



# REFUGEES FOR EQUALITIES

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# “We Don’t Do Refugees!”

## Refugees and Multiple Inequalities Report 2009



Supported by



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## “WE DON’T DO REFUGEES”

### Refugees and Multiple Inequalities Report 2009

#### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

REAP is a refugee-led charity based in West London that aims to empower refugees (see 2.2 for definition) so that they can live fairly, equally and as a valued part of British society. This year is a learning year for REAP as we try to strengthen our understanding about equalities issues faced by refugees and build connections across all equalities sectors as the most effective strategy to enable refugees to get on with living their lives as they wish to do so. We are grateful to EHRC for a year of ‘interim’ funding and hope they will fund us again to continue this work in more depth. We have also been able to draw on Capacity-Builders/Improving Reach funding for work that also provided input to this area of learning. Longer term funding from London Councils enabled REAP to get to the position where it could take on this work.

A refugee is a person who feels s/he has sought refuge in the UK  
Section 2.2

#### 1.1 Current attention to equalities

This work comes at a time of rapid change, fast debate and new directions in equalities work in the UK. The Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) is bedding in; the Single equality Bill (SEB) due in a few months. There has been high and often negative popular and political attention to refugees for years and more recently attention

‘Londinium jobs for Londinium workers’

to migrant labour, heightened and legitimised by claims of ‘British jobs for British workers’. In London the HEAR network has been active, linking diverse voluntary sector equalities bodies in a year when Draft Guidance, later withdrawn, attacked specialist, identity and equalities organisations.

#### 1.2 Why Refugees?

Refugee populations struggle with many needs; isolation, post-traumatic stress, bereavement, lack of capital, lack of contacts, unfamiliarity with British systems and culture. But this research finds that their struggles are often made harder by artificially and unnecessarily created obstacles and failures in systems designed to help people in need. Their struggles with a range of discriminatory structures, some of which were examined in this research, deserves attention not least as a matter of principle, humanity and not least their human rights to dignity and respect, as with any population that faces discrimination whether or not they are a recognised ‘strand’ in equalities law.

Refugees are not a tiny number of people: people have been fleeing to the UK for centuries, more recently fleeing the holocaust, post-colonial devastation, the war on terror. People have escaped situations anywhere on a spectrum from murderous, state-sponsored discrimination to an inability to live freely and openly according to their nature and beliefs – what we have called the ‘Prossy-Laurilee’ spectrum (4/2/09) explained further in section 2.2. But even if we were talking about a tiny number of people – would that mean avoidable suffering and alienation doesn’t matter in modern day Britain?

Another argument for close attention to discrimination against refugees is the phenomenon of labelling. Before this project REAP was increasingly aware that refugees are perceived as a distinct and broadly cohesive group, boxed, and treated as ‘other’, as somehow different to normal people, able to turn to ‘their community’ or at best ‘their communities’ when in need. This research has shown this meaningless labelling to be a strong feature of refugee’s lives with wide implications for individuals, the refugee population as a whole, and for services and institutions. The topic of labelling and boxing arises throughout these findings, not as a curiosity, but as a serious problem that needs to be tackled.

### ‘We don’t do refugees’

When we asked one local charity that supports local families with disabled children to give support to a family living in their area that had a disabled child their response was “*we don’t do refugees*”.

During the survey of organisations, one organisation told us “*we ... are fighting AIDS, we don’t have a service for refugees*”, and another “*We do housing for gay men, we don’t do refugees*”. Many others said similar things (see Resource Bank (rb)).

