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BUILDING A SAFE, JUST
AND TOLERANT SOCIETY

Skills audit of refugees

Rachel Kirk

Home Office Online Report 37/04

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors, not necessarily those of the Home Office (nor do they reflect Government policy).

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the following for their time and assistance: Philip Danzelman, Lesley Duff, Tina Heath, Kara Hiscox, Lynda Joeman, James Noble, Sneha Popat, Ester Romeri and the members of the Skills Audit Working Group.

I would especially like to thank the original managers of this project, Janis Makarewich-Hall and Kate Hitchcock, who were responsible for initiating this project and managing the survey itself.

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Executive summary

The objective of this research was to explore the skills and qualifications of refugees in the United Kingdom, about which – until now – there has been very little information. The research was conducted by the Immigration Research and Statistics Service of the Home Office, and supported by a cross-governmental steering group.

This was the largest ever skills audit of refugees undertaken in the UK. Over 3,700 questionnaires were posted to people who received a positive decision on their asylum application between November 2002 and February 2003, and almost 2,000 completed questionnaires were returned. The questionnaires were made available in a variety of languages, and asked the respondent to provide information on a broad spectrum of skills, including: literacy (in their own main language); English language ability; educational background (including qualifications gained); work-related skills and qualifications; and work history.

The distribution of respondents against these variables was heavily influenced by the concentration of certain nationalities in the sample (see below). Overall, two-thirds of respondents were working before leaving their country of origin, one in ten were students and less than five per cent were unemployed and looking for employment. This distribution of economic activity is similar to that for all UK residents. Almost a half of those persons surveyed had received ten years or more of education, and over 40 per cent held qualifications before they arrived in the UK. Three-quarters of respondents could read and write either fluently or fairly well in their main language. Around a third (31%) of respondents rated each aspect of their English language skills – reading, writing, speaking and understanding spoken English – as either fluent or fairly good.

The results highlighted the differences in the skills and experience of persons from different countries of origin. For example, respondents from Zimbabwe tended to be highly educated: almost 90 per cent had received at least ten years of education, and over 90 per cent held qualifications before coming to the UK; 98 per cent of respondents from Zimbabwe were able to read and write in their main language either fluently or fairly well, and 93 per cent considered their skills to be either fluent or fairly good in each of the four English language skills: understanding; speaking; reading; and writing. In comparison, just over a quarter of respondents who originated from Iraq had received ten years or more of education and the same proportion held qualifications before arriving in the UK. Only 65 per cent of respondents from Iraq were able to read and write in their main language either fluently or fairly well, and 12 per cent considered their skills to be either fluent or fairly good in each of the four English language skills.

The analysis also showed that there was a difference between the skills and experiences of men and women in the case of some nationalities. For example, over a quarter of men who originated from Somalia held qualifications prior to arrival in the UK, compared with just three per cent of women.

There are certain limitations to this research. The survey was administered over the winter of 2002/2003 and so its results reflect the characteristics of people granted asylum or Exceptional Leave to Remain at that time. During winter 2002/03, the nationalities that received the most positive decisions on asylum cases were Iraqi, Zimbabwean and Somali. Therefore, relatively more questionnaires were sent to people of these nationalities, and the majority of respondents were from Iraq (half of all questionnaires analysed), Zimbabwe (20%) and Somalia (11%).

There are two important consequences of this. First, the findings of this research tend to reflect the characteristics of nationals of these three countries – Iraq in particular – and therefore this research does not claim to be representative of the refugee population of the UK, but rather a snapshot of the refugees whose cases were decided at that time. Second, when analysing the differences between the characteristics of respondents from particular countries of origin, the survey results for only a small number of individual countries can be relied upon as being statistically robust. (In general this tends to be the three countries noted above.) If the survey were to be carried out over a longer period of time then it would be possible to analyse results for more countries and produce a wider range of valuable results. The report summarises the methodological lessons learnt, which could benefit anyone conducting a similar survey in the future.

1. Introduction

Background and aims

To date, there has been relatively little wide-scale information available on the skills and qualifications of refugees. The information that exists has tended to be based on small samples of individuals, which has limited its use for evidence-based policy development and planning.

Large-scale datasets that are collected by the Government (for example the Census and the Labour Force Survey) do not currently provide data for different categories of migrants, and do not therefore provide any information on qualifications and skills held by refugees.

In order to address this information gap, the Home Office Immigration Research and Statistics Service (IRSS) was tasked with implementing a skills audit of refugees. A cross-government Skills Audit Group (SAG) was set up to steer and advise the project. The principal objective of the audit was to provide skills and qualification information for planning policies and programmes to assist people in their integration into the UK. It was administered as a postal survey of people granted refugee status and Exceptional Leave to Remain¹ (ELR) between 28 October 2002 and 7 February 2003.

This is the largest skills audit of people granted refugee status and ELR ever undertaken in the United Kingdom. However skills audits of this kind have been carried out previously. In spring 2004, the Scottish Executive published a report on a similar study, *Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Scotland: A Skills and Aspirations Audit*, which focused on asylum seekers and refugees in Scotland. In addition, this report referred to a number of previous skills audits of asylum seekers and refugees, all of which give a valuable insight into this subject area. These included:

- Alice Bloch, *Refugees' Opportunities and Barriers in Employment and Training*: Department for Work and Pensions Research Report 179 (2002);
- Hildegard Dumper, *Missed Opportunities: A Skills Audit of Refugee Women in London from the Teaching, Nursing and Medical Professions*: Greater London Authority (2002);
- Fiona Aldridge and Sue Waddington, *Asylum Seekers' Skills and Qualifications Audit Pilot Project*. National Organisation for Adult Learning (2002).

¹ People who are found not to be refugees in the terms of the 1951 United Nations Convention are refused asylum. In certain circumstances, prior to 1 April 2003, such people may have been granted Exceptional Leave to Remain for a limited period. ELR was replaced by Humanitarian Protection and Discretionary Leave from 1 April 2003.

Methods

Questionnaire design and coverage

Questionnaires were designed to gather self-assessed information on respondents':

- level of proficiency in reading and writing in their main language;
- ability to read, write, speak and understand spoken English, and other languages;
- length of time spent in education before coming to the UK;
- qualifications before coming to the UK – including details of highest qualification;
- work-related skills and qualifications;
- main activity before coming to the UK;
- last two jobs held before coming to the UK.

Respondents were asked to assess their own ability to read and write their main language as "fluently", "fairly well", "slightly" or "not at all" (based on their own choice of one main language). They were then asked to assess their own ability to read, write, speak and understand spoken English using the same categorisation, and finally to list any other languages they had knowledge of and to rank their level of fluency in each language listed.

The National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) was commissioned to equate overseas qualifications to their UK equivalents. In order to assess qualifications, NARIC uses criteria such as the entry requirements, status of the awarding institution, nature of the assessment, structure of the course etc. in order to benchmark an overseas qualification framework against that of the UK.

The survey responses to questions on occupation were coded using Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) 2000. This coding structure groups each occupation into nine main groups based on the kind of work performed. A summary of the SOC 2000 structure can be found at the National Statistics web site at: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/methods_quality/ns_sec/soc2000.asp.

Questionnaires also allowed for any extra comments or information the respondent wished to provide, as well as to record whether or not an interpreter was used.

In addition the following personal details were sought in order to enable comparison across demographic groups:

- gender;
- age group;
- length of time the respondent had been living in the UK;
- country of origin.

It was decided to include in the survey all asylum applicants granted asylum or ELR within a specific time-scale. Given time and cost constraints, and other methodological issues, it was not feasible to conduct face-to-face interviews and it was decided that a postal survey would be the most viable method for collecting the information.

Pilot survey

A pilot trial of two methods took place in October 2002. The aims of the pilot survey were to investigate:

- the viability of two different methods of contacting potential respondents;
- the response rates achieved using the two different methods of contact;
- any problems with the questionnaire which might be resolved prior to the main survey.

In the first method trialled, Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) caseworkers sent out questionnaires along with the positive determination letters. The rationale for this was that it was believed that this would be the most reliable method of contact. It was also hoped that people concurrently receiving a positive determination letter might be more inclined to reply to the questionnaire. However, many positive determination letters are sent to applicants via their advocates or legal representatives and not directly to the individuals.

In the second pilot IRSS used IND's Asylum Cases Immigration Database (A-CID) to issue the questionnaires directly to applicants at their own home addresses. The pilot revealed that the most effective time to send out the questionnaire was two weeks after receipt of the positive determination letter. There was concern that mailing out the questionnaire later than this would miss the respondents as they may have moved on.

The distribution method used in the second pilot was chosen for the main-stage survey, primarily because it yielded a greater response rate. This might be because some of the questionnaires sent out via advocates or representatives may not have reached the applicant themselves.

Home Office interpreters played a key role in the development of the questionnaire. They advised on the language used to ask the questions to try and make these meaningful to respondents, and made the researchers aware of the cultural sensitivities in asking for information.

Sampling and administration of main survey

The skills audit survey was administered by postal questionnaire to those aged eighteen or over who were granted either ELR or asylum during the period 28 October 2002 to 7 February 2003, and for whom an address was recorded. IRSS drew the sample from A-CID and issued the 3,712 initial questionnaires in English.

In the covering letter respondents were given the option of requesting a translated version of the questionnaire in one of six languages – Arabic, Dari, Peshtu, Somali, Sorani and Tamil. These languages were chosen to reflect the languages spoken by the top nationalities claiming asylum at the time of the survey. The majority of questionnaires were completed in English (96%), although a number were completed in other languages (see below).

