylum seekers, that is those whose application for NASS support has been rejected, in the total population of Iraqi Kurds is principally the result of the implementation on 8<sup>th</sup> January 2003 of section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum 2002 Act, a measure discussed previously. Basing myself on the number of Iraqi asylum applications as well as the date of the implementation of section 55, it would appear that the overcrowding of Iraqi Kurdish accommodation has, so far, been most acute in 2003, with carry over into 2004.

#### **7.1.5 Asylum seekers are primarily dispersed to deprived wards**

The detrimental effect of the dispersal policy on the housing of dispersed asylum seekers is increased by this set of individuals being primarily dispersed to highly deprived wards, accommodation situated in wards characterised by high levels of deprivation tending to be in worse condition than those situated in less deprived wards. According to my fieldwork, almost half of the wards where asylum seekers tend to reside in both Newcastle and Birmingham are amongst the top 10% most deprived wards in England, the asylum seeker wards in the former overall being more deprived than those in the latter (DETR, 2000). A similar trend has been observed in Manchester. 'Although it is fair to report that the situation has improved slightly, the pattern of NASS dispersal in Manchester is still highly skewed. To illustrate this point, the three poorer Manchester constituencies, where all the wards are in the top 10% most deprived in the country have 96% of all NASS placements. Over a third of all NASS placements are in just three of the most deprived wards in the city, none of which have any sizeable pre-existing BME communities' (House of Commons Office of the Deputy Prime Minister:

Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Select Committee, 14<sup>th</sup> July 2003).

#### **7.1.6 The significance of the gender and marital status of those who are dispersed**

The detrimental impact of the dispersal policy on the housing of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers is augmented in some instances and lessened in others depending upon the gender, marital status, age and level of English of those who are dispersed. Combining marital status and gender, the negative impact of the dispersal policy on the housing of asylum seekers is increased by being a single male, this group's dwellings being prone to overcrowding, each resident customarily possessing their own network of relatives and friends who might require, at similar or different times, a temporary or permanent shelter. Indeed, it would appear that single Iraqi Kurds constitute a particularly mobile population, individuals moving from one dispersal city to another in search of work, residing for various periods of time in the homes of co-ethnics. Additionally, putting aside the issue of job seeking, a proportion of this community is temporarily or permanently in need of an abode because they have not succeeded in obtaining public or private sector housing as refugees or because they are not or no longer entitled to state-funded accommodation. The harmful impact of the dispersal policy on the housing of asylum seekers is mitigated by being a single female, this group's abodes being less prone to overcrowding because their network of contacts is less extensive, given their smaller number in the total population of newly arrived (since 1998) Iraqi Kurds and their relatively limited social bonding. Additionally, they constitute a less mobile group since they are less likely to be travelling between dispersal areas in search of work, the broader Iraqi Kurdish



community's stance on women's roles and daily tasks obstructing the efforts of those who do wish to be employed. The negative impact of the dispersal policy on the housing of married men and women accompanied by their spouses is divergently modified. For some married men and women with their spouses, the negative impact is increased, overcrowding occurring because there exists a shortage of large family accommodation amongst the dispersal authorities' procured dwellings and as a result, a couple with children, for instance, might be obliged to live in an insufficiently large abode. For other married men and women with their spouses, the harmful impact of the dispersal policy is lessened, overcrowding being limited because as in the case of single women, their network of acquaintances is less broad. Moreover, this group's relatives and friends overlap more than those of single men sharing an abode together because of the former's common past.

In sum, the impact of the dispersal policy on the housing of Iraqi Kurdish dispersed asylum seekers varies depending on the housing characteristics of the dispersal locality, the scheme under which individuals are dispersed, the type of the accommodation provided by the dispersal authorities and the personal traits of the individuals dispersed. The hypothesis that the dispersal policy wields a negative impact on the housing of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers is most accurate for persons who were dispersed via the NASS scheme to dispersal localities typified by scarce available accommodation and who were accommodated by the dispersal authorities in a shared room in a hostel, in the private housing sector. The hypothesis is least accurate for persons who were dispersed via the interim programme, to dispersal areas characterized by abundant available accommodation and who were accommodated by the dispersal authorities in a room in a shared house or flat in the public housing

sector. The impact of the dispersal policy on the housing of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers is made worse by this set of individuals being predominantly sent to significantly deprived wards. Finally, the impact of the dispersal policy on the housing of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers is experienced by persons as either more or less harmful, depending on their gender and marital status, single men worsening the effect of dispersal more than single women and married men/women accompanied by their spouse. Importantly, whilst some asylum seekers obtain relatively more suitable dwellings than others, the quality of the group's abodes in more absolute terms remains low, compared to the population of the UK as a whole.

It can be concluded from this discussion that the conditions that foment access to adequate housing and suitable employment are seemingly opposed. Indeed, being male is more beneficial than being female when searching for work but, when assessing the relative quality of asylum seekers' dispersal abodes, being a man tends to be more detrimental than being a woman. Similarly, it is easier for an asylum seeker to secure an adequate job if s/he resides in a dispersal locality containing a large co-ethnic community but the presence of this sizeable co-ethnic support network is also significantly detrimental to the quality of his/her housing. Finally, whilst high levels of work opportunities in a dispersal locality for the local population as a whole aids asylum seekers in their own search for employment, this phenomenon is disadvantageous for accessing suitable housing, overcrowding tending to occur where job prospects are present. Concerning dispersed asylum seekers' access to suitable housing and social bridges, it is noteworthy that the best and worst housing conditions overall, the former being a room in a self-catering shared house and the latter consisting in a shared room in a full-board hostel, also correspond closely to the most and least

appropriate type and quality of abode for fomenting social bridges. A similar pattern can be observed concerning the level of ward deprivation. Regarding dispersed asylum seekers' access to social bonds and adequate housing, it is necessary to stress that the ideal co-ethnic group size diverges, the former being most developed when asylum seekers reside in localities containing a large co-ethnic network and the latter being most suitable when asylum seekers live in areas typified by a small co-ethnic community.

## **7.2 The impact of the dispersal policy on the housing of Iraqi Kurdish refugees**

### **7.2.1 Dispersed refugees who move away from their dispersal locality following the receipt of their authorisation to stay in the UK**

The dispersal policy's effect on the housing of those who depart from their dispersal locality following the receipt of their authorisation to stay in the UK is non-existent. The reasons for this trend as well as the traits and circumstances of the dispersed refugees who are most and least prone to move following the receipt of their right to remain are presented in chapter six and chapter four. Importantly, the dispersal policy indirectly impacts upon the housing of some of the dispersed refugees who depart from their dispersal area. An explanation of a very similar trend relating to refugee employment is presented in chapter six.



### **7.2.2 Dispersed refugees who remain in their dispersal locality following the receipt of their permission to stay in the UK**

The primary change, pertinent to housing, that occurs on receipt of the refugee status is the universal granting by the dispersal authorities of a 28 day notice period following which new refugees lose their entitlement to dispersed accommodation and financial subsistence and are required to vacate their dispersal dwelling. This grace period was originally 14 days regardless of the outcome of the asylum claim and was amended to 28 days for successful asylum claimants in the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002. Unfortunately, the length of the notice period frequently shortens to seven days. A NASS policy-maker explains that the short duration of the grace period is tied to poor synchronisation between the Asylum Caseworking Directorate and NASS rather than an over-zealous stance towards expelling new refugees from their dispersed accommodation. Indeed, he notes that the Asylum Caseworking Directorate 'will send out their decision letter and that starts the clock on the grace period. They then need to tell us (NASS). We need to record it on our computer and send a termination letter. At the same time, we send a notice to the accommodation provider and they need to process that and give a notice to quit to the person and they can only do that once we've told them and then they've got to give the person at least 7 days to quit. It is all rather tight' (NASS, para 107 & 108).