*“...sometimes individuals, groups and organisations start to impose their own ‘immigration law’, by making it a condition which the law does not actually state.”*  
Participant, 17/9/09

Refugees and many other people from ethnic minorities who have been involved in this work perceive themselves as being discriminated against, whether because of their asylum/refugee claims and status, or a range of other reasons. Discrimination in asylum processes is documented and the subject of extensive lobbying eg ‘The Women’s Asylum Charter’ (See Resource Bank, section 2.5, marked ‘rb’). Though not focussed on asylum processes, through this research REAP has heard many refugees’ perceptions of UK immigration procedures as unsympathetic toward asylum seekers whose claims are based on equality issues for which they would be protected under British law if they were British nationals. For instance, during her hearing, a lesbian woman fleeing Jamaica was told by the judge that her asylum claim on the grounds of persecution because of her sexuality was invalid, as “the appellant is now in her middle age and is not likely to focus on her sexuality as in the past” (also see UKLGIG). REAP has also had evidence over the years that refugees are highly sensitive to possible discrimination on ground of refugee background or race, and a tendency of some automatically to interpret disappointments (eg. having 6 minutes with a GP; a college losing assessed work) in terms of racism or refugee-hostility.

During the research we have also witnessed or been told of aggressive or discriminatory incidents in ‘real time’ – ie happening on the day of the event or interview or in the recent

past. For example, water thrown at a baby accompanied with asylum abuse from the passenger of a passing car, while the parent was on her way into our training session (7/09). People describe, often with humour, being asked obscure and irrelevant questions at immigration at Heathrow. Many believe discrimination is normal and natural; they accept it and don't believe it can be changed 'As long as we are human beings we face challenges' (15/1/09).

We have heard from many who value the UK's legal protection for equality and against discrimination, even when acknowledging that their personal opinions may be hostile to certain issues, often singling out homosexuality or the duties of female adults. Concern about equality is an aspect of Britain that is highly valued by refugees and migrants voicing views during this work, and many contributors expressed concern about actions or inactions taken in the media and by Government that they felt would undermine support for equality – the story in Dec 2008 that Christmas had been banned in Harrow's primary schools caused many people to express astonishment and anxiety about provoking hatred from English people and Christians.

*Many believe discrimination is normal and natural; they accept it and don't believe it can be changed 'As long as we are human beings we face challenges'*

#### 1.4 Refugees as a case that provides lessons with wider application

Looking at any single equalities population can provide lessons for wider equalities work and populations. This year has taught REAP that attention to refugees gives a particularly valuable way to explore wider equalities issues, particularly the essential question of how to understand and tackle multiple-inequalities. Refugees are ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances and so their lives and issues are as diverse as any random population, reaching across all 'strands'. In addition, many have fled situations of extreme discrimination, and bring critical insight with them.

For voluntary and statutory bodies to reach and work equitably with all refugees, they must be able to cope with the full complexity and diversity of society. To reach all refugees is not about reaching a smaller and smaller minority, but about creating services that will reach more and more people, and will benefit everyone. What is more, equality is the law and people who may be refugees, but who are also gendered as women or men, girls or boys; young, middle or old; sexual; of different abilities, beliefs, ethnicities are all entitled to equal opportunities in the UK, regardless of whether and how they end up living here. There is also a groundswell conviction in refugee support structures that asylum-hate and discrimination is 'the respectable face of racism' and must be tackled proactively by anti-racists if racism is to be tackled.

Refugees in British society are comparatively powerless socially, economically and politically. Dependence and vulnerability feed power hierarchies and enable the misuse of power and the abuse of people, creating suffering for many and danger for everyone. Reports and indications of such situations have emerged at several points through this research process, both in barely visible social, economic and domestic structures and in what should be closely supervised access structures into voluntary and statutory services. Closer scrutiny is needed.

**"Never think it can't happen here"**

## 1.4 Objectives

### a) REAP Objectives

Refugees in Effective and Active Partnership (REAP) is an independent organisation with the main aim of empowering refugees and asylum seekers to reach their full potential and to enable them to rebuild their lives within the UK. (Please see 'What is REAP', in appendices.)