Questionnaires were mailed out as close as possible to the date the decision letter was served by caseworkers, the aim being to try and reach those individuals supported by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) before the end of the 28-day grace period when they have to vacate NASS accommodation.

A reminder questionnaire was issued to all non-respondents three weeks after the initial mail-out.

Prior to the survey being conducted, the National Refugee Integration Forum (NRIF) was informed about the aims and objectives of the research and asked to cascade this information to their colleagues and to other refugee community organisations. The main aim of this was to dispel any mistrust about the motives for the survey and to increase awareness of it.

Response

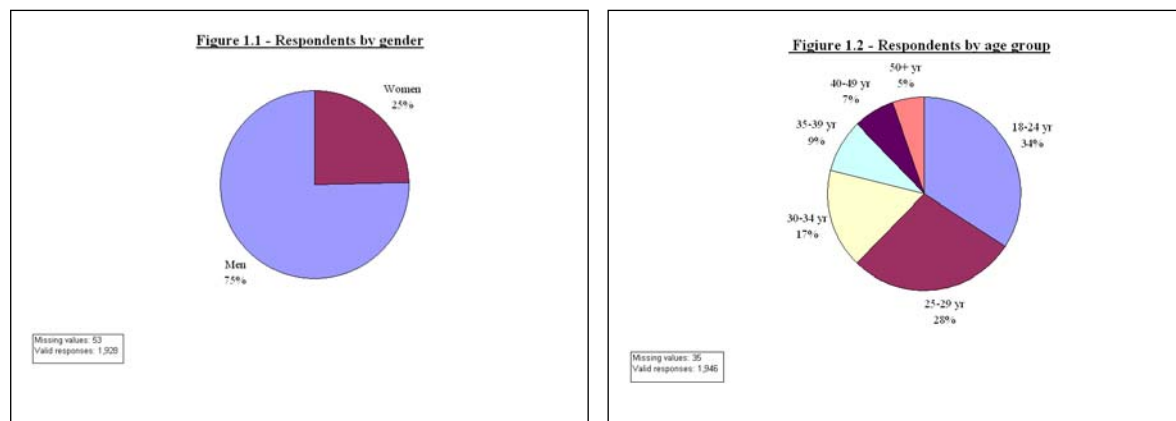
Of the 3,712 questionnaires issued, 1,985 (53%) were completed and returned to IRSS (although a small number were not suitable for analysis²) and 762 (21%) were returned because the individual was no longer at the recorded address³. (Of the 1,985 questionnaires completed and returned, 309 were returned after a reminder had been issued.) It is not known, of course, how many questionnaires were not received by the relevant person and were not returned to IRSS. The overall response rate for the survey was 53 per cent. This increases to 67 per cent when those questionnaires which were returned uncompleted to IRSS because the addressee had moved are excluded. *The response rates shown below exclude known non-contacts.*

This is an excellent response rate for a postal survey, particularly given the characteristics (including the transient nature, differing languages, need for interpreters, etc.) of the population being sampled.

It is believed that having the support of the NRIF contributed to the excellent survey response rate. Other contributing factors may have included the involvement of non-governmental organisations and interpreters, the fact that the Home Office distributed the questionnaire, and a possible misunderstanding from some respondents that by taking part in the survey they would be assisted in finding employment. Despite the introductory notes on the front of the questionnaire clearly stating that "[this form] will not be used to find you a job. If you are looking for employment you should contact your Jobcentre Plus", some respondents used the additional information field to emphasise their skills, experience and future career aspirations suggesting that they may have seen it as a route to employment.

Data quality issues with the address of asylum applicants recorded on A-CID (such as misspelt address, missing postcode, out-of-date address) and the transient nature of the sample population are among factors which increased the proportion of non-contacts and make the high response rate even more impressive.

In total, 1,981 questionnaires were analysed. Of those, 41 per cent were granted refugee status and 59 per cent were granted ELR. Just under three-quarters (73%) of the respondents were male (1,451), 24 per cent were female (476) and three per cent (53) did not state their gender (see Figure 1.1). seventy-seven per cent (1,534) of respondents were aged between 18 and 35 years old (see Figure 1.2) and the majority of respondents (77%) had been in the country for less than six months.



The majority of questionnaires (1,909) were completed in English. Fifty-two were completed in Arabic, three in Dari, four in Somali and thirteen in Sorani. Twenty-two per cent (426) of the respondents

² A small number of returned questionnaires were omitted from the analysis. The reasons for this included the forms being only partly completed, or being completed in a language IRSS was unable to translate.

³ These figures omit 150 questionnaires which were mistakenly issued to persons aged under 18.

indicated that they used an interpreter to complete the questionnaire. However, of the 1,555 respondents who did not indicate the use of an interpreter, almost a half (762) assessed their English reading ability as nil or slight, suggesting that the proportion of respondents who actually used an interpreter was much higher, possibly as high as 60 per cent. However, it may also suggest that some people completed the questionnaire despite poor English language skills, or that they completed the form with the help of family or friends whose English language skills may not have been sufficient for this purpose.

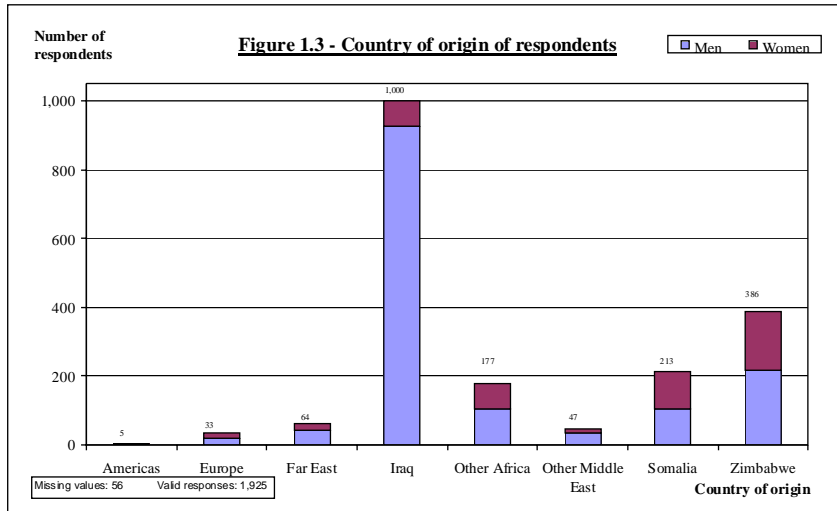


Figure 1.3 shows the country (and country groups) of origin of respondents. It also shows the gender distribution within each group and shows that only a small proportion of respondents who originated from Iraq were women (7%). On the other hand, between forty and fifty per cent of respondents from Somalia, Zimbabwe and other African countries were women.

Analysis of the cases from whom no response was received through comparison with the characteristics of the initial sample population shows that:

- a similar proportion of women replied as of men: 63 per cent of women to whom a questionnaire was sent replied compared with 69 per cent of men, and there was little variation amongst age groups;
- of the three countries of origin from which the highest number of completed questionnaires were received (Somalia, Iraq and Zimbabwe), persons from Zimbabwe (74% of those contacted) and Iraq (71%) were more likely to respond than those from Somalia (50%).

Analysis of known non-contacts, i.e. those individuals to whom a questionnaire was sent but returned as the intended recipient was no longer at the recorded address, shows that:

- women were more likely to be contacted than men (15% were not contacted compared with 22% of men);
- people from Somalia were more likely to remain at the recorded address than those from other countries of origin: the questionnaires of five per cent of those surveyed were returned as being unknown at the recorded address, compared with 18 per cent of questionnaires sent to people from Zimbabwe and 23 per cent to people from Iraq.

How representative is the sample of the wider population of refugees?

The survey collected information from asylum applicants who received a positive decision between November 2002 and January 2003. At this time there was considerable unrest in Iraq with the approaching war (which commenced in March 2003). This resulted in a large number of Iraqis being granted leave to remain in the UK. Forty-seven per cent of those persons who were granted either asylum or ELR between November 2002 and January 2003 were Iraqi nationals, compared with 31 per cent of all positive decisions made in 2002 as a whole. Because of this, the survey results overall are heavily influenced by the characteristics of respondents from Iraq. The skills audit was never intended to reflect the refugee population as a whole, but to provide a "snapshot" of the skills, qualifications and work experiences of those refugees who received a positive decision within a specific time period, for use by IND's Refugee Integration Section to plan integration initiatives.

Another point to consider is one that affects all skills audits is: those people who have skills and qualifications might be more likely to complete the questionnaire. Non-skilled or unqualified people might be embarrassed, or less likely to recognise the importance of the survey, and therefore be less likely to reply.

Sample characteristics compared with administrative data

Survey data on the characteristics of respondents have been compared with data from A-CID. These data relate to cases on which initial decisions were made between 1 November 2002 and 31 January 2003 and in which the principal asylum applicants were aged 18 or over at the time of application. They exclude decisions made on reconsidered cases and appeals.

By comparing survey data with administrative data from A-CID, IRSS sought to assess the representativeness of the sample in terms of each age group, gender and country of origin.

This exercise showed that the achieved sample of respondents is reasonably representative of those persons being granted leave to remain at that time. However, the sample is a little skewed in the following ways:

- men, and especially younger men, are slightly under-represented in the sample compared with the target population;
- women are slightly over-represented – mainly due to the high proportion of women from Zimbabwe in the target population (who were more likely than other groups to respond);
- men from Somalia and Iraq are slightly under-represented, while women from Iraq are over-represented.