The harmful impact of the dispersal policy on the housing of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish refugees is modified by the 28-day grace period at least during the early stages of being a refugee. Indeed, those residing in a dispersal locality containing a large co-ethnic community are less negatively affected, because of their ensuing greater opportunities to obtain temporary accommodation with an

acquaintance, than those living in a dispersal area characterised by a small co-ethnic group. Certainly, according to a move-on officer, new refugees are customarily compelled to reside at least temporarily with relatives, friends or in homeless hostels given the short time period they possess to acquire their own accommodation (Housing, City Council 1, para 11 & 81). The other local service providers interviewed in Newcastle and Birmingham also support this claim. Welan, reflecting the perspective of the Iraqi Kurds interviewed, notes that 'I have seen lots of people, when they get their status, NASS or immigration kicks them out from the property and they have nowhere to stay. So they go to live with relatives or friends. What else can you do?' (Welan, para 219). This ensuing refugee homelessness is certainly an unintended consequence of the '28' day notice period measure.

In both of my case study dispersal cities, measures have been introduced locally in an attempt to facilitate the transfer of refugees from the dispersal arrangements to the mainstream system. In Newcastle, for instance, since October 2002, the City Council offers advice and guidance as well as housing for six months to new refugee families. Importantly, however, this service is only for those who were accommodated, as asylum seekers, in council housing contracted out to NASS and who wish to move into a council dwelling (Move-on officer, para 11 & 39). Unfortunately, in Newcastle, for all new single refugees and for those new refugee families who, as asylum seekers, resided in private sector housing, there are no equivalent schemes in place (Specialist voluntary agency 1, para 213). Significantly, part of NERS' official remit, as a One Stop Service, consists in assisting new refugees with their accommodation. However, NERS staff are already overwhelmed with the assistance they are required to provide to asylum seekers (Housing association, para 81). A voluntary agency

manager, summing up the support situation in Newcastle, in October-November 2003, for new refugees notes that 'there is a two tier system where you have refugees who are getting help and you have lots of refugees who don't get any help at all' (Specialist voluntary agency 1, para 215).

With regards to Birmingham, since April 2003, twenty-two local organisations receive funding, from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), via the Supporting People Fund. These agencies provide new refugees with financial support and housing in hostels or shared accommodation in houses or flats for a period of six months (Housing, Specialist voluntary agency 2, para 11 & 3). However, regrettably, occupants residing in this form of housing are failing to acquire alternative dwellings and consequently remain in their current accommodation beyond the six month period (Housing, City Council 2, para 117) within a context where demand for this type of housing continues to increase (Housing, Specialist voluntary agency 2, para 123). Birmingham City Council also assists new refugee families with access to council housing (Connexions, para 3). Yet, their client base represents a small proportion of the total population of individuals recently granted refugee status in the city (Housing, City Council 2, para 115) and moreover, the waiting list for this type of property is augmenting (Housing, Specialist voluntary agency 2, para 37). As an illustration, in 2001, it was estimated that a new refugee would access a flat within one month of applying to the Council whereas in December 2003-January 2004, the waiting period was closer to one, two or even three years, according to the Iraqi Kurds interviewed in Birmingham.

Affordable and readily available non-council housing for new refugees in Birmingham, as in Newcastle, is scarce. Indeed, the cost of renting a property in



the private or housing association sector can exceed the housing benefit allowance, particularly in Birmingham (Birmingham Kurdish association, para 370 & 374). The other local service providers interviewed in Birmingham agree with this assertion. Moreover, private sector landlords often request one month's rent in advance along with a deposit, both demands consisting in financial commitments that new refugees understandably cannot meet. In addition, across both case study cities, there exists a dearth of reliable advice and support and consequently, in the private housing sector, many refugees fail to fully comprehend the process of acquiring a home. Importantly, it would appear that, from 2001 onwards, Birmingham City Council re-opened its Bed & Breakfast accommodation, a form of housing in disuse for thirty years, this phenomenon representing 'a symptom of a growing number of homeless people of whom a significant portion are refugees' (Housing, City Council 2, para 51).

Thus, the hypothesis that the dispersal policy exerts a harmful impact on the housing of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish refugees is incorrect if applied to those who leave their dispersal area following the receipt of their authorisation to stay in the UK. Nevertheless, the hypothesis is applicable to the dispersed refugees who settle in their dispersal area after they have received their permission to stay in the UK, the impact being similar, save for the primarily short-term effect of the 28-day notice period measure, to the influence the policy exercises on this set of individuals when they were asylum seekers.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, the impact of the dispersal policy on dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees' housing has been examined. The following

hypothesis has been tested: the dispersal policy yields a negative impact on the housing of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees because this policy houses this set of individuals in inadequate dwellings.

This hypothesis is most accurate for asylum seekers who were dispersed via the NASS scheme to dispersal localities typified by scarce available accommodation and who were accommodated by the dispersal authorities in a shared room in a hostel, in the private housing sector. This hypothesis is least accurate for asylum seekers who were dispersed via the interim programme, to dispersal areas characterized by abundant available accommodation and who were accommodated by the dispersal authorities in a room in a shared house or flat in the public housing sector. Significantly, the impact of the dispersal policy on the housing of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers is made worse by this group being predominantly sent to significantly deprived wards. Additionally, the impact of the dispersal policy on the housing of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers is experienced by persons as either more or less harmful, depending on their gender and marital status, single men suffering the effect of dispersal more than single women and married men/women accompanied by their spouse.

It is important to stress that the conditions that foment access to adequate housing and suitable employment are seemingly opposed. For instance, it is easier for an asylum seeker to secure an adequate job if s/he resides in a dispersal locality containing a large co-ethnic community but the presence of this sizeable co-ethnic support network is also significantly detrimental to the quality of his/her housing. Concerning dispersed asylum seekers' access to suitable housing and social bridges, it is noteworthy that the best and worst housing conditions overall also correspond closely to the most and least appropriate type

and quality of abode for fomenting social bridges. A similar pattern can be observed concerning the level of ward deprivation. Regarding dispersed asylum seekers' access to social bonds and adequate housing, it is necessary to stress that the ideal co-ethnic group size diverges, social bonds developing most when asylum seekers reside in localities containing a large co-ethnic network and housing being most suitable when asylum seekers live in areas typified by a small co-ethnic community. Importantly, whilst some asylum seekers obtain relatively more suitable dwellings than others, the quality of this group's abodes in more absolute terms remains low, compared to the population of the UK as a whole.

Finally, it is apparent that the dispersal policy fails to exercise any impact on the housing of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish refugees who leave their dispersal locality following the receipt of their authorisation to stay in the UK. Nevertheless, for those refugees who remain in their dispersal locality, the housing hypothesis is pertinent the impact being similar, save for the short-term effect of the 28-day notice period measure, to the influence the policy exercises on dispersed asylum seekers.



## CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis has been to identify the influence of the current UK dispersal policy on asylum seeker and refugee integration. In order to facilitate this study, I have adopted Ager and Strang's (2004a: 5) approach to integration and have chosen to focus upon the effect of this policy on four main components of integration, namely access to employment and housing, on the functional side, and access to co-ethnic social bonds and social bridges, on the relational side. The focal point of this study involved exploring in depth the significantly different integration opportunities encountered by asylum seekers and refugees in their respective dispersal localities. In order to achieve this, I chose to compare the experiences of this group in two contrasting dispersal cities, Newcastle and Birmingham. Significantly, this thesis focuses primarily on the experiences of asylum seekers, the findings regarding refugee circumstances nevertheless enriching this thesis, as they highlight, more powerfully, the situation of asylum seekers. The difficulty of studying the experiences of all asylum seekers and refugees, given the national, ethnic and socio-economic heterogeneity of this group encouraged me to adopt a case study approach. Kurds from Iraq were chosen as a case study because of my existing knowledge of Kurdistan and Iraq. Moreover, Iraqis, a large proportion of whom are Kurds, currently constitute a significant share of the total population of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK and thus, a study focusing on Iraqi Kurds is valuable for policymakers and academic researchers alike.

## **The impact of the current UK dispersal programme on the integration of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers**

Overall, the effect of dispersal on the integration of dispersed asylum seekers is significant, because this policy places this group in a pre-designated locality where they are obliged to remain until they receive a decision on their asylum application from the Immigration and Nationality Directorate in the Home Office. If a dispersed asylum seeker leaves his/her allocated abode of his/her own accord, s/he risks losing his/her entitlement to state-funded housing. It is important to recall that only asylum seekers who are designated by NASS as destitute, following a special assessment procedure, are entitled to subsistence support and/or state-funded dispersed accommodation. The removal of a dispersed asylum seeker's right to state-funded housing following non-compliance with dispersal regulations therefore constitutes a significantly detrimental sanction when implemented.

### Social bonds

Regarding social bonds, I tested the following hypothesis, namely that the contemporary UK dispersal policy exercises a negative impact on the social bonds of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers because this policy sends this group to localities where there are no settled co-ethnics.

I concluded that this hypothesis was largely correct for those asylum seekers who were dispersed prior to 2001. Firstly, from the beginning of the dispersal programme onwards, as explained in chapter one, the process of determining the area to which asylum seekers should be dispersed was primarily based on the

location of available and affordable housing rather than the principle of language clustering. Moreover, with the majority of the Iraqi Kurdish population traditionally residing in London and the South East of England, very few settled co-ethnics were residing in the dispersal localities before 2001. However, from 2000 onwards, Iraqi Kurds constituted a high proportion of the total asylum seeker population in the UK. Furthermore, from 2000 onwards, the number of total dispersals taking place increased significantly, NASS becoming operational on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2000.

Table C Iraqi asylum applications in the UK (excluding dependents) and cumulative number of NASS dispersals (including dependents), 2000-2003.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Percentage of all asylum applications from Iraqis</b>	<b>Cumulative number of NASS dispersals (including dependents)</b>
2000	9.3	13 530
2001	9.4	40 325
2002	17.3	54 045
2003	8.1	49 760

Source: Home Office Asylum statistics (Matz, Hill and Heath, 2001; Heath and Hill, 2002; Heath, Jeffries and Llyod, 2003 and Heath, Jeffries and Purcell, 2004).

Additionally, dispersed asylum seekers were sent to a relatively small number of localities, as mentioned above, leading in effect to this group's concentration in a few areas rather than to their dispersal across the UK. For instance, in 2001, approximately half of asylum seekers supported in NASS accommodation (22,500 of 40,325) were sent to one fifth (12 out of 64) of the designated dispersal areas (Heath and Hill, 2002).

Consequently, Iraqi Kurds slowly began to accumulate in the various dispersal localities and thus, from 2001 onwards, the newly arrived Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers were dispersed to areas containing co-ethnics. As a result, for those asylum seekers dispersed from 2001 onwards, the dispersal policy exercises a



less negative impact on their social bonds, relative to its effect pre-2001. Notwithstanding this improvement, evidence from my interviews suggests that, for asylum seekers dispersed from 2001 onwards, the impact of the dispersal policy on their co-ethnic social bonding can still be harmful, particularly for those who are sent to areas containing a relatively small Iraqi Kurdish group. It is noteworthy that the impact of the dispersal policy on the co-ethnic social bonds of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers is experienced by individuals as either more or less detrimental, depending on their gender, marital status and age.

### Social bridges

Concerning social bridges, I tested the following hypothesis, namely that the current UK dispersal policy yields a negative impact on the social bridges of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers because this policy sends this set of individuals to areas where the perceptions and attitudes of host-community members towards them are hostile.

As observed in chapter one, one of the cluster area criteria set out by the Home Office at the policy formulation stage was the presence of a multi-ethnic population and existing communities with whom the dispersed asylum seekers could link in with. However, as referred to above, in practice, the cluster localities were chosen based on the presence of available and affordable housing in the area. Data from my interviews suggests that this trend detrimentally affects the social bridging of asylum seekers, and thus confirms my second hypothesis. Indeed, areas containing cheap and empty housing are usually localities that are typified by high levels of deprivation and social exclusion, where support services are already over-stretched. Social bridging in these areas, between asylum

seekers and host-community members, is consequently fraught with tensions, local residents feeling threatened by the added competition from this new group for scarce resources. Evidence from my fieldwork indicates that the difficulty in building social bridges in the dispersal localities increased from 2001 onwards. Certainly, from this date forwards, significant numbers of asylum seekers were beginning to reside in the dispersal localities and more host-community members were aware of this group's presence in their neighbourhood. Concomitantly, as discussed earlier, negative media coverage of asylum seekers rose and the nation-wide politicisation of the asylum issue increased. Local organisations in the dispersal areas remained largely unprepared for, and at times, were not informed of the arrival of asylum seekers in their locality. In addition, there was little or no time for local agencies to prepare, and on occasions, even inform deprived and socially excluded host-community members of the dispersal of asylum seekers to their residential area.

Another important finding from my research is that the type of housing occupied by the dispersed asylum seekers affects social bridging. Indeed, hostility between host-community members and asylum seekers tends to be more pronounced when the latter are housed in hostel accommodation and/or reside in overcrowded dwellings. Conversely, antagonism is less marked when asylum seekers live in self-catering abodes and/or reside in under or normally occupied housing. Certainly, accommodating asylum seekers in hostels can lead to very localised concentrations of this group and their highly visible presence in a few neighbouring streets can be intimidating for host-community members. Moreover, overcrowding can lead to more neighbourhood noise and more household refuse. A further essential finding is that the impact of the dispersal policy on the social bridging of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers is experienced by persons as

either more or less harmful, depending on their gender, marital status, age and proficiency in English. Finally, I noted that some of the conditions that foster social bonds discourage the development of social bridges and *vice versa*. For example, the period from 2001 onwards is most favourable for the social bonding of dispersed asylum seekers, because from this time forward concentrations of co-ethnics began to develop in the dispersal localities. However, the very concentration of co-ethnics in the dispersal areas can be detrimental for social bridging. This is especially the case, as in Newcastle, when the localities in question are typified by a deprived and socially excluded monocultural population who possess limited prior experience of living alongside members of Black and Minority Ethnic groups. Nevertheless, there are some instances where, given the right conditions, both forms of social connections can grow. Indeed, the presence of a large co-ethnic community in a sizeable multicultural city, like Birmingham, constitutes a very promising setting for both social bonding and bridging.