### b) Project objectives

In 2008/09 the Refugees for Equalities project was created to learn about and raise debate about equalities and discrimination issues faced by refugees, particularly looking at people's experiences and views in west London, where REAP works. A number of issues were already identified before the project began:

- Although refugees may be facing more 'life-' and 'equalities-' issues than most people face in their entire lives, they face additional difficulties created unnecessarily by institutional or indirectly discriminatory structures as well as underlying hostility in many quarters. With few resources, reserves, knowledge, contacts to overcome discrimination refugees are rendered dependent and vulnerable to avoidable suffering and abuse.
- Despite the utter diversity of the refugee population, these people who have come from all over the world, from all sorts of backgrounds, each with her or his own completely unique story and who have arrived in the UK any time from 30 years to 30 days ago are pigeonholed, boxed and labelled with the single heading 'refugee'. As a group of people that draws extremes of hate and sympathy from across British society, the fact that a person has sought refuge in the UK is often allowed to obscure every other aspect of their lives, personalities, needs and social connections. One result is that many organisations providing support to people with particular areas of need, do not see it as in their brief or mandate to provide that same support to people who have sought refuge in the UK.
- In addition, the significant stigma and discrimination refugees face amongst the refugee population itself - particularly around race, sexuality, disability and mental health - is rarely acknowledged openly by refugee groups or those who work with refugee communities. When encouraging refugee groups to become involved in the West London BME&R network, one group's coordinator (quite a well known refugee group) told us 'we don't want anything to do with those BME types' - they were not atypical. As with domestic violence in LGBT relationships (see Broken Rainbow), racism between refugees and ethnic minorities is a very uncomfortable but unavoidable part of reality that must be addressed by those who aim to promote equality. From REAP's existing contacts, it was clear already that knowledge and understanding of legal requirements relating to equality was very low across the vast majority of refugees and other migrants.

Therefore, with 'Refugees for Equalities' REAP aimed to:

- understand experiences and perceptions of discrimination, and attitudes of refugees towards equalities issues;

- research the attitudes of groups and organisations that were not specifically ‘refugee’ organisations, but that provide support that might be useful to refugees including groups focussed on one or more equalities issues;
- improve understanding about and amongst specialist equalities groups and organisations about the multiple inequalities faced by refugees;
- improve understanding amongst refugees and their community groups and organisations about equalities.

## 1.5 The Report

This report aims to summarise and present what REAP has learned in the past year. It is one element in a wider pool of communications and feedback that REAP is developing relating to equalities, including web-based materials and ongoing discussions. The marker (rb) indicates where further materials relating to points in this report area available, both primary data and secondary, which can be accessed via REAP’s new web-based Resources Bank. We greatly appreciate any input, comments, ideas from you which you can email directly to REAP’s Communications Development Worker, [Olesya@reap.org.uk](mailto:Olesya@reap.org.uk) or Director [Sarah@reap.org.uk](mailto:Sarah@reap.org.uk) .

The report is intended to reflect intense internal debate amongst REAP staff, trustees, members, volunteers and other contacts, including perceptions of wider equalities, anti-discrimination and human rights debates which we have come into contact with over the 12 month period. Unexpected richness has been brought to this project as well as to REAP’s wider work through membership of the HEAR network which has provided REAP with strong bridges to other groups, individual professionals and fora.

The report is a sequence of themes, drawing data and lessons from activities, surveys, workshops, network meetings, other organisations’ events and other activities throughout the year.

Section 2, ‘Methodology’: Maybe you normally skip ‘methodology’ sections, but please don’t in this report: it includes a very important discussion about definitions which became the spine for almost all other activities over the year and describes the method developed for identifying and analysing needs and multiple equalities issues faced by refugees.

Section 3, ‘Experiences’ reports on a wide range of combined and compounded issues on many equalities fronts described over the year by people who have sought refuge in the UK.

Section 4 describes how and where discrimination takes place, as experienced and expressed by refugees over the past year, and lays out lessons and questions about institutional discrimination with much wider application.

Section 5 ‘Reducing Impact’, Combined, Compounded and Voice, look at how concerned bodies could reduce the impact that discrimination and discriminatory structures have on refugees who are dealing with multiple inequalities. The ‘One plus One’ principle is described, and the issue of ‘those who know and can speak and those who don’t or won’t’.