The questionnaire was intended for completion by the person who applied for asylum and hence received the decision, that is the principal applicant. In family cases, the principal applicant is often a man and so the survey is heavily weighted towards men. However, this does correspond with administrative data, for example:

- Seventy-eight per cent of principal applicants who were granted either asylum or ELR at the initial decision stage between November 2002 and January 2003 who were aged over 18 at the time of application were men, and 22 per cent women. While of those persons who returned a completed questionnaire, 73 per cent were men and 24 per cent were women⁴;
- Fifty-two per cent of principal applicants in this group were men originating from Iraq and three per cent women from Iraq, while, of those persons who returned a completed questionnaire, 47 per cent were men from Iraq and four per cent women⁴.

⁴ All administrative data are provisional.

2. Results^{5,6,7}

The findings of the skills audit are presented below.

It will be noted that the breakdowns by country of origin vary between sections of the analysis. This is due to the low number of responses to some questions from respondents from certain countries, which has led to countries being grouped to give sufficient numbers for analysis. Only those countries of origin (or grouped countries) from which 50 or more respondents provided a response to the analysed question have been presented here. This served to protect the anonymity of respondents and also to minimise the risk of drawing out misleading results from small non-representative sample sizes.

Qualifications and education

The questions

- Before coming to the UK how many years of education did you receive?
 - None/6 years or less/7-9 years/10-12 years/13-15 years/16 or more years .
- Before coming to the UK did you have any qualifications?
- Before coming to the UK what was the highest qualification you held?
 - Full title of qualification
 - Subject(s)
 - Country where qualification was awarded
 - Name of institution where qualification was awarded
 - Duration of study
 - Please state was this.... Full-time/part-time
 - Date of award.
- Please state any other education qualifications you may have.
- Do you have any work-related skills or qualifications not mentioned above? If yes, please state.

Key findings

Table 2.1 shows the number of years of education by country of origin and gender. This question was designed to give an idea of how long the respondents were educated but no assumptions should be made about content or possible qualification and the possibility of a UK equivalent.

⁵ In analysis of gender, the proportions relating to each gender may not sum to that for total persons due to the small number of people who did not specify a gender.

⁶ Where a sample size is less than 50 for a particular group, no further analysis has been carried out since the sample has been considered too small to be reliable. This figure has not been calculated by any statistical means, but has just been chosen as a possible benchmark.

⁷ The questionnaire asks "what is your country of origin" rather than "what is your nationality", however in many cases (but not all) this will be the same as the respondent's nationality.

Table 2.1: Years spent in education before coming to the UK, by country of origin and gender⁽¹⁾

Men							
Country of origin	Years of education⁽²⁾						Number of respondents
	None	6 or less	7-9	10-12	13-15	16 or more	
Far East	10%	12%	14%	31%	14%	19%	42
Iraq	26%	36%	13%	11%	8%	7%	903
Other Africa	5%	11%	12%	25%	19%	28%	103
Somalia	24%	21%	21%	22%	8%	4%	100
Zimbabwe	0%	3%	6%	33%	32%	26%	217
Other	5%	15%	4%	35%	16%	25%	55
All	19%	26%	12%	17%	13%	12%	1,420

Women							
Country of origin	Years of education⁽²⁾						Number of respondents
	None	6 or less	7-9	10-12	13-15	16 or more	
Far East	9%	14%	5%	50%	0%	23%	22
Iraq	15%	26%	10%	18%	10%	21%	72
Other Africa	10%	13%	17%	19%	23%	17%	69
Somalia	55%	25%	10%	6%	4%	0%	100
Zimbabwe	1%	6%	7%	39%	30%	17%	162
Other	16%	3%	13%	41%	9%	19%	32
All	18%	15%	10%	26%	17%	14%	457

All persons							
Country of origin	Years of education⁽²⁾						Number of respondents
	None	6 or less	7-9	10-12	13-15	16 or more	
Far East	9%	13%	11%	38%	9%	20%	64
Iraq	26%	35%	13%	11%	8%	8%	995
Other Africa	7%	12%	14%	23%	21%	24%	173
Somalia	40%	23%	15%	14%	6%	2%	202
Zimbabwe	1%	4%	6%	36%	31%	22%	382
Other	10%	16%	6%	33%	13%	21%	97
All	19%	24%	11%	19%	14%	13%	1,913

⁽¹⁾ "All persons" includes those persons who did not state their gender (3% of all respondents).

⁽²⁾ Excludes 68 cases where no response was given.

- Table 2.1 shows that almost a half (46%) of respondents had received ten years or more of education, 35 per cent had received some but less than ten years, and 19 per cent no education. This compares with over 99 per cent of UK-born people in the UK who received ten years or more of education, and less than one per cent who received none. (Figures have been estimated from *UK Labour Force Survey*, winter 2002/2003, and assume that respondents commenced education aged 4.)
- Overall, a higher percentage of female respondents (57%) than male respondents (42%) had received ten years or more of education, although this may be accounted for by the different country of origin distribution of men and women.
- The vast majority of respondents who originated in Zimbabwe had spent ten years or more in education (89%: 91% of men and 85% of women), with only one per cent having received no education.

- Forty per cent of those with country of origin as Somalia had received no education, and 23 per cent had received less than seven years of education. Women from Somalia were less likely than men to have been educated: 55 per cent had received no education and 25 per cent had received less than six years, compared with 24 per cent and 21 per cent, respectively, of men.
- Sixty-one per cent of respondents from Iraq had received either no education or less than six years of education.
- Overall, 97 per cent of respondents provided a response to this question. The response rate was higher for men than for women. All respondents from the Far East replied to the question, compared with only 94 per cent of respondents from Somalia (92% of women from Somalia). The response rate was higher amongst people who originated from Zimbabwe (98%) – as expected given the higher level of education amongst this group.

Although the questionnaire asked for information on 'highest qualification held', it was found that this did not produce useful data for analysis. In over a third of cases, insufficient information was provided in order to code the qualifications held (27%), or to establish their comparability with British qualifications (7%). Together with a handful of cases in which respondents did not reply to this question, no information on qualifications is available in over a third (36%) of cases in which qualifications are reportedly held. Such a large number of missing responses precludes any meaningful analysis of this information. This is been an important methodological finding relevant to future research in this area and is discussed further in Chapter 3.

For this reason, the analysis has mainly focused on the number of years spent by the respondent in education rather than qualifications held. It is felt that this gives a better indication overall of the educational profile of the sample. Respondents who originated from Zimbabwe tended to remain in education for longer, and achieve higher qualifications, than those originating from other countries. In order that the characteristics of the Zimbabweans do not give rise to a skewed picture of the education and qualification of refugees in general, results for respondents who originated from Zimbabwe are presented separately

Using the qualification data that are available, Figures 2.1 and 2.2 show the proportion of respondents originating from (i) Zimbabwe and (ii) other countries who held any qualifications before coming to the UK.

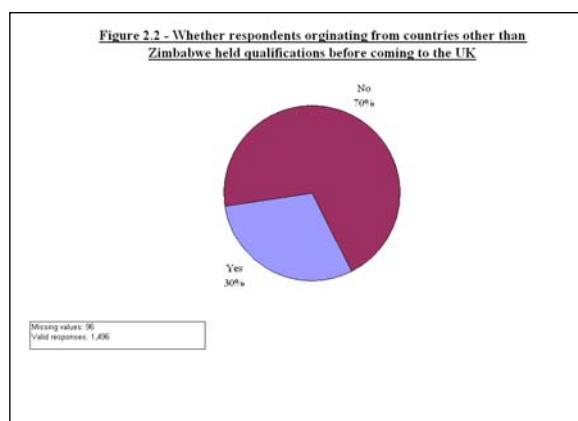
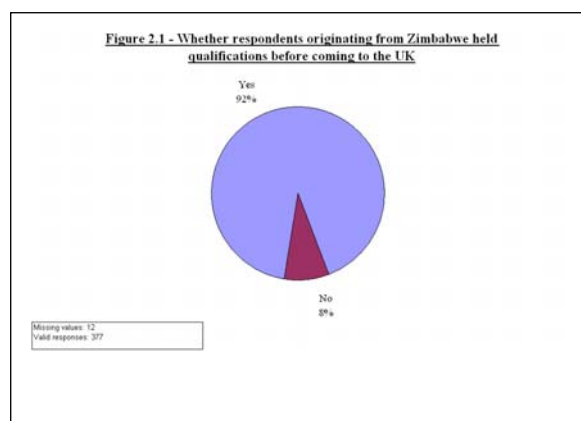


Table 2.2 shows the distribution of highest qualification level (as coded by NARIC), by gender, for those respondents for whom equivalent qualifications were identified. It also breaks down the respondents into those who originated from Zimbabwe and those who originated from other categories. The categories of qualifications are very broad to cover the low sample sizes in some individual categories.

Table 2.2: Highest qualification held before coming to the UK⁽¹⁾

Country of origin	Zimbabwe		Other		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Highest level held ⁽²⁾						
School level (academic or vocational) or below	29%	30%	6%	6%	10%	14%
Post-16 (academic or vocational)	25%	23%	3%	3%	6%	10%
Undergraduate (academic or vocational)	13%	8%	7%	9%	8%	8%
Postgraduate	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%
Other (including professional awards and work-based training)	7%	4%	0%	0%	1%	1%
Qualifications held but insufficient or no information provided	18%	25%	14%	12%	15%	17%
No qualifications held	7%	10%	70%	70%	60%	49%
Number of respondents	212	162	1,178	297	1,390	459

⁽¹⁾ Excludes 132 cases where no response was given (for either gender or highest qualification).