### Employment

Turning to employment, I tested the following hypothesis, namely that the contemporary UK dispersal policy exercises a negative impact on the employment of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers because this policy sends this group to localities where suitable employment opportunities are limited. Importantly, the employment of asylum seekers is controversial as it is deliberate government policy since 2001 to prevent this group from working. As noted in chapter one, government policy is not to encourage settlement and integration until permission has been granted to remain in the UK. This is enormously frustrating for asylum seekers as they need to build a new life even though, in the long term, they may wish to return to their home-country.



I have concluded that this third hypothesis is largely correct. Indeed, as remarked upon earlier, asylum seekers have been overwhelmingly dispersed to areas of the UK containing very low-cost, vacant housing and few Black and Minority Ethnic groups. It is important to note, firstly, that the accommodation in these localities is affordable and available precisely because there are limited local employment opportunities. Thus, by prioritising cost-savings on housing, the government has necessarily compromised the job prospects of dispersed asylum seekers. This is not surprising as asylum seekers are not allowed to work. Secondly, the presence of Black and Minority Ethnic groups in the dispersal localities would have enhanced asylum seekers' job prospects. As discussed in chapters five and six, social and therefore professional relationships are more easily developed with members of these communities than with individuals from the white British majority group.

However, from 2001 onwards, the progressive concentration of Iraqi Kurds in the dispersal localities, as noted previously, a wholly unintended consequence of the policy, does increase the informal and, pre-23<sup>rd</sup> July 2002, formal employment opportunities of asylum seekers. Moreover, if work prospects are sufficiently enhanced by the presence of co-ethnics in the dispersal localities, some individuals on receipt of their refugee status choose to remain in their initial dispersal area. Another important finding from my research is that the impact of the dispersal policy on the employment of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers is experienced by individuals as either more or less detrimental, depending on their gender, age and proficiency in English. Finally, it is noteworthy that the conditions that stimulate the social bonds and employment of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers in the dispersal areas are virtually

identical whilst the set of circumstances that fuel social bridging prospects and employment opportunities are much less similar.

### Housing

With reference to housing, I tested the following hypothesis, namely that the dispersal policy yields a negative impact on the housing of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers because this policy houses them in inadequate dwellings.

I have concluded that overall, my housing hypothesis is largely correct. Dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers are primarily sent, as a result of the government's emphasis on costs savings, to the most deprived wards of the UK where the housing is in severe disrepair. The housing circumstances of this group do, nevertheless, vary. Indeed, the dwellings of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers are worst for those who firstly, were dispersed via the NASS scheme to dispersal localities where accommodation choice for asylum seekers was limited and secondly, were accommodated by the dispersal authorities in a shared room in a hostel, in the private housing sector. The abodes of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers are least worst for those who firstly, were dispersed via the interim programme to dispersal areas where housing choice for asylum seekers was abundant and secondly, were accommodated by the dispersal authorities in a room in a shared house or flat in the public housing sector. An additional finding is that the impact of the dispersal policy on the housing of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers is experienced by persons as either more or less harmful, depending on their gender and marital status, single men suffering more from dispersal than single women and married men/women accompanied by their spouse.

Finally, it is important to stress that the conditions that encourage access to adequate housing and suitable employment are seemingly opposed. For example, it is easier for an asylum seeker to secure an adequate job if s/he resides in a dispersal locality containing a large co-ethnic community but the presence of this sizeable co-ethnic support network is also significantly detrimental to the quality of his/her housing. Concerning dispersed asylum seekers' access to suitable housing and social bridges, it is noteworthy that the best and worst housing conditions overall also correspond closely to the most and least appropriate type and quality of accommodation for encouraging social bridges. Regarding dispersed asylum seekers' access to social bonds and adequate housing, it is necessary to stress that the ideal co-ethnic group size diverges, the former being most developed when asylum seekers reside in localities containing a large co-ethnic network and the latter being most suitable when asylum seekers live in areas typified by a small co-ethnic community.

### **The impact of the current UK dispersal programme on the integration of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish refugees**

Overall, the influence of the dispersal policy on the integration of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish refugees varies. Certainly, the dispersal policy ceases to wield any direct effect on the four aspects of integration studied in this thesis for those dispersed refugees who choose to leave their dispersal area following the receipt of their authorisation to remain in the UK. Dispersed refugees are freer to leave their dispersal locality than dispersed asylum seekers, the former, unlike the latter, generally possessing the right to move and choose their place of residence



without this decision affecting their welfare entitlements<sup>30</sup>. Unfortunately, there is no statistical data available on the residential location of dispersed refugees across the UK and therefore it is impossible to quantify the proportion of this group who relocate, and by extension the percentage whose integration is no longer affected by the dispersal policy.

However, on the basis of my fieldwork, I have been able to identify the characteristics and circumstances of the dispersed refugees who are most and least likely to move following the receipt of their right to remain. Indeed, it would seem that those who are most inclined to relocate on receipt of their permission to stay in the UK are dispersed Iraqi Kurdish refugees who are firstly, aged between 21 and 29 years old. Those who are most likely to relocate also tend to have resided, as asylum seekers, for a comparatively short period of time, in a relatively small dispersal locality characterised by low employment opportunities, a small co-ethnic group and a monocultural host-community. Finally, those who are most prone to relocating usually have housing available for them elsewhere in the UK, with relatives or friends, in a locality suitable to their needs. As a result, it is likely that the integration of this group ceases to be affected by the dispersal policy. Conversely, it would appear that those who are most likely to remain in their dispersal locality on receipt of their authorisation to stay in the UK are dispersed Iraqi Kurdish refugees who are firstly, aged 40 and above. Those who most commonly stay in their dispersal area also tend to have accessed formal work as asylum seekers. Furthermore, this group is most likely to have been sent to their dispersal locality from 2001 onwards and have resided, as asylum seekers, for a comparatively long period of time, in a relatively large dispersal

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<sup>30</sup> Since 4<sup>th</sup> January 2005, this has slightly changed with the coming into force of section 11 of the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants, etc.) Act 2004.

area typified by comparatively high employment prospects, a large co-ethnic group and a multicultural host-community. Finally, this group usually have housing available for them in their dispersal area. Consequently, it is likely that the integration of this set of individuals continues to be influenced by the dispersal policy.

Significantly, the dispersal policy indirectly impacts upon the integration of the dispersed refugees who move to another dispersal locality. Their experience, however, is likely to be less negative than those who remain in their dispersal area because it is probable that the former group chose another dispersal area as their new residence because of the greater benefits available to them there, such as employment opportunities or the location of relatives and friends.