Section 6 concludes the report and presents ‘next steps’.

Appendices will be available by the end of June 2009. Many materials including some primary data will become available via the new resource bank (rb) in the coming weeks.

## 2.0 METHODOLOGY

This section is not simply about how we did things, but about why we did things the way we did.

### 2.1 How REAP tries to work,

The way we went about this project seeks to reflect REAP's mission of empowering refugees and asylum seekers to rebuild their lives. REAP does not claim to be a representative body, and we cannot claim this work is representative. Our aim is to strengthen the likelihood that refugees will be able to get their voices heard and this project was a pilot year, at least partly to learn about how we might get that to work better. We worked from the premise that refugees are ordinary people in extraordinary situations which often demand they become quite extraordinary individuals in order to survive. Having sought refuge is only part of their complex lives and when trying to address equalities issues faced by refugees it is important to take a holistic approach, one which is responsive and personal.

### 2.2 Defining refugees

The project has confirmed that there is confusion and damaging ignorance about what a 'refugee' is and what she or he is allowed to do or access. Definitions are always relative to context, for example immigration lawyers will have one set of definitions of what 'refugee' means related to legal processes, and a theatre group will need a different kind of definition of 'refugee', perhaps related to expressive work. The following definitions are suggested very much as working definitions for the purposes of the project and this report, intended to be appropriate for individual refugees and professionals from voluntary and some statutory bodies to use in day to day interaction as the refugees rebuild their lives. They are not legally based or precise definitions as an advice worker might need for example.

Asylum-seekers are people who have asked if they can stay in the UK on the grounds that they would be in danger if they returned to their country of origin. They are still waiting for a final decision, perhaps after a series of appeals. Importantly they are NOT allowed to work and can only claim very limited support which may be conditional on being 'dispersed' – usually sent out of the South East.

Refugee (with leave to remain LTR) A working definition useful for most equalities groups and mainstream services would be a person who has fled their country of origin, sought refuge in UK ('come through the asylum process'), and been given some form of permission or 'leave to remain' (LTR). Refugees under this definition are in a very different situation to asylum-seekers: they are allowed to work, register for mainstream state benefits and social housing, receive full health care etc. However, it is still important to distinguish between those people with kinds of LTR which are permanent and those who have temporary forms of LTR (for 1, 2, 3, years only) who will then have to reapply, effectively returning to the situation of an asylum seeker though retaining the

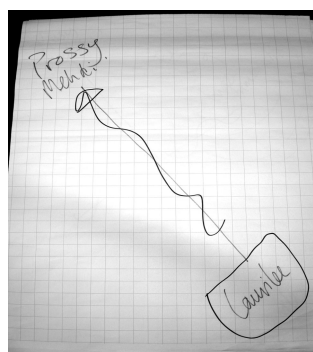
entitlements of someone with LTR. Although sharing the opportunities to work and take part in mainstream life, the lack of security for people with temporary LTR will affect their daily experiences and future plans.

Refugee as a 'community' There is also a 'social' use of 'refugee' eg. 'refugee writers circle' 'refugee community' which usually means people from an ethnic group for which the initial arrivals largely came through asylum processes. This definition encompasses asylum seekers and refugees with LTR as well as people who arrived in the UK through other channels and 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> generation etc.

Refugee self-defined The definition used by REAP generally, in this project and **in this report (unless otherwise indicated) is people who feel they have sought refuge in the UK.** It can include asylum seekers, people who have exhausted the appeal process, people with LTR, 2<sup>nd</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> generation, naturalised British. It may include people with British nationality or patrilineage or anyone who was living in another country but came to the UK because they found their situation made intolerable by discrimination where they were living.

A refugee is a person who feels s/he has sought refuge in the UK.