⁽²⁾ As equated by NARIC.

- Forty-two per cent (797) of respondents held qualifications before they arrived in the UK. This equates to 40 per cent of men and 51 per cent women, though if Zimbabweans are excluded these proportions drop to 30 per cent for both sexes (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2).
- Forty-three per cent of respondents who held qualifications originated from Zimbabwe.
- Eight per cent of persons originating from Zimbabwe held no qualifications before arriving in the UK, compared with 74 per cent of those from Iraq and 86 per cent from Somalia. This compares with 15 per cent of the UK population at the same time.
- Of the 797 who said that they held qualifications, only 512 persons had their highest qualification coded by NARIC. A further 269 persons were coded as having provided insufficient information to be coded in this way (either (i) specific details needed to compare such as year of completion, institution name, subject studied; (ii) only the professional or job title was given; or (iii) that research is required to establish comparability). The country of origin of 41 per cent of these respondents was Iraq and of 29 per cent was Zimbabwe. In the remaining cases no qualification was given.
- A quarter of male respondents had a highest qualification recorded, and a third of women. Eight per cent of all respondents (both men and women) had reached either undergraduate or postgraduate level, while 15 per cent of men and 19 per cent of women had achieved a post-16 qualification.
- Of those persons whose qualifications were coded, 31 per cent were recorded as having a highest educational level of "school level - academic", 24 per cent "undergraduate – academic" and 18 per cent "post 16 – vocational". Thirty-two per cent of men were recorded as having a highest level of either under or postgraduate, compared with 25 per cent of women.

Main activity (economic status) before coming to the UK

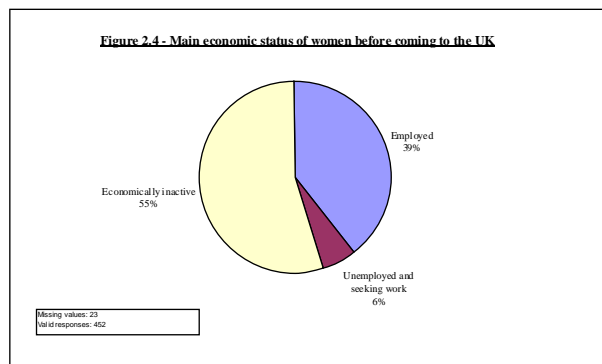
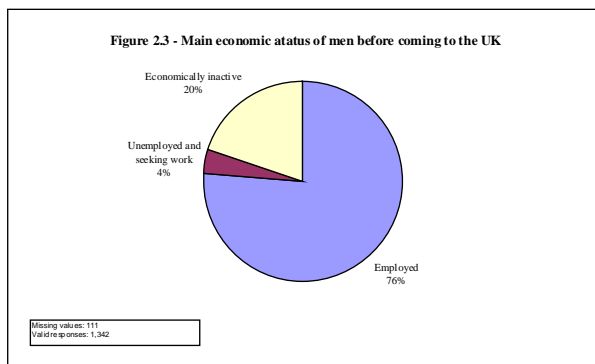
The question

- Before coming to the UK what was your main activity? (tick one box only)
 - In employment
 - Self-employed
 - Unemployed and looking for work
 - A student
 - Looking after home and family
 - Retired
 - Not working for some other reason. Please state ...

Responses given to this question have been used to estimate economic activity rates based on those used in socio-economic statistics. In the Labour Force Survey, the recognised measure of unemployment is the International Labour Organisation (ILO) definition by which a person is considered unemployed if they are out of work, looking for work and available to work within four weeks. By this definition, only those persons who stated that their main activity was "unemployed and looking for work" have been classified as unemployed, and all other non-working persons as economically inactive. Owing to the focus in this survey being on skills and education, the economically inactive group has been split between students and other inactive.

Key findings

Figures 2.3 and 2.4 show the main economic activity of respondents immediately before they came to the United Kingdom, by gender.



- Three-quarters (76%) of men were employed (either in employment or self-employed) before they came to the UK, 20 per cent were economically inactive (including 9% who were students), and four per cent were unemployed and looking for work.
- A much smaller proportion of women were employed (39%), and a larger proportion were economically inactive – 13 per cent were students and 42 per cent in other economically inactive categories (of whom 86% looked after family and home).
- The UK Labour Force Survey in winter 2002/03 found that 60 per cent of the UK population were either in employment or self-employed at that time, three per cent were ILO unemployed and 37 per cent were economically inactive. This is broadly similar to the economic status distribution of the sample prior to their departure for the UK – 67 per cent were employed, four per cent unemployed and looking for work and 28 per cent were economically inactive.

Table 2.3: Primary economic status of respondents before coming to the UK, by country of origin and gender⁽¹⁾

Men						
Country of origin	Primary economic status⁽²⁾					Number of respondents
	In employment	Self-employed	Unemployed and looking for work	Student	Other economically inactive	
Far East	18%	39%	0%	16%	26%	38
Iraq	32%	47%	4%	6%	10%	850
Other Africa	39%	22%	4%	26%	9%	98
Somalia	16%	38%	6%	12%	28%	95
Zimbabwe	65%	20%	4%	8%	3%	211
Other	30%	36%	2%	14%	18%	50
All	36%	40%	4%	9%	11%	1,342

Women						
Country of origin	Primary economic status⁽²⁾					Number of respondents
	In employment	Self-employed	Unemployed and looking for work	Student	Other economically inactive	
Far East	5%	5%	5%	19%	67%	21
Iraq	17%	6%	10%	9%	58%	69
Other Africa	24%	18%	4%	21%	33%	67
Somalia	4%	3%	3%	9%	81%	99
Zimbabwe	58%	11%	6%	13%	13%	165
Other	29%	10%	10%	10%	42%	31
All	30%	9%	6%	13%	42%	452

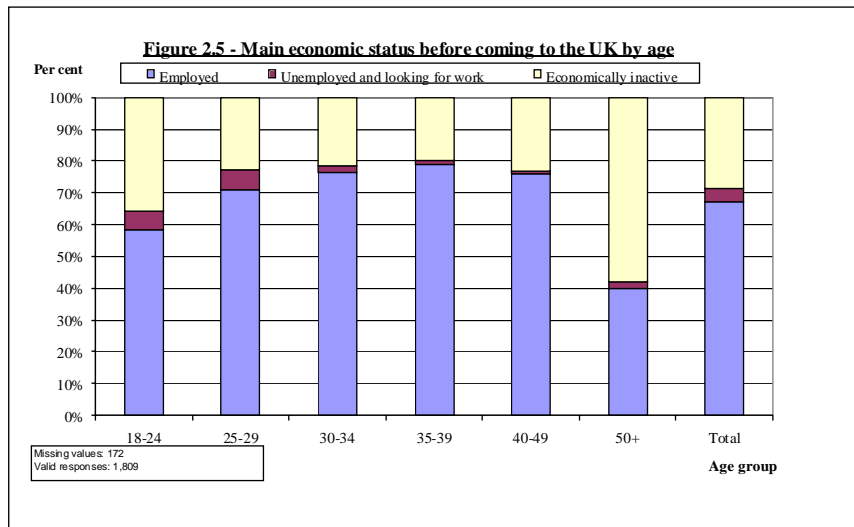
All persons						
Country of origin	Primary economic status⁽²⁾					Number of respondents
	In employment	Self-employed	Unemployed and looking for work	Student	Other economically inactive	
Far East	14%	27%	2%	17%	41%	59
Iraq	31%	44%	4%	7%	14%	937
Other Africa	33%	21%	4%	23%	19%	166
Somalia	10%	20%	5%	10%	55%	196
Zimbabwe	62%	16%	5%	10%	7%	379
Other	30%	29%	4%	11%	26%	90
All	35%	32%	4%	10%	19%	1,827

⁽¹⁾ "All persons" includes those persons who did not state their gender (3% of all respondents).

⁽²⁾ Excludes 154 cases where no response was given.

- Table 2.3 shows that men from Iraq were more likely to be self-employed (47%) than from either of the other two countries of origin (Somalia, 38% and Zimbabwe, 20%).
- Over two-thirds (68%) of Zimbabwean women were working when they left their home country, a far higher proportion than either of the other two main nationalities. If this Zimbabwean group is excluded, then the proportion of women in employment falls to 23 per cent.
- A higher proportion of male refugees surveyed were in employment prior to coming to the UK than men in the UK population (67% compared with 60%). However female refugees were less likely to be

employed (39% compared with 53% of the UK population), with the exception of female respondents from Zimbabwe, of whom over two-thirds were employed prior to coming to the UK.



- Figure 2.5 shows the economic status prior to departure for the UK of respondents by age. It shows that persons aged under 24 and over 50 were more likely to be economically inactive – that is not in employment, self-employed or unemployed and looking for work – than those in other age groups. Thirty-three per cent of 18 to 24 year-olds were classified as economically inactive, however over half of these were students. Fifty-six per cent of persons aged over 50 were economically inactive, however over 90 per cent of these were either retired or looking after a family.
- Ninety-two per cent of respondents provided a response to this question – 95 per cent of women and 92 per cent of men. This response rate was higher amongst people from Zimbabwe – 99 per cent of women and 95 per cent of men replied, and lower amongst people from Somalia – 91 per cent replied.