Regarding the social bonds of refugees who stay in their dispersal area, I conclude that the main changes that occur on receipt of an individual's permission to remain in the UK do not affect the local co-ethnic social bonds of this group. Consequently, the impact of the dispersal policy on this aspect of integration is identical to the effect the policy has on dispersed asylum seekers. Concerning the social bridges of refugees who remain in their dispersal area, I also conclude that the influence of the dispersal policy on this aspect of integration is very similar to the impact the policy has on dispersed asylum seekers. Nevertheless, over time, it would appear that the negative impact of the policy on social bridges decreases somewhat as more Iraqi Kurds conceal their ethnic origin and immigration status as well as adjust their appearances and behaviour to fit the white British norm, host-community views and behaviour towards this group becoming, in the process, less hostile and antagonistic. Pertaining to the employment of refugees who settle in their dispersal area, I

conclude that the impact of the dispersal policy on this aspect of integration is virtually identical to the influence the policy has on dispersed asylum seekers. With reference to the housing of refugees who remain in their dispersal area, I also conclude that the effect of the dispersal policy on this aspect of integration is similar to the influence the policy has on dispersed asylum seekers, save for the primarily short-term effect of the 28-day notice period measure.

Importantly, this piece of research suggests that the effect of the dispersal policy on the integration of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish refugees is, comparatively, far less pronounced than the effect the policy has on the integration of dispersed Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers. This is partly the product of the greater freedom of movement that refugees are entitled to compared to asylum seekers. In the instances where the policy does affect refugees, it does so in a way that parallels the way it affects asylum seekers. The differences between these two groups might have been more pronounced if the researcher had been able to analyse the longer term effects of the dispersal policy on integration by interviewing refugees who had resided in the UK for more than five years. However, this was not possible to achieve in this piece of research since the current UK dispersal policy was only introduced five years prior to the fieldwork taking place.

### **Critique of Ager and Strang's (2004a) integration framework**

Whilst Ager and Strang's (2004a) framework for analysing integration constitutes a highly comprehensive and useful approach, the findings of this piece of research highlight several gaps that are present in their analysis. Firstly, these authors omit the spatial dimension of integration. Indeed, the conclusions of this thesis indicate that asylum seeker and refugee integration prospects vary

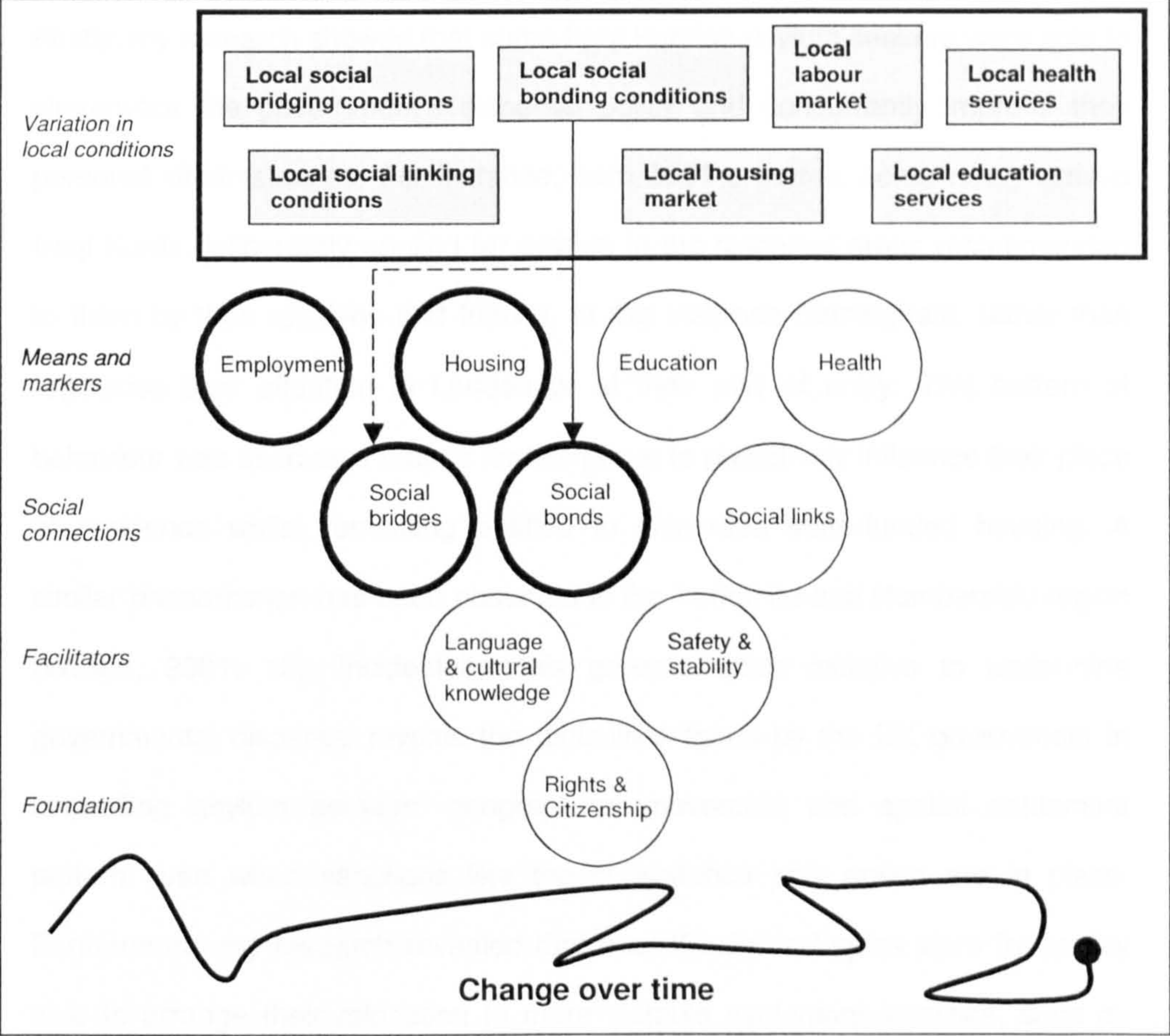


spatially, within a country, depending upon the local characteristics of their dispersal area. Thus, an Iraqi Kurd's chances of bonding and bridging as well as accessing employment and housing vary depending on whether s/he lives in Birmingham or Newcastle, the former offering an overall better integration 'package', for the four variables studied, than the latter. Secondly, Ager and Strang (2004a) fail to include the ambivalent effect of time in their integration framework. Certainly, the results of this study suggest that levels of asylum seeker and refugee integration vary with the passage of time. For instance, the social bonds of Iraqi Kurds appear to improve over time as greater spatial concentrations of co-ethnics develop and deeper co-ethnic relationships grow in the dispersal localities. Over time, Iraqi Kurds' defence mechanisms, in response to host-community hostility, also improve. This phenomenon, however, exercises contradictory effects on social bridging. Thus, Iraqi Kurds' concealment, over time, of their ethnic origin and immigration status as well as the adjusting of their appearance and behaviour to fit their perception of a white British norm positively affects their social bridging. However, the withdrawal, over time, of Iraqi Kurds from many non co-ethnic interactions in order to protect themselves from prior experiences of host-community hostility also lessens their social bridging. Finally, Ager and Strang (2004a) neglect the possibility that success in one sub-area of integration can reduce progress in another. Indeed, the findings of this piece of research reveal that the conditions encouraging Iraqi Kurdish social bonding may discourage the development of this group's social bridges. Similarly, it would appear that the conditions that generate Iraqi Kurds' access to suitable employment dampen the circumstances that engender access to adequate housing for this group. Figure A presents a modified version of Ager and Strang's (2004a) integration framework, incorporating a spatial dimension as well as acknowledging the ambivalent, non-linear effect of the passage of time.