Under this definition the spectrum of individuals' experiences can be huge, from the actual case of a Ugandan woman, Prossy, who was raped and tortured and whose life was threatened because of her lesbian relationship, who gained LTR after a number of appeals in 2008, to an American woman REAP met in the course of the project, and whom we will call Laurilee, who had chosen to come to the UK to join her British partner, also a woman, because in deciding whether to settle in the US or in the UK, they decided they could not easily live openly and in a relaxed way as a lesbian couple in the part of the USA where Laurilee was from. We have called this the Prossy – Laurilee spectrum and it serves to emphasize the diversity as well as sheer number of people who have sought refuge of one kind or another in the UK. The nature of the situation they are leaving and the means of entering and remaining in the UK may vary hugely but their presence here is for the same underlying reason; a search for safety, freedom from discrimination, dignity.



Migrant Person who has moved from one area, place or country to another. Can include tourists, business people, students, people without documents, spouses and families, people seeking work, refugees. Where used in this report it is in this definition of people who have moved, but only for people born outside the UK. However in attention to equalities, it must be recognised that 'migrant' is a politicised term in the UK at present, increasingly used to refer primarily to people arriving from the accession countries of the European Union (A8 countries), strongly linked to the idea of people choosing to come to the UK to get more money. Refugees (here, people with LTR) are often included in the migrant category in policy documents etc., which often creates or reinforces the impression that refugees are economic migrants, deliberately choosing to come to the UK for economic reasons, and ignoring both the nature of their arrival, legitimacy of their

presence on other grounds, and the fact that refugees (with LTR) do not have the option of returning to their original country.

## 2.4 Defining key equality terms

At times Refugees for Equalities participants have clearly found equalities-related language difficulty. People describe being worried about saying anything, about being ‘shot down’, about offending.

- a) equality, inequality, equity, diversity, discrimination

We expected participants who are still building their English language vocabulary and confidence to find it difficult to distinguish between the meaning of equality, equity, diversity, discrimination but were surprised how many first-language speakers also used terms, especially ‘equality’ and ‘diversity’ *interchangeably*. However, despite our surprise at others’ confusion, when pressed to explain and define the differences, even project staff got stuck until we settled on the following:

Equality: Again a working definition: Being able to get on with your life without constantly having to think/being reminded that you are a refugee/a person with disabilities/a woman/a gay man etc. at times when you wouldn’t chose to think about it. Inequality is not simply the reverse of equality, but is what happens when people in a population with certain shared characteristics face a regular range of problems or challenges, related to their shared characteristic, which people outside of that population do not face so frequently or regularly.

Equalities group or population: A social group is any set or population of people who have certain features in common, eg. They are left handed, they are asylum-seekers. Many of them will face certain common life- or equalities-issues related to the feature they have in common. An equalities group or population is a social group that directly or indirectly faces disadvantages, compared to others in wider/other populations, because of the features they have in common.

Where the ‘disadvantage’ is caused artificially – whether deliberate or not – and could be avoided, it is discrimination. It is a particular concern where people in positions of influence or power over the lives of others treat those of an equalities group less well than they would treat people who are not in that social group. In other words, where a person has the power to make things better or worse and makes them worse, or fails to make them better, equalities activists and organisations should start to worry. Individual members of any disadvantaged population may be able to overcome the obstacles they face, and may be able to overcome discrimination too, but individuals who do not have the confidence, skills, knowledge, contacts to tackle discrimination are likely to suffer. Refugees are often the weaker party in a power relationship and are thus particularly susceptible to discrimination whilst largely lacking the tools and resources to deal with it. (Discrimination takes many forms and is realised through different structures and terms direct, indirect, and institutional discrimination will be used in section 4.)

Equity, equitable when people in a population with shared characteristics and related disadvantages have access to additional resources that enable them to live equally with people outside that population, despite those disadvantages.