Occupation

The questions

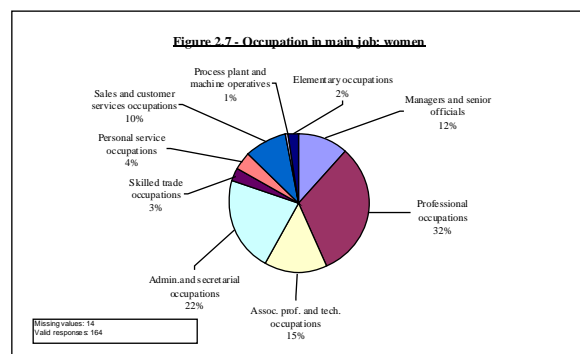
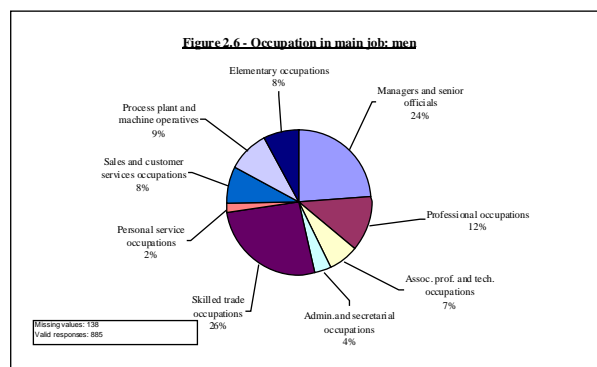
- Before coming to the UK what were your last two jobs, either paid or unpaid? Please state these starting with the most recent. If none please go to end of questionnaire.
 - Most recent job title
 - Start date
 - End date
 - For each letter please tick one box only
 - (a) Employed or self-employed
 - (b) Full-time or part-time
 - (c) Temporary or permanent
 - (d) Paid or unpaid
 - Please provide a brief description of what you did in that job
 - Reason for leaving
- Job 2.
 - Questions as above

The survey responses were coded using the SOC 2000 coding frame. The results presented below show the occupation in the respondent's main job using the major one-digit codes. The results are being presented at this level of analysis rather than using the more detailed two-digit codes owing to the small numbers of respondents falling into the detailed categories, and due to difficulties with applying the UK SOC classification to occupations in other countries. Keeping the analysis to the higher level of classification helps to minimise the effects of these factors on the overall findings.

Key findings

- When they left their home country, 1,227 people were either in employment or self-employed and 1,234 of these people provided details of their occupation. One hundred and fifty-seven people who were employed did not state an occupation, and 164 who said they were not employed did state an occupation.
- Of the not-employed persons who provided an occupation, over a quarter were in skilled trade occupations (of which the two largest groups were shopkeepers and farmers, though these were both under 20 individuals). Thirteen per cent were unemployed and looking for a job, 17 per cent were students and 26 per cent were looking after home and family.

Figures 2.6 and 2.7 show the main occupational group of respondents in employment or self-employment before coming to the UK, by gender, and Table 2.4 shows the main occupational groups of persons in employment or self-employment by country of origin.



- Almost a quarter (23%) of respondents who provided details of their occupation were in skilled trade occupations, and 22 per cent were managers and senior officials.
- The UK Labour Force Survey found that 12 per cent of people who were in employment in the UK during winter 2002/03 were in skilled trade occupations and 15 per cent were managers and senior officials.

Table 2.4: Occupation of respondents who were working before coming to the UK, by country of origin

Country of origin	Iraq	Other Africa incl. Somalia	Zimbabwe	Other	All
Occupation ⁽¹⁾					
Managers and senior officials	24%	29%	15%	22%	22%
Professional occupations	7%	14%	31%	17%	15%
Associate, professional and technical occupations	4%	11%	11%	19%	8%
Administrative and secretarial occupations	1%	7%	17%	6%	6%
Skilled trades occupations	32%	13%	9%	17%	23%
Personal service occupations	3%	3%	2%	0%	2%
Sales and customer service occupations	9%	10%	8%	3%	9%
Process, plant and machine operatives	9%	10%	4%	10%	8%
Elementary occupations	10%	4%	2%	6%	7%
Number of respondents	601	113	287	69	1,070

⁽¹⁾ Excludes 157 cases where no response was given.

- Twelve per cent of men and 32 per cent of women were coded as being in professional occupations. A further 24 per cent of men were coded as being managers or senior officials and 26 per cent as being in skilled trade occupations.
- Thirty-two per cent of women were in professional occupations, and 22 per cent were in administrative and secretarial occupations. However, only 164 working women gave occupations (of which two-thirds were Zimbabwean) and the sample sizes of all other nationalities are too small for further meaningful analysis to be carried out.
- Eighty-seven per cent of persons who were either in employment or self-employed before coming to the UK provided details of their occupations. This response rate was 85 per cent amongst persons from Iraq, 97 per cent amongst persons from Zimbabwe, and just 76 per cent amongst persons from other African countries.

Language skills

The questions

- What is your main language? (tick one box only)
 - Arabic/Dari/English/Farsi/Kurdish/Kurmanji/Ndebele/Peshto/Portuguese/Shona/Somali/Soranji/Other (please state)
- How well can you read in your main language?
 - Fluently/Fairly well/Slightly/Not at all
- How well do you understand spoken English?
 - Fluently/Fairly well/Slightly/Not at all
- How well can you speak English?
 - Fluently/Fairly well/Slightly/Not at all
- How well can you read English?
 - Fluently/Fairly well/Slightly/Not at all
- How well can you write English?
 - Fluently/Fairly well/Slightly/Not at all
- Do you know any other languages? (not including English or your first language)
- Which other languages can you ... [state up to two languages and for each rate]
 - Speak ... Fluently/Fairly well/Slightly/Not at all
 - Understand spoken ... Fluently/Fairly well/Slightly/Not at all
 - Read ... Fluently/Fairly well/Slightly/Not at all

It is difficult to provide details of main language since a large number of people specified two or more main languages. However, 39 per cent of respondents stated that one of their main languages was Kurdish, 14 per cent Sorani, 12 per cent Shona, 11 per cent Arabic, ten per cent Somali and seven per cent Ndebele. These languages are mainly spoken in Iraq, Iraq, Zimbabwe, Iraq and other Middle East, Somalia and Zimbabwe, respectively.

Respondents who originated from Zimbabwe (where the official language is English) tended to have better literacy skills in both their main language and English, than those originating from other countries. As with the analysis of education data in Chapter 2, results for respondents from Zimbabwe are presented separately from the results of other respondents so that the characteristics of the Zimbabweans do not give a biased picture of the language skills of the respondents.

Key findings

Literacy in own language

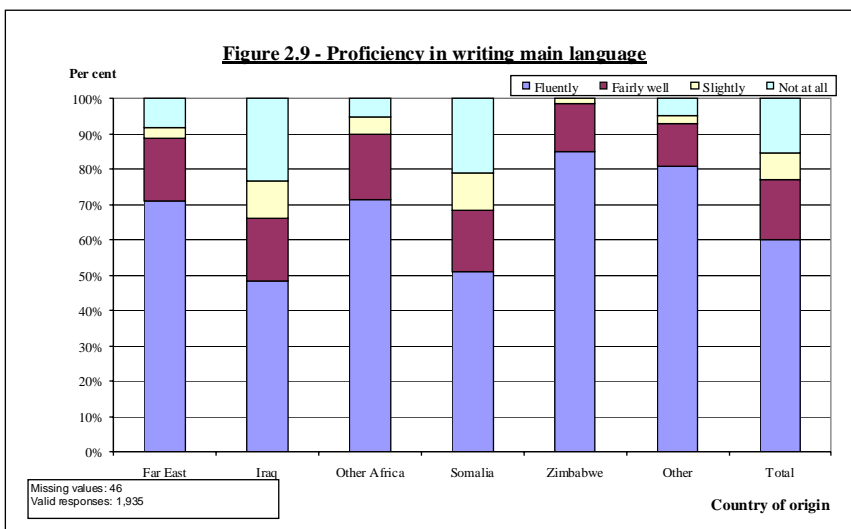
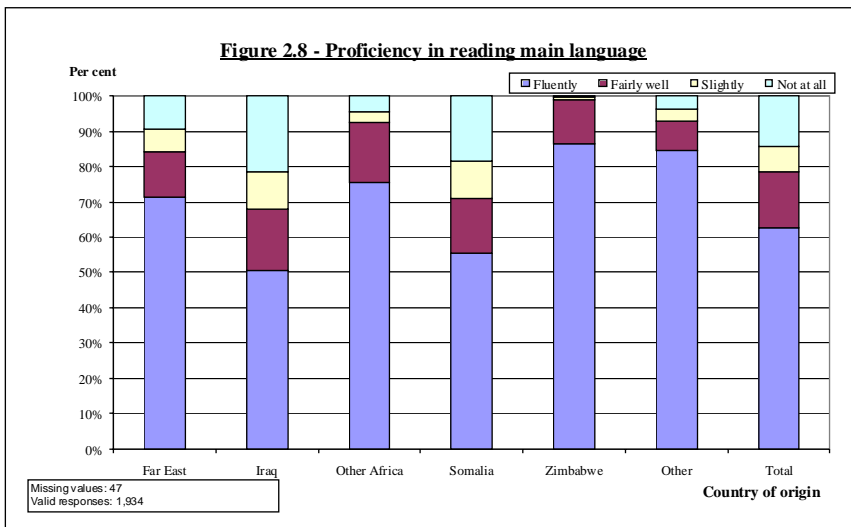
Table 2.5 shows the self-rated ability of respondents to read and write in their own main language. The table shows results for persons who originated from Zimbabwe separately from those for all other respondents to show the high level of literacy amongst these respondents. Figures 2.8 and 2.9 show this for a wider range of countries of origin.