Furthermore, the arrows emphasise how propitious conditions for one element of integration (the full line) can hamper the development of another aspect of integration (the dotted line). The four components focused upon in this thesis are highlighted in bold.

Figure A Refugee integration framework, based on Ager and Strang (2004a)



**Dispersal: a barrier to integration?**

It is important to address the question stated in the title of this thesis: Dispersal - a barrier to integration? In other words, does the UK dispersal policy obstruct the integration of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees? It would appear, on the

basis of my findings, that Iraqi Kurds' potential to integrate as refugees has not irreparably been obstructed by what might appear to be a relatively harsh dispersal policy. Certainly, members of this group, through their strategic actions, have shown that they are far from being passive victims and instead, individually and collectively, participate in determining their life circumstances and outcomes.

Firstly, my research showed that some Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers were able to circumvent the government's dispersal policy and concurrently improve their personal circumstances. For instance, from 2001 onwards, some newly arrived Iraqi Kurds deliberately applied for asylum in the dispersal areas recommended to them by their relatives and friends, in this instance Birmingham, rather than regularise their situation in London or at their port of entry. This pattern of behaviour was used as a means for this group to proactively influence their place of residence whilst remaining entitled to dispersed state-funded housing. A similar phenomenon has been observed in the Yorkshire and Humberside region (Wilson, 2001: 12). Incidentally, this group's active initiative to undermine governmental dispersal reveals the difficulties faced by the UK government in controlling asylum seekers' geographical movement and spatial settlement pattern even when sanctions like the subsistence only option are in place. Furthermore, my research revealed that Iraqi Kurdish refugees were frequently able to arrange their relocation to more suitable settlement localities, such as London, another part of the South East of England or another dispersal locality.

Secondly, according to my findings, some, although not all, Iraqi Kurdish refugees settled in their dispersal localities, having found housing and work, being able to pursue social bonding and engage, to a degree, in social bridging. In other words, some of the dispersal destinations, according to my research,



were not as inauspicious as expected. One of the outcomes of the current UK dispersal policy appears to have been a degree of Iraqi Kurdish clustering in certain dispersal areas, a phenomenon that has made particular localities more attractive, both socially and in terms of employment opportunities, for this co-ethnic group. Interestingly, whilst clustering people who shared a nationality or an ethnicity was a stated objective of the dispersal policy, the model of dispersal adopted in practice made it impossible for the government to intentionally achieve this aim. Indeed, the UK government's focus on cost-effectiveness led it to prioritise, in its selection of dispersal localities, areas containing low-cost vacant housing, rather than areas typified by the presence of Black and Minority Ethnic groups and refugee communities. It would appear, however, that, in some instances, the main concentrations of affordable dispersal accommodation were confined to a relatively small number of areas. Moreover, Iraqi asylum seekers, a significant amount of which tend to be Kurdish, constituted a relatively large proportion of the total asylum seeker population from 2001 onwards and consequently, the likelihood of being dispersed with a group of other co-ethnics or to a locality containing other dispersed co-ethnics was relatively high, in some instances. This likelihood increased, to a degree, with the passage of time, the more dispersals taking place, the more co-ethnics accumulated in some of the dispersal areas. This unintended consequence has also helped fulfil, indirectly and to a degree, another long term objective of dispersal, namely to encourage the settlement of refugees in their dispersal locality. These findings clearly illustrate the unexpected workings of policy implementation and its outcomes. In this instance, two of the more integration-focused aims of the dispersal policy were achieved, albeit only to a degree, via a dispersal model that primarily emphasised cost-effectiveness and host-community appeasement.

My findings demonstrate that the current UK dispersal policy has had a relatively more lasting effect on the spatial distribution of refugees than previous policies, such as that involving the Vietnamese. This has been acknowledged not only by the government but also by the Refugee Council. Lord Richard Best (Director of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust) notes that 'dispersal is showing some signs of working. Those who have been sent to northern cities are prepared to make a go of it and stay there' (HL Deb, 15<sup>th</sup> July 2002, col.968). Similarly, Nick Hardwick, from the Refugee Council, remarked that 'local services are beginning to adapt, communities are beginning to form. We see about 40,000 people a year going through the initial part of the system. To begin with very large numbers of those were coming back to us and saying, "It is dreadful, we cannot cope". That return rate of numbers of people coming back has very significantly reduced' (House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee, 17<sup>th</sup> September 2002). The relative success of this policy is in part the consequence of the phenomenon described above. Furthermore, according to my research, there appears to have been a realisation amongst some Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees that London, although a highly desirable place to live because of its status as one of the most famous capital cities in the world, is not necessarily 'paved with gold'. Through the experience of dispersal, Iraqi Kurds have become familiar with other parts of the UK and recognised, in some instances, that other cities may present them with as good, or even better, opportunities than the traditional areas of co-ethnic concentration. As noted earlier, some asylum seekers have voluntarily migrated to the West Midlands, according to my own findings, as well as to Yorkshire and the Humber, according to Wilson (2001). Furthermore, some of the refugees who moved to London from their dispersal locality following the receipt of their status have returned, or intend to return, to their initial dispersal area or another locality outside of the South East

of England. Several reasons have been put forward, according to my research, for this migratory trend. Outside of London and the South East, accommodation is cheaper and distances between home, friends, relatives and the place of work can be shorter. In addition, with co-ethnic networks having been developed, to a degree, in other parts of the country via dispersal, refugees in London may have other Iraqi Kurds in the regions who can temporarily accommodate them, help them find work and accompany them on their journey of building a new life in their host-country. In any case, many of the Iraqi Kurds are unaccustomed to living in large metropolitan areas like London and may find the relatively smaller cities and towns in other part of the UK similar in size to their place of origin in their home-country.

Thus, in the case of Iraqi Kurds, in the long term, refugees' experience of dispersal and their process of integrating into UK society are not necessarily contradictory phenomena. In fact, in some instances, the dispersal policy has introduced this group to better integration opportunities than they would otherwise have encountered in their voluntarily chosen, traditional areas of concentration, in London and the South East of England.



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## APPENDIX ONE – SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

### Interview guidelines for asylum seekers and refugees

#### **Example: Birmingham**

- Receipt of positive decision – ELR or ILR? Receipt of negative decision – in process of appealing or exhausted right of appeal? When?

#### Process of arrival in Birmingham (includes movements linked to EA and dispersal)

1. How did you get to Birmingham?
2. IF CHOICE – good / bad decision to come to this city?
3. IF FORCED – How did you feel when you found out that you were being sent to Birmingham?
4. Previous knowledge of Birmingham?
5. Explanations given about why you were sent to this city?
6. On arrival in UK, was there a particular city you wanted to go to?
7. Date of arrival in Birmingham

#### Emergency accommodation

1. Did you stay in EA? For how long? Where? Positive – negative side
2. Were you in EA when you received your R status?

### Dispersal

1. What kind of support did you receive as an AS – subs only or subs + accomm?
2. Did you change this support? Why? How long did it take for change of circumstances to come through?

### Experience of other UK cities

1. Lived in other cities in the UK before coming to this city?
2. Reasons for leaving these cities?
3. Comparison between these cities and this one?