In this exercise to explain ‘equity’, a person over 5’8” and a person under 5’ were stood beside one another and given ‘equal access’ to a pencil held above their heads. The taller person took it with ease and held it over her head. After a couple of jumps, the shorter person tried to tickle the taller without success. Next she grabbed a chair, climbed up, and took the pencil, to shrieks of “that’s empowerment!” (7/09)

b) Approaches : multiple, pan-, common denominator, Human rights

The concept of multiple inequalities became important early in the project and was the focus of REAP’s major conference (members’ annual meeting/AGM 15<sup>th</sup> Oct 2008), exploring the topic in relation to all 4 strategic ‘pillars’ of REAP’s work. Conversations about multiple equalities, multiple inequalities, pan-equalities and mainstreaming, human rights-based approaches were going on around us at HEAR, EHRC consultations, 3SA/LVSC and National Equality Partnership channels. But are these just different names for the same concept? The discussion is moving fast but does not seem to be approaching a conclusion just yet. We suggest the following:

Equalities approaches Those approaches that tackle specific realities in current British social, economic and political structures by identifying specific social groups or populations that suffer unnecessarily because of inequitable and discriminatory structures. Equalities approaches tackle single, multiple and pan-equalities issues. Alternatively, and not necessarily in conflict are what REAP has started to call common denominator approaches that tackle issues which affect all equalities populations and potentially affect the ‘global population’ (here, everyone living in the UK). Common denominator approaches can also be seen to include ‘Pan-equalities’ and also ‘Human Rights’ and ‘Mainstreaming’.

Single equalities work identifies and serves populations facing specific inequalities and discrimination, eg. women, deaf people. ‘Single equality projects, services or organisations may be created initially to deal specifically with the issues people of that population face in relation to their shared characteristic. However it is widely acknowledged that single equality worker often deal with a far wider range of life issues faced by people in that population, including many issues that may be unrelated to their common characteristic, not least because relationships of trust build up between the individual and the workers.

Multiple equalities is attention and work that recognises people face issues relating to many different equalities aspects of their lives, eg. A refugee who uses a wheelchair, an unaccompanied child who is also seeking asylum because she and her family belonged to a persecuted religious minority. Refugees are also migrants, ethnic minorities, gendered male and females, all of various ages. Many refugees are disabled, religion is often an issue for them – even part of their reason for flight, at least as many if not more refugees are lesbians, gay men, bisexuals or transgender people as in the wider UK population. They are just as likely to face gender, age, ethnicity, disability etc. issues unrelated to their refugee backgrounds as a person selected at random from the UK population.

Multiple equalities is also a way of looking at relationships between different equality aspects of people’s lives. Thus refugee experiences are likely to have affected other aspects of their lives – their gender expectations, sexual relations, physical health, mental health etc.. For actual examples, see section 3.

There are 7 recognised strands in British equalities legislation, but multiple equalities approaches do not necessarily stop there: what of carers? caste or class? different opportunities for people in rural Britain or urban Britain? Continuing with the case of the refugee population, refugees can have temporary or permanent forms of leave to remain, in the definition used in this report they could still be struggling with asylum claims.

Pan equalities work combines attention to equalities populations and common denominators. We have used it to mean work that identifies and tackles shared issues which affect all equalities groups – such as governmental processes for producing policy and legislation, seeking to build communication structures and access to information to serve all equalities groups, funding for equalities work, infrastructure support to specialist or multiple equalities groups, principles and priorities given to equality. It can be used to describe work which addresses the whole picture. It is about work that relates to the ‘global’ population, here everyone living in the UK, not least because we are all in equalities populations – we are all gendered, we are all of various ages etc. but also because we all potentially lose, or suffer in a society that allows discrimination. Pan-equalities is also about a degree of sympathy, or empathy, solidarity and strategic collaboration between equalities specialists. (‘Pan-equalities’ could also be used to describe work to tackle ‘compounded’ equalities issues, about which, more in section 3.)