Table 2.5: Proportion of respondents (by gender) who consider their main language skills to be "fluent" or "fairly good"

	Country of origin						Number of respondents
	Zimbabwe		Other countries		Total		
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	
Read main language⁽¹⁾	99%	99%	73%	74%	77%	82%	1,947
Write main language⁽²⁾	99%	98%	72%	71%	76%	81%	1,948

⁽¹⁾ Excludes 34 cases where no response was given.

⁽²⁾ Excludes 33 cases where no response was given.



- Sixty-three per cent of respondents who answered this question stated that they could read their main language fluently, with a further 23 per cent saying they could read it fairly well or slightly. Sixty-seven per cent of women and 62 per cent of men said that they could read fluently in their main language. Respondents from Zimbabwe had particularly good reading skills with 86 per cent of both men and women saying that they could read their main language fluently, and all being able to read to some degree. On the other hand, a half (51%) of people from Iraq stated that they were able to read their main language fluently, and a fifth (21%) that they were unable to read their main language at all. The figures are similar for respondents from Somalia – 55 per cent and 18 per cent correspondingly;
- Sixty per cent of respondents to this question stated that they could write their main language fluently, with a further 24 per cent saying they could write fairly well or slightly. Sixty-four per cent of women and 59 per cent of men stated that they could write fluently. Respondents from Zimbabwe claimed to have particularly good writing skills with 85 per cent saying that they could write fluently in their main language (86% of men, 83% of women) and all could write to some degree. Less than a half (48%) of people from Iraq could write fluently in their main language and 23 per cent were unable to write at all. The figures are similar for respondents from Somalia – 51 per cent and 21 per cent correspondingly;
- Thirteen per cent of the sample population were unable to read or write at all in their main language, and 57 per cent could both read and write fluently. If the Zimbabweans are excluded, then 17 per cent of the remaining cases were unable to read or write at all, and five per cent could read and write fluently.

English language skills

Table 2.6 shows the self-rated English language ability of respondents. Again, the table shows results for persons who originated from Zimbabwe (where English is the official language) separate from those for all other respondents to show the high level of literacy amongst these respondents compared with others. Table 2.7 shows English language ability by country of origin.

Although English is the official language in Zimbabwe, only six per cent of respondents from Zimbabwe considered it to be their main language – the majority of the remainder stated their main language to be either Shona (58%) or Ndebele (35%). Of these respondents, all but one considered themselves to be fluent in all aspects of the English language, with the remaining person judging his/her English skills to be fairly good. A small number of other respondents also gave English as their main language, all of whom considered their skills to be either fluent or fairly good. In total, 36 people – two per cent of all respondents – considered English to be their main language. The responses of these people have been included in the analysis below.

Table 2.6: Proportion of respondents who consider their English language skills to be "fluent" or "fairly good", by gender

	Country of origin						Number of respondents
	Zimbabwe		Other countries		Total		
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	
Understand spoken English⁽¹⁾	99%	94%	24%	24%	35%	49%	1,943
Speak English⁽²⁾	98%	92%	21%	20%	33%	46%	1,940
Read English⁽³⁾	99%	95%	26%	24%	37%	49%	1,947
Write English⁽⁴⁾	98%	95%	23%	21%	35%	47%	1,941

(1) Excludes 38 cases where no response was given.

(2) Excludes 41 cases where no response was given.

(3) Excludes 34 cases where no response was given.

(4) Excludes 40 cases where no response was given.

- Around a fifth of respondents to this question had fluent skills in at least one aspect of English – 18 per cent could understand spoken English fluently, 16 per cent could speak fluently, 22 per cent could read fluently and 19 per cent could write fluently. Six hundred and fifteen respondents (31%) described all their English language skills as fluent or fairly good, of which 264 (13% of all respondents) considered themselves to be completely fluent in all four English language skills.
- Many of those with fluent skills originated from Zimbabwe – approximately three-quarters of those who describe themselves as fluent in reading, writing or understanding English are from Zimbabwe, and 83 per cent of fluent speakers. Ninety-three per cent of respondents from Zimbabwe considered themselves to be fluent or fairly good in all aspects of English.
- Overall, women rated their English language skills more highly than men. Much of this is due to the high number of women from Zimbabwe in the survey (35% of women who replied were from Zimbabwe). If respondents from Zimbabwe are excluded, 24 per cent of the remaining respondents (both male and female) said they could understand spoken English fluently or fairly well, 21 per cent could speak English fluently or fairly well, 25 per cent could read English and 23 per cent could write English fluently or fairly well, and these results are similar for both sexes.
- A significant positive correlation exists between the ability to (i) write in own language and write in English, and (ii) read in own language and read in English (excluding those whose first language was English). Ninety-seven per cent of those people who can both read and write English either fluently or fairly well can also read and write in their own main language either fluently or fairly well (excluding those whose first language was English). A very small number of people claimed to be able to read and write English either fairly well or fluently but were not able to read and write in their own language to the same standard (18 excluding the non-responses).

Table 2.7: Standard of English language skills, by country of origin

Ability to understand spoken English					
Country of origin	Respondent is able to understand spoken English⁽¹⁾:				
	Fluently	Fairly well	Slightly	Not at All	Number of respondents
Far East	8%	26%	53%	13%	62
Iraq	3%	16%	38%	44%	1,013
Other Africa	13%	33%	31%	23%	175
Somalia	5%	14%	34%	46%	209
Zimbabwe	70%	27%	4%	0%	386
Other	14%	29%	38%	19%	98
All	18%	20%	30%	31%	1,943

Ability to speak English					
Country of origin	Respondent is able to speak English⁽¹⁾:				
	Fluently	Fairly well	Slightly	Not at all	Number of respondents
Far East	5%	24%	53%	18%	62
Iraq	2%	13%	38%	47%	1,014
Other Africa	8%	33%	35%	24%	175
Somalia	3%	16%	31%	50%	202
Zimbabwe	66%	30%	5%	0%	389
Other	8%	27%	46%	19%	98
All	16%	20%	31%	33%	1,940

Ability to read English					
Country of origin	Respondent is able to read English⁽¹⁾:				
	Fluently	Fairly well	Slightly	Not at all	Number of respondents
Far East	11%	27%	40%	21%	62
Iraq	6%	14%	28%	52%	1,014
Other Africa	16%	31%	26%	27%	176
Somalia	5%	16%	25%	54%	209
Zimbabwe	79%	19%	3%	0%	388
Other	9%	32%	36%	23%	98
All	22%	18%	23%	37%	1,947

Ability to write English					
Country of origin	Respondent is able to write English⁽¹⁾:				
	Fluently	Fairly well	Slightly	Not at all	Number of respondents
Far East	8%	24%	47%	21%	62
Iraq	4%	14%	27%	54%	1,008
Other Africa	12%	31%	28%	29%	176
Somalia	5%	13%	23%	58%	209
Zimbabwe	71%	25%	4%	0%	388
Other	8%	27%	40%	26%	98
Total	19%	19%	23%	39%	1,941

⁽¹⁾ Excludes cases where no response was given (as Table 2.6).

- A quarter of all female respondents had no English language skills compared with 28 per cent of men. However, if respondents from Zimbabwe are excluded, then 38 per cent of female respondents had no knowledge of the language compared with 33 per cent of men. Women from Somalia were

particularly unlikely to have knowledge of English – over a half (55%) had no English skills compared with under a quarter (24%) of men.

- A quarter (27%) of all respondents had no knowledge of the English language. Excluding respondents from Zimbabwe from the base population (all of whom had some knowledge), this increases to a third (34%). Thirty-nine per cent of all respondents who originated from Iraq and Somali had no knowledge of English at all.
- Forty-four per cent of respondents from Iraq were unable to understand spoken English at all, 47 per cent were unable to speak English at all, 52 per cent were unable to read English and 54 per cent were unable to write any English, and 39 per cent had no English language skills at all (reflecting the relatively high illiteracy rates of respondents from Iraq).
- Similarly, 46 per cent of respondents from Somalia were unable to understand spoken English at all, a half were unable to speak English at all, 54 per cent were unable to read English and 58 per cent were unable to write any English (reflecting the relatively high illiteracy rates of respondents from Iraq).
- Ninety-eight per cent of respondents – including all respondents from Zimbabwe – assessed their literacy skills in their main language. The same proportion provided assessments of each of their English language skills, again with respondents from Zimbabwe being the most likely to respond.

3. Conclusions

Summary of results

This skills audit has shown that the asylum applicants who were granted leave to remain in the United Kingdom during winter 2002/03 were from a variety of backgrounds with a variety of skills and qualifications. Overall, the occupational groups and economic activity rates of the respondents to this survey were similar to those of the UK population, however these, together with language skills and qualifications held, vary a great deal between the different countries of origin of the respondents.