### Staying in or leaving Birmingham

1. Plans to move to another city in the UK in the future? Why? Where? When?
2. Why do you want to stay in this city

### Employment

1. Worked as an AS – LR – refused asylum  
Job; hours worked per week; salary; work location; employer; process of finding work – easy / difficult; most enjoy and most dislike about job – satisfaction with current job; voluntary work
2. Birmingham – good job opportunities? Foreign employers, work available that requires less language skills?
3. What kind of job did you expect you would have in the UK?



4. Job in Kurdistan
5. Possibility of having similar job in the UK?
6. Difficulties in finding better work?

Difference between UK – IK system of finding work – application process...

7. Debt owed to smugglers, others?
8. Remittances

### Training courses

1. Courses followed as AS and R adults– Why?
2. Have children gone to school throughout their stay in the UK? What class?  
Positive – negative aspects...

### Housing chronology

1. Number of houses lived in since arriving in Birmingham?  
Shared – number; IK or others; Atmosphere in house; Time spent in each place;  
landlord – council or private, good – bad; quality of housing; process of getting  
housing as R – who helped you; atmosphere in neighbourhood; reasons for  
moving-on – move-on experience.
2. Preferred accommodation out of all those lived in – where would you like to  
live in B'am?
3. Satisfaction with current home
4. What kind of home did you expect to have in the UK?
5. House in Kurdistan?
6. Sleeping on other people's floors?

### Solicitors – legal representative

Difficulty in finding solicitor?

Solicitor in one city – client in another – cost of travel...

### Relationships

1. Friends or relatives in this city, the Region, the UK pre-arrival?
2. Where are your friends in this city from?
3. Where did you first meet them – at work, at pub, at friend's house?
4. What kind of welcome have you received from local residents – white and BMEs (Muslims, Arabs, other Kurds, settled Iraqi Kurds)? Have you observed changes in Birmingham in this welcome since being here? Impact of 9/11 and Iraqi war?
5. What kind of welcome had you expected?
6. Which people / friends do you feel closest to (identity) in Birmingham? Why?
7. Are you satisfied with your relationships / friendships in Birmingham?
8. Family reunion?

### Kurdistan and UK culture

1. Do you have plans to go back to Kurdistan? Why?
2. How do your expectations of English life and culture compare with the reality of it? Thoughts about English culture in contrast with Kurdish culture.
3. What are the main differences between your life here in the UK and your life in Kurdistan?

4. Do you feel that you have changed since being in the UK? How? Why?
5. Tribes in the UK?

#### Kurdish association(s)

1. Are you a member of the Kurdish association? Why?
2. What are the activities of the Kurdish association in Birmingham?
3. Political affiliations?
4. What more could the association offer?
5. Successes and challenges?
6. What are the benefits and disadvantages of having a Kurdish association?  
Why?
7. Do you take part in any other organisations – leisure, political?

#### Treatment of AS and R by the UK

1. In the UK, have you been treated as you expected to be treated? Why?  
Choice, freedom
2. Thoughts on the forced dispersal policy – benefits and drawbacks for AS and R
3. Thoughts on immigration policy / asylum application procedure
4. Thoughts on UK media re AS and R – impact on your view of the British government and the British people?
5. Thoughts re local organisations work with AS and R?



### Difference in experience between AS and LR

1. How different is your experience as an AS v. as an ELR – ILR v. negative decision?
2. Change in relationship with UK people – because you are working, paying tax, you have a right to stay in the UK?
3. Develop more friendships with UK people – because meeting more people through work?

### Integration

Do you feel integrated? Why?

### General re Iraqi Kurds in Birmingham

- Approx number of IK in Birmingham
- Date of first arrival of IK in Birmingham
- Proportion of Iraqi Kurds who stay – leave this city, as AS and R? Why?
- Number of Iraqi Kurds who choose to move to this city? Why?
- Do people come back to Birmingham after trying out life elsewhere in the UK?
  
- Where are you from in Kurdistan?
- How long have you been in the UK?

## Interview guidelines for national policy makers and local service providers

### **Example: Birmingham**

#### Organisation's activities

1. Organisation's activities with AS and LRs in this city
2. Nber of AS and LRs clients – nationalities
3. Length of time doing this work
4. Source of funding
- (5. Successes and challenges)

#### Emergency accommodation

1. History of EA in Birmingham – when did it begin, why?
2. Why are more AS travelling further into the country?
3. Are AS in EA able to register with a GP?
4. Role of Refugee Council in Birmingham – history of its role in the city

#### Implementation of dispersal

1. Starting date of dispersal in region – by stealth, voluntary interim, statutory interim, NASS
2. Why do AS change their support arrangements from subs only to accomm + subs or vice versa?
3. Why do some AS fail to travel to dispersed accomm from EA?

4. Why do some who are dispersed to their accomm then leave NASS accomm?
5. How is decision made about who is dispersed where, criteria? Who decides?
6. Cost of supporting AS and R in Birmingham – reimbursements from central government?

### Dispersal and its impact

1. Has dispersal avoided adding to problems of social exclusion?
2. Has dispersal avoided creating racial tension?
3. Has dispersal linked AS up with existing communities or has it primarily been accommodation-led?
  - a. Language clustering in the city? Positive – negative aspects of clustering?
4. Has dispersal avoided AS migrating back to London?
5. Has the supporting infrastructure for AS and R developed in Birmingham since the beginning of dispersal? Is it equivalent to that available in London?
6. Is the AS accommodation suitable? Hostels with full board – self-catering; flats and housing with self-catering; supported accommodation.

### Assessment of dispersal

1. Pros and cons of forced dispersal policy for city; for AS and LRs
  - a. Are AS concerned about where they are located in the UK?
2. Should dispersal be stopped? Alternatives to dispersal?



3. Possible improvements to dispersal – in general + to promote integration

### Settlement and secondary migration

1. Proportion of AS and LRs who leave – stay in the city
2. Reasons for leaving – staying
3. For those leaving, destination? Why?
4. Voluntary migration of AS and LRs to the city? From where – N or L?
5. Reasons for voluntary migration?
6. Measures in place to minimise secondary migration?

### Integration

1. Why do Home Office argue that integration starts from day one of being an LR rather than from day one in this country?
2. Integration of AS and LRs in this city?
3. Facilitators of integration
4. Barriers of integration
5. Initiatives to promote integration
6. How does experience as AS affect person's ability and willingness to integrate in this city as LR?
  - a. Forced nature of dispersal
  - b. Length of asylum application procedure
  - c. Prior regional experience of BME's
  - d. Absence of right to work for AS
7. Integration of AS and LRs who were dispersed v. those who weren't

## Employment

1. Employment prospects of AS and LRs – comparison with prospects of general population – opportunities in construction?
2. Advantages and difficulties with employment – comparison
  - a. Employers?
  - b. Language
  - c. Qualification equivalence
3. Projects in place to assist AS and LRs with access to satisfactory employment
  - a. Encouragement of entrepreneurship?
  - b. Mainstream support?
4. Voluntary work – benefits and drawbacks; allowed?
5. Impact of AS and R on local labour market?
6. Indebtedness of AS and R to smugglers, others?
7. Presence of more foreign employers in Birmingham – easier for other foreigners to find work?
8. Opportunities for agricultural labour – requires less language skills.
9. Remittances?

## Housing

1. Providers in the city for AS accommodation (see quantitative table)
2. Allocation of housing to AS - procedure
3. Hostel accommodation
4. Homelessness (7-28 day deadline) – move-on period

- a. Need for LR-specific move-on project? Mainstream insufficient?  
Why?
  - b. Projects in place
- 5. Process for LRs of finding housing post move-on: advantages and difficulties
  - a. LR access to mainstream housing – public, RSL, private
  - b. Projects in place
- 6. Frequency of AS and LR moves – reasons
- 7. Impact of AS and R on local housing market – NASS rent v. housing benefit rent

#### Solicitors – legal representation

Difficulty in finding solicitor?

Solicitor in one city and client in another city – cost of travel

#### Welcome

1. Response from local residents – white and BMEs – to AS and LRs - reasons

Awareness training – preparing local, established communities to receive AS and R?

2. Local media – reasons

3. Awareness raising initiatives?



Iraqi Kurdish community in the city

1. Presence of established community pre-dispersal – barrier or facilitator to integration?
2. Particularity of Iraqi Kurds, ways in which they have integrated? Family reunion?
3. Name of any Iraqi Kurdish organisations
4. Date of first arrival of IK AS and R in Birmingham?

**APPENDIX TWO – CHARACTERISTICS OF IRAQI KURDISH SAMPLE**

<b>Alias name</b>	<b>Case study area</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age (years)</b>	<b>Marital status</b>	<b>If married, location of spouse</b>	<b>Number of children in UK</b>	<b>Education (years)</b>	<b>Occupation in Iraq</b>	<b>Level of spoken English</b>
Arenan	Newcastle	Male	30-39	Single	N/A	1	Unspecified	Electrician	Medium
Armanc	Newcastle	Male	30-39	Single	N/A	0	7 to 13	Retail	Good
Besna	Newcastle	Female	30-39	Married	In UK	2	7 to 13	Teacher	Poor
Dijwar	Newcastle	Male	20-29	Single	N/A	0	14 or more	Lawyer	Good
Dozdar	Newcastle	Male	30-39	Single	N/A	0	14 or more	Peshmerga (senior)	Good
Felemez	Newcastle	Male	20-29	Single	N/A	0	14 or more	Doctor	Good
Gerdengaz	Newcastle	Male	40-49	Married	Outside UK	2	Unspecified	Business (chicken farm)	Poor
Kanyaw	Newcastle	Male	30-39	Married	In UK	3	Unspecified	Carpenter	Poor
Kinyaz	Newcastle	Male	30-39	Single	N/A	0	14 or more	Trader	Good
Lane	Newcastle	Female	30-39	Married	In UK	0	7 to 13	Social worker (with women)	Good
Mezdar	Newcastle	Male	40-49	Married	In UK	2	Unspecified	Business (car shop & clothes factory)	Poor
Naso	Newcastle	Male	30-39	Single	N/A	0	14 or more	University lecturer	Good
Nebez	Newcastle	Female	30-39	Married	In UK	0	Unspecified	Military clerk (husband)	Poor
Rengo	Newcastle	Male	30-39	Single	N/A	0	Unspecified	Trader	Medium
Sabar	Newcastle	Male	20-29	Single	N/A	0	7 to 13	Student	Good

Alias name	Case study area	Gender	Age (years)	Marital status	If married, location of spouse	Number of children In UK	Education (years)	Occupation in Iraq	Level of spoken English
Yardil	Newcastle	Male	20-29	Single	N/A	0	Unspecified	Manager (sand factory)	Medium
Yekdil	Newcastle	Male	20-29	Married	Outside UK	0	14 or more	Accountant	Good
Zinar	Newcastle	Male	20-29	Single	N/A	0	Unspecified	Carpenter	Medium
Ziryan	Newcastle	Male	20-29	Single	N/A	0	Unspecified	Retail	Good
Anik	Birmingham	Female	30-39	Single	N/A	0	14 or more	Accountant	Good
Bendewar	Birmingham	Male	40-49	Married	In UK	3	Unspecified	Driver (bus)	Poor
Birwaz	Birmingham	Male	20-29	Single	N/A	0	14 or more	Journalist	Good
Casim	Birmingham	Female	30-39	Married	In UK	3	Unspecified	Manager (shop)	Poor
Cenik	Birmingham	Female	30-39	Married	In UK	0	14 or more	Cashier (bank)	Good
Delav	Birmingham	Male	20-29	Single	N/A	0	14 or more	Business (mechanic shop)	Good
Enwa	Birmingham	Female	40-49	Married	Outside UK	0	14 or more	University lecturer	Good
Erdehan	Birmingham	Male	20-29	Single	N/A	0	7 to 13	Trader	Good
Fodil	Birmingham	Male	20-29	Single	N/A	0	7 to 13	Barber	Poor
Gernaz	Birmingham	Male	30-39	Single	N/A	0	14 or more	Student	Good
Gurzi	Birmingham	Female	40-49	Widowed	N/A	0	7 to 13	Teacher	Poor
Jan	Birmingham	Male	20-29	Single	N/A	0	6 or less	Mechanic	Poor
Kereng	Birmingham	Male	20-29	Single	N/A	0	Unspecified	Trader	Medium



Alias name	Case study area	Gender	Age (years)	Marital status	If married, location of spouse	Number of children in UK	Education (years)	Occupation In Iraq	Level of spoken English
Mokan	Birmingham	Male	20-29	Married	Outside UK	0	7 to 13	Shoe-maker	Medium
Polat	Birmingham	Male	30-39	Single	N/A	0	14 or more	Journalist	Medium
Qubat	Birmingham	Male	20-29	Single	N/A	0	Unspecified	Manager (shop)	Good
Rojdar	Birmingham	Male	30-39	Single	N/A	0	7 to 13	Nurse	Good
Warzan	Birmingham	Female	30-39	Married	In UK	3	Unspecified	Manager (shop)	Poor
Welan	Birmingham	Male	20-29	Single	N/A	0	14 or more	Teacher	Medium

## APPENDIX THREE – LIST OF ORGANISATIONS INTERVIEWED

Borough Council 1  
Borough Council 2  
City Council 1, Housing, Manager  
City Council 1, Housing, Move-on officer  
City Council 1, Housing, Support manager  
City Council 1, Housing, Support worker  
City Council 2, Housing  
City Council 3, Diversity  
Connexions  
EA provider  
ESOL provider institute  
Generalist voluntary agency 1  
Generalist voluntary agency 2  
Home Office Integration Unit  
Housing association  
Kurdish association 1, London  
Kurdish association 2, London  
Kurdish association 3, London  
Kurdish association 4, Birmingham  
Kurdish restaurant 1 OR Salahaddin  
Kurdish restaurant 2  
LGA  
NASS  
NERS One Stop Shop, Chief Executive  
NERS One Stop Shop, Community advisor  
NERS One Stop Shop, Manager  
NERS One Stop Shop, Vice-Chair  
Private housing company  
Refugee Council, Community Officer  
Refugee Council, Head of Policy  
Refugee Council, One Stop Shop  
Regional Development Agency  
Specialist voluntary agency 1  
Specialist voluntary agency 2, Employment  
Specialist voluntary agency 2, Housing  
Specialist voluntary agency 3