



Women's Resource Centre

REFUGEE WOMEN'S GROUPS

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REFUGEE AND ASYLUM SEEKING WOMEN IN THE UK

- It is estimated that 350,000 people in London entered the country as asylum seekers in the last 15 years. ¹
- One third to one half of asylum seekers are likely to be female. ²
- In 2002, 21,775 women sought asylum in the UK as principal applicants and half of those applying as dependents were female. ²
- The main countries of origin of asylum seeking women in 2002 were Zimbabwe, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo.
- Women's reasons for asylum are usually complex and based on more than one ground under the Refugee Convention. Many have suffered gender-based persecution which asylum decision-makers have little information on. ³
- The Government's 'white list' of countries from which all asylum claims will be refused includes countries where "domestic violence is prevalent without any state protection" and those where trafficked victims have come from.
- When they arrive in the UK, women refugees receive little support, and the support they do receive is often inappropriate for their needs.
- One study has shown that newly arrived refugee women feel so unsafe in the UK that 83% live under self-imposed curfew. ⁴
- 84% of refugee women interviewees from the above study lived in accommodation without a telephone. ⁴
- A third of refugee women walk everywhere because they cannot afford public transport, adding to their feeling of vulnerability. ⁴
- A further third of women have been verbally or physically abused, including being spat on or shouted at. ⁴
- Many refugee women are destitute. ⁴
- "When the baby came out, it was hard. I did not have anything for the baby, no money, no clothes. One of the outreach staff gave me a kettle so that I could boil water for the baby. It was very difficult, as I had to leave the baby to queue for food. I was frightened it would choke. I often went without food". ²





REFUGEE WOMEN'S VOLUNTARY & COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS IN THE UK

- Refugee women's organisations provide essential services addressing the poverty and discrimination that asylum seeking and refugee women face in Britain.
- "The marginalisation of refugee women has meant that until recently their voices have not always been given the platform to be heard. The traditional gatekeepers and spokespersons for refugee communities have, in the main, been male community leaders. It is only through the establishment of specific women's projects that the issues that concern them are beginning to be identified and addressed".²
- A study of asylum seeking women in Brighton identified six specific areas where more services for women were needed: training and employment, education (including English as a second language), social services, health, housing and racial harassment.⁵
- Refugee women's organisations also provide valuable opportunities for refugee women to gain experience through volunteering and training that help them overcome barriers to employment.
- "The majority of people from the refugee community came into the UK due to civil war in their country. Their qualifications are not recognised and as such they are unable to find jobs in their own areas of expertise, i.e. doctors working as cleaners, porters, waiters. Prominent men and women are now doing menial jobs to survive. Getting involved in the Black Voluntary and Community Sector can raise self-esteem, let you know you are not alone and help others back into the mainstream of society, a positive influence on life chances".⁶
- One study found that although local authorities with recent refugee community populations often prioritise funding refugee organisations, this funding is almost always "generic" and not specifically for women.⁷
- The above study also found "stereotyping and subsequent dismissal" of refugee women. The underfunding of refugee women's organisations is sometimes attributed to language barriers, inexperience of funding systems and other capacity building needs in the sector. However, the exclusion of refugee women's organisations from funding and policy decisions is compounded by institutional racism and sexism and the marginalisation of refugee women both within refugee communities and the wider voluntary and community sector.⁷

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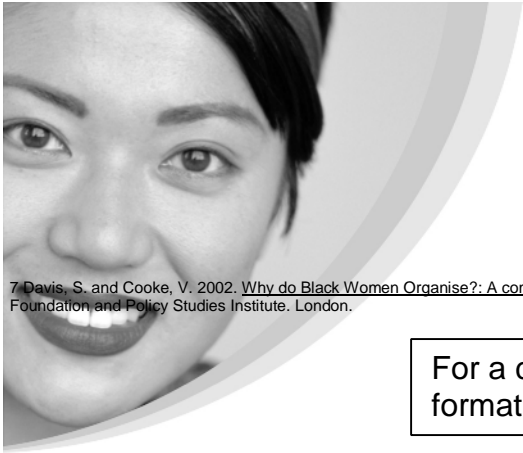
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