- Over 40 per cent of all refugees who replied held qualifications before arriving in the UK, and almost a half had received over ten years of education – broadly equivalent to leaving school aged 16 and over. The sample population showed a breakdown of economic activity status (prior to departing for the UK) comparable with that of the UK population. Before leaving their country of origin, 67 per cent of the refugees who replied were either in employment or self employed – slightly higher than the 60 per cent of the UK who were working – a similar proportion was unemployed and seeking work, and a lower proportion was economically inactive.
- A quarter of respondents who originated from Iraq had not received any education, although a higher proportion of women had received education than men. Four-fifths of male respondents from Iraq were working before leaving for the UK, compared with less than a quarter of women. A third of the male respondents from Iraq in employment had been working in skilled trade occupations. A fifth of respondents originating from Iraq could not read or write at all, and almost 40 per cent had no English language skills.
- Respondents originating from Zimbabwe indicated that they were highly skilled. The majority had received a high level of education, with over 90 per cent having gained at least one qualification. The majority were working before they left for the UK, of whom a third were in professional occupations. Almost all could read and write in their own language and had good English language skills.
- Respondents from Somalia had received the least education of the main country groups, and exhibited the largest differences between the education and employment experience of men and women. Forty per cent of respondents originating from Somalia had not received any education – rising to 55 per cent amongst women – and only 14 per cent (3% of women) had any qualifications. Over a half of men from Somalia were working when they left for the UK, compared with just seven per cent of women from Somalia. Despite the low levels of education, half of all respondents from Somalia said that they could read and write fluently in their own language but 42 per cent of Somali respondents had no English language skills.

The limitations of this research and methodological lessons learnt

A number of methodological limitations and lessons learnt have been identified and are listed below. It is hoped that these will be of assistance to other groups who are seeking to carry out further skills audits.

It is important to note that the results presented here provide a picture of the skills of the refugees who were granted leave to remain in the winter of 2002/03 and not at any other time. At this time, a high number of Iraqi nationals were applying for asylum in the UK, and receiving their decisions, and so the overall results of this survey tend to reflect the Iraqi respondents' characteristics. Whenever the survey had been carried out using the same sampling methods, it is likely that one or two particular nationalities would have dominated the sample, reflecting the constant change in world events and hence the characteristics of asylum applicants.

It had been suggested, both by the interpreters who helped with the wording of the questionnaire and in previous research, that several of the concepts of a questionnaire survey may not be fully understood by certain sections of the sample population (in this case especially those from Iraq, Sri Lanka, Somalia and

Afghanistan). Wording and phrases that are commonly understood in the West often do not translate well into languages used by some of the groups represented in the sample (input from the Home Office translators helped to minimise this effect). This did not appear to be as much of a problem, however, for those from the second largest group within the sample, originating from Zimbabwe, perhaps because English is the official language in Zimbabwe. Examples given by interpreters of respondents showing a lack of understanding include what constituted a "skill" and "job title": terms not commonly used by some of the respondents from Iraq and Afghanistan. People from some countries of origin are unfamiliar with using dates – or may be used to a different calendar – and so responding to questions asking how long they have been doing something may be confusing to people from these countries. Interpreters also indicated that completing questionnaires may not have been a familiar concept to some of the respondents. This may have been a contributing factor to the lack of responses to some questions.

The survey team also experienced difficulties in securing appropriate translations of responses. In many cases, initial translations were much too traditional to be understood. In these cases, detailed comments from interpreters were passed to a translation company to ensure that the translations were in "plain English". Another problem with translations was that some languages are spelt differently in different regions, but this was overcome by retesting the translated surveys with the interpreters.

The low proportion of respondents who used an interpreter to complete the questionnaire (22%) may suggest that respondents either completed the questionnaire themselves despite poor English language skills, or sought assistance from family or friends who may not have translated the questionnaire correctly. A limitation of this research may therefore be that professional interpreters were not used to assist respondents in completing the questionnaire, which may have led to less accurate responses in some cases.

The small sample size of this survey means that results for only a small number of individual countries of origin can be relied upon. Where the sample size has been deemed sufficient, the relevant countries have been presented in the tables in this report. If the survey were carried out over a longer period of time, or yielded an even higher response rate, then it would be possible to analyse results for more countries. However carrying out an extended survey would incur high costs and delay the reporting process.

Another lesson for future surveys would be to inform the questioning from the understanding of the cultures for whom the survey is intended. This would be invaluable to gain effective and true results. However, this would have required having several different versions of the questionnaire in each language and extra work for researchers to provide the most appropriate questionnaire to respondents, which would have been costly as well as being a longer process.

It should be noted that in April 2003, after this survey was carried out, ELR was replaced with two alternative categories - Humanitarian Protection and Discretionary Leave.

It is conceivable that respondents may exaggerate their education history (and other skills) if they are under the (false) impression that the questionnaire may assist them in finding employment, or alternatively may underestimate these due to lack of confidence. In addition to this, some of the question areas carry specific limitations, as follows.

Country of origin

Respondents were asked to state their country of origin rather than nationality. This makes comparison with administrative records complicated.

Qualification

As described in Chapter 2, IRSS does not recommend that the 'highest qualification held' field is used to produce detailed analysis of the qualifications of respondents. This is mainly due to the high number of records for which it was not possible to complete this field owing to the respondent providing insufficient information for coding to be possible: 36 per cent of respondents who stated that they held a qualification

prior to arrival in the UK have not had their highest qualification coded. There are also cases in which the process of likening of non-British qualifications to British ones had the result of equating some non-British qualifications to a lower level than expected. For example, of the twenty-five medical professionals in the sample, only four were considered to be of British bachelor degree standard or above. For these reasons, the majority of the analyses in this area focus on the number of years spent by the respondent in education rather than qualifications held. It was felt that this would give an idea of how much education the respondent received while avoiding the questionable data quality of the highest qualification field.

Occupation

The survey responses were coded using the SOC 2000 coding frame. The SOC system was created for classifying occupations in the UK and so IRSS has concerns about the accuracy of the coding of occupations of persons from developing countries. For example, a Somali farmer who single-handedly runs a small piece of land may be classified in the same way as a farm manager in the UK who runs a large area of land with many staff.

Language and literacy

In order to respond to the language and literacy questions, respondents had to self-assess their skills. Such questions are gathering respondents' own views and so – as with all questionnaires seeking views of self-assessments of skills – different respondents with equivalent skills may have rated those skills differently.

The implications of this research for policy-makers

The skills audit demonstrates that many refugees have valuable skills and experience which can benefit the UK. Increased awareness of this could help to change public perceptions, foster community cohesion and aid integration. It is hoped that the report will also be a useful tool for practitioners and policy-makers in the statutory, further education and voluntary sectors who are involved with helping refugees into sustainable jobs and assisting their integration.

The findings clearly illustrate the diversity within the refugee community and show marked differences between nationalities in levels of language skill, qualifications and experiences of employment. Furthermore, amongst some nationalities at least, there seem to be significant differences in the skills and employment profiles of men and women.

Notably, almost a half of those respondents who were economically active prior to coming to the UK were self-employed. In part, this might reflect higher levels of self-employment overall in the developing world. It also suggests that the refugee population is an enterprising one and that promoting self-employment might be considered as one way of engaging them in the labour market.

The research suggests that advisors in Jobcentre Plus and in voluntary organisations need to respond to a very wide range of needs in terms of practical advice and guidance for refugee job-seekers. Those who arrive in the UK with high levels of education and significant professional experience in fields such as medicine or engineering will have very different needs from those who have had little or no formal education in their country of origin.

The findings in this report on the language skills – both first language and English – exhibited by respondents should be taken into account when planning employment or learning programmes in areas where it is known that there are growing numbers of unemployed refugees. For example, excluding Zimbabweans, literacy levels in respondents' first language were lower than those for the UK population as a whole (over two-thirds of non-Zimbabwean refugees said that they could read and write their main language fluently or fairly well). In addition, only around one in four respondents (Zimbabweans excluded) arrived in the UK able to speak English fluently or fairly well. This lack of language competence could represent a major barrier to integration for some groups if not addressed effectively. Policy-makers need to consider how the language needs of refugees can be assessed systematically and how

appropriate provision can be delivered to support integration in the community and crucially in the workplace.

Further research on the skills of refugees

As discussed above, the results of this skills audit show the characteristics of the refugees who were granted leave to remain during winter 2002/03. Furthermore, since the vast majority (82%) of respondents originated from Iraq, Zimbabwe or Somalia, these results tell us little about the characteristics of people from other countries of origin. Further research could focus on obtaining information on the skills and qualifications of nationals of other top refugee originating countries such as China, Iran, India and Turkey. Possible ways of doing this include sending questionnaires specifically to successful applicants from these countries, or repeating the survey over a longer period of time and taking into account the limitations and lessons learnt discussed in Chapter 3.

The majority of principal asylum applicants are male, therefore, since this questionnaire was sent to principal asylum applicants, the majority of respondents (73%) were male. Future research could consider targeting the dependants of asylum seekers (often spouses and children), or all adults, in a bid to yield more female respondents and therefore be more representative of the refugee population.

A fairly high proportion of respondents (women in particular) from some countries of origin (in particular countries in the Far East and Somalia) reported being economically inactive prior to their arrival. Explanations for this may include less of a tradition of labour market involvement in certain cultures and difficulties with childcare. Further research may be useful to explore this issue, and to investigate the feasibility of labour market participation for these groups.

This project has also highlighted the difficulties of analysing and reporting the skill levels and qualifications of migrants. Further work on overseas education and qualifications would be helpful in order to provide a better understanding of what these entail and their applicability to the UK context. This could cover aspects such as: an in-depth analysis of the education systems in other countries; details of qualifications and the comparison of these to UK qualifications (including the use of current coding frames); details of training received; and the application of overseas qualifications in the UK to investigate whether migrants are able to gain full use of relevant qualifications here in the UK. (Refugees who come to the UK with educational qualifications and professional experience can be assisted by NARIC and other agencies which specialise in the accreditation of prior experience and learning.)

It would also be useful to carry out research into the aspirations of refugees and other migrants, and the link between reported skills and qualifications and subsequent experiences of employment in the UK.

The findings of this research will be reflected in the Home Office's refugee integration strategy and will contribute to the Department for Work and Pensions' refugee employment strategy. In July 2004 the Home Office published a Refugee Integration Strategy Consultation Document – *Integration Matters*.

Appendix A - Questionnaire



لتم شوصنة [] بكة و نتم لائترقية بخرة ناو نتم [✓] نططر نصوصيت بة وطرطر اوي سوراني نتم نامتية و ترسيار نامتكة هتية نكاية نيشانتيكي
زترفةي نكشكي نولمان لصدائة و بوماني بنصرفوة (نصوصيت ناكات نول لستر نامتكت بدقيت)
SOR

كه تاسو ددى ليك او سوالنامي به پستو ژبه كي ترجمه كړي شوى نقل ته اړتيا لري نودلته كي [✓] ته كس رابنكي او دا پانپا به وړيا خواب وركونكي پاكټ كي بيرته
راواستوي (كوم ټكټ ته اړتيا نه لري) []
PES

در صورتیکه احتیاج به متن ترجمه شده به دري این نامه و پرسشنامه دارید، لطفا در اینجا یک تیک [✓] بگذارید [] و این صفحه را در پاکت
که خرج ارسال آن پرداخته شده است برگردانید (تمبر لازم ندارد).
DAR

إذا كنت بحاجة إلى نسخة من هذه الرسالة والأستبيان، مترجمة إلى اللغة العربية، يرجى وضع إشارة [✓] هنا [] وأعادة هذه الصفحة في المظروف المدفوعة
أجرته البريدية مسبقاً (لا يحتاج إلى طابع بريدي)
ARA

உங்களுக்கு இக்கடிதம் மற்றும் கேள்விப்பத்திரத்தின் தமிழ் மொழிபெயர்ப்பு தேவைப்படின தயவுசெய்து [✓] என இவ்விடத்தில் []
குறிப்பிட்டு இப்பக்கத்தை தரப்பட்டிருக்கும் பதில் உறையிலிட்டு அனுப்பவும். (தபால் முத்திரை தேவையில்லை)
TAM

Haddii aad doonaysid nuskhad ku tarjuman af Somali oo ah warqadan iyo su'aalahan fadlan calaamadee [✓]
halkan [] kadibna soo celi warqadan adigoo ku soo ridaya boqshadan (uma baahna farankabolo)
SOM

Skills Audit of People Granted Refugee Status and Exceptional Leave to Remain

Dear Sir/Madam

This letter should NOT be taken to be a letter determining your status in the United Kingdom

I write on behalf of the Immigration, Research and Statistics Section of the Home Office. We understand that you have recently received a letter from the Immigration and Nationality Directorate of the Home Office granting you leave to remain. If that is the case then please could we ask you to complete this short questionnaire and return it as soon as possible in the reply-paid envelope (no stamp required). (If you have not been granted leave to remain then please ignore this letter and take no further action.)

The aim of this important research is to gain a better understanding of your skills, qualifications, and employment background. This information will then be used by the Government to plan policies, programmes and services in order to assist others like you in gaining access to training and employment. It will not be used to find you a job. If you are looking for employment you should contact your local Jobscentre Plus.

All the information you provide is confidential and will only be seen by the research team. It will not be traced back to you and it will not be used in determining any future claim for further exceptional leave or indefinite leave to remain. If you have any questions please contact Kate Hitchcock, Principal Research Officer on 020 8760 8632.

If you are using an interpreter or someone to help you complete this questionnaire please tick this box []

About You

1. Are you...? Male
- Female
2. How old are you? 18-24 years old
- 25-29 years old
- 30-34 years old
- 35-39 years old
- 40-49 years old
- 50 years old or over
3. How long have you been living in the UK?
(tick one box only) 0 to 5 months
- 6 to 11 months
- 12 to 17 months
- 18 to 23 months
- 24 months or longer
- Can't remember/ don't know
4. What is your country of origin?
(tick one box only) Afghanistan Pakistan
- Algeria Sierra Leone
- Angola Somalia
- China Sri Lanka
- India Turkey
- Iran Former Republic of Yugoslavia
- Iraq Zimbabwe
- Other (please state) _____

Your Language Skills

5. What is your **main** language? (tick one box only)
- | | | | |
|----------|-----|------------|-----|
| Arabic | [] | Ndebele | [] |
| Dari | [] | Peshto | [] |
| English | [] | Portuguese | [] |
| Farsi | [] | Shona | [] |
| Kurdish | [] | Somali | [] |
| Kurmanji | [] | Sorani | [] |

Other (please state) _____

6. How well can you **read** in your main language?

Fluently [] Fairly well [] Slightly [] Not at all []

7. How well can you **write** in your main language?

Fluently [] Fairly well [] Slightly [] Not at all []

8. How well do you understand **spoken** English?

Fluently [] Fairly well [] Slightly [] Not at all []

9. How well can you **speak** English?

Fluently [] Fairly well [] Slightly [] Not at all []

10. How well can you **read** English? *(We are aware that some people may receive help with this questionnaire)*

Fluently [] Fairly well [] Slightly [] Not at all []

11. How well can you **write** English?

Fluently [] Fairly well [] Slightly [] Not at all []

12. Do you know any other languages? Yes []
(not including English or your first language) No (go to question 14) []

13. Which other languages can you...	Speak	Understand spoken	Read	Write
Please state language _____	Fluently [] Fairly well [] Slightly [] Not at all []	Fluently [] Fairly well [] Slightly [] Not at all []	Fluently [] Fairly well [] Slightly [] Not at all []	Fluently [] Fairly well [] Slightly [] Not at all []
Please state language _____	Fluently [] Fairly well [] Slightly [] Not at all []	Fluently [] Fairly well [] Slightly [] Not at all []	Fluently [] Fairly well [] Slightly [] Not at all []	Fluently [] Fairly well [] Slightly [] Not at all []

Your Education Level

14. Before coming to the UK how many years of education did you receive? (tick one box only)
- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| None | [] |
| 6 or less years of education | [] |
| 7-9 years of education | [] |
| 10-12 years of education | [] |
| 13 to 15 years of education | [] |
| 16 or more years of education | [] |

15. Before coming to the UK did you have any qualifications?
- | | |
|------------------------|-----|
| Yes | [] |
| No (go to question 17) | [] |

16. Before coming to the UK what was the **highest** qualification you held?

Full title of qualification _____

Subject(s) _____

Country where qualification was awarded _____

Name of institution where qualification was awarded

Duration of study _____

Please state was this... Full time []
Part time []

Date of award /
 M M Y Y Y Y

Please state any other educational qualifications you may have

17. Do you have any **work related** skills or qualifications not mentioned above? If yes, please state.

Your Employment History Before Coming to the UK

18. Before coming to the UK what was your **main** activity? (tick one box only)
- | | |
|---|-----|
| In employment | [] |
| Self employed | [] |
| Unemployed and looking for work | [] |
| A student | [] |
| Looking after home and family | [] |
| Retired | [] |
| Not working for some other reason. Please state _____ | [] |

19. Before coming to the UK, what were your last two jobs, either paid or unpaid? Please state these starting with the most recent. If none please go to end of questionnaire.

Most recent Job Title: _____

Start Date / End Date /

For each letter please tick one box only

- a) Employed [] or Self employed [] b) Full time [] or Part time []
c) Temporary [] or Permanent [] d) Paid [] or Unpaid []

Please provide a brief description of what you did in that job

Reason for leaving

Job 2 Job title: _____

Start Date / End Date /

For each letter please tick one box only

- a) Employed [] or Self employed [] b) Full time [] or Part time []
c) Temporary [] or Permanent [] d) Paid [] or Unpaid []

Please provide a brief description of what you did in that job

Reason for leaving

If you would like to make any comments on your skills, qualifications or employment please use the space below.

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please return it as soon as possible in the reply paid envelope (no stamp required) to:

**Immigration Research and Statistics Service
The Home Office
6th Floor Apollo House
36 Wellesley Road
Croydon
CR9 3RR**

Appendix B – Country of origin coding used in the analysis presented in this report

The countries of origin, as given by respondents, were grouped in the following way in order to analyse the survey results.

Americas: Bolivia; Colombia; Jamaica.

Europe: Azerbaijan; Bosnia; Former Republic of Yugoslavia; Georgia; Kosovo; Kyrgyzstan; Republic of Croatia; Turkey; Turkmenistan; USSR.

Far East: Afghanistan; Bhutan; Burma; China; India; Myanmar; Pakistan; Sri Lanka; Vietnam.

Iraq: Iraq

Other Africa: Algeria; Angola; Burkina Faso; Burundi; Cabinda; Cameroon; Chad; Congo; Eritrea; Ethiopia; Ghana; Guinea; Guinea-Conakry; Ivory Coast; Kenya; Liberia; Nigeria; Rwanda; Sierra Leone; Sudan; Suthu; Uganda; Zambia.

Other Middle East: Iran; Libya; Palestine; South Yemen; Syria; Tunisia; Yemen.

Somalia: Somalia.

Zimbabwe: Zimbabwe.

Unknown: Unknown.

Produced by the Research Development and Statistics Directorate, Home Office

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through the RDS website

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ISBN 1 84473 323 8

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