Human rights-based approaches: Established principles of a common and legal right to justice and the legal right to dignity, equality and respect regardless of the individual’s situation. It is about the ‘global’ population, but one by one. (See rb, BIHR)

### Mainstream

At present, it is probably not possible to give a neutral definition of ‘mainstream’ given the anger amongst equalities campaigners and groups about government guidance in 2008 that implied specialist equalities and community work was divisive and implied that ‘mainstream’ services could deliver adequately to all equalities groups. Opponents argued this denied the reality of inequalities and discrimination in Britain today, and that it implied there was no problem of inequality or inequity in service provision therefore implying that there was no problem of inequality in British society: at best the guidance was seen as naïve, at worst a denial that discrimination exists and is a problem. The guidance has already given some funders justification for cutting funding to specialist equalities, ethnic-identity based or single interest-led groups on the grounds that all services should be ‘mainstreamed’ and that ‘mainstream’ services will deliver as needed.

If ‘mainstream’ is a metaphor, what does it refer to? The fast clear water in the central flow of a river; away from the banks where slower moving and altogether muddier water gets caught in eddies and bogs? In an ideal picture mainstream services are expected to specialise in providing a certain activity, eg. health checks, to all, regardless of creed, colour etc. in line with their ‘Equality and Diversity’ policies. They will serve everyone adequately regardless of peoples diverse needs, very like a pan-equalities approach. But the equalities movement clearly sees mainstreaming as providing for the easiest to serve, responding only to simple needs that fit pre-planned services and help meet targets, dealing only with the lowest common denominators, with no recognition of inequity of access, leaving out the specific, the exceptional, the unpredictable, the edges.

## 2.4 Analytical method in development

Throughout the project REAP was trying to find or develop a process for gathering and managing data, identifying, organising and analysing issues and exploring interrelationships and interfaces between different aspects of equality. We needed tools to make the wealth and complexity of issues and information manageable before we could get meaningful communication started amongst interested parties; ourselves, participants, other contributors and observers in a way that did not have to avoid detail.

There is recognition across the equalities world that we need a way of making sense of the complexity of multiple equalities. Various bodies have looked directly at specific combinations eg. Older Refugees (rb) Disability and refugees (rb), or discussed common denominators which can be addressed through mainstream approaches. However, we found no tried and tested method for coping with multiple issues.

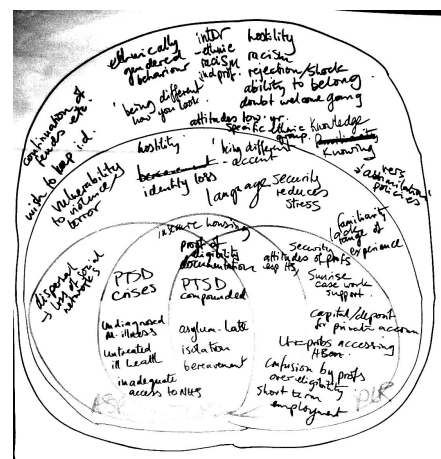
We felt that developing a method for managing and interpreting issues had potential value beyond the needs of the project, and it became one of the foci in the series of internal debates, workshops run by REAP and workshops run for other organisations. As part of that process we developed a series of diagrams and exercises to be used in combination. Two further concepts also emerged as we tried to clarify the issues under discussion: combined equalities issues being the cumulative total of all the different needs and issues a person faces relating to all the diverse aspects of her or his life (5+5=10); and compounded equalities issues, where the interface between different equalities issues a person faces creates new, perhaps more intransigent issues in their lives (5+5=12).

Step One: Define a population (here, refugees) by a single, well-defined characteristic. In the venn diagrams used in this method, (see illustration below) each circle represents the people or issues faced by the defined equalities population.

Step Two: Decide which other equalities populations you need to consider in relation to your first defined group and add one circles to the venn diagram for each population. In the example below the three circles at the bottom are asylum seekers, refugee with temporary LTR and refugees with permanent LTR; the larger circle, migrants, the largest circle ethnic minorities. You may need to add more as you go along and the part of the value of this method has proved to be that it pushes the user to work out the populations relate to one another, which they have to do to be able to draw the venn diagrams:

Nested? Overlapping? Figure of eight? It can change as you explore the issues they share. Where one set is 'nested' inside another (eg. Refugees inside migrants), it means that all the people in the smaller population also meet the criteria that defines the larger population and therefore are likely to experience all the issues of the larger population.

Step Three: Identify issues and felt needs from people's experiences where possible and mark down the issues in the set or intersection according to whether they apply to one (eg. Asylum-seekers only/'dispersal') or more (eg. Migrants including



refugees/'lack range of experience').

Simply adding up the number of issues faced by both populations gives a strong sense of the scale of challenges faced. We called this 'combined' issues.

Step Four: Taking one issue at a time, explore where people's experiences and struggles in one aspect of their lives (eg. being a refugee) can 'compound' (reinforce/be reinforced) issues raised by other equalities experiences, eg. being a gay man or a lesbian. For example, refugees' dependence on identity-based social support structures combined with homophobic attitudes results in LGB refugees being unable to speak openly about their sexuality, compounding isolation and exclusion, thus '5 + 5 = 12'. For example, a deaf refugee's basic English language and limited hearing compound one another to make communication increasingly difficult, and at the same time making it harder to learn English.

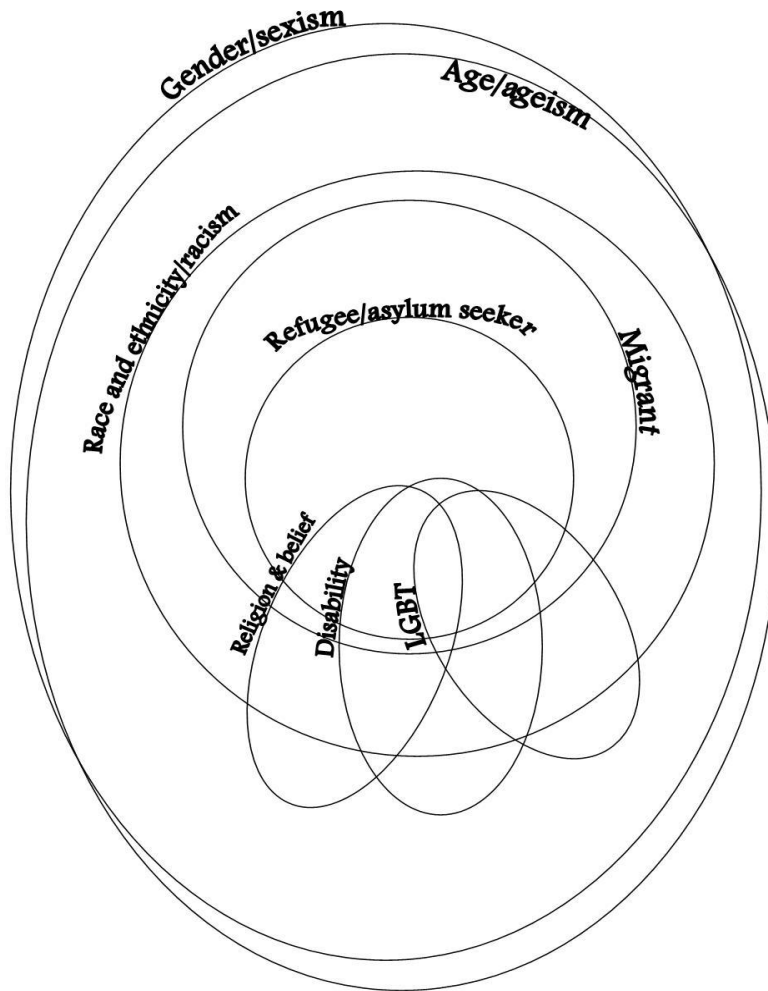
The venn diagram at the end of this section shows the 6 equalities strands that were highlighted in EHRC's recent consultation in relation to one another. The largest set (outside ring) also represents the whole UK population, as everyone is gendered and everyone is of an age.

## 2.5 Data gathering activities

To try to work consistently with our ideal approach, this project has tried to draw directly from refugee's own lives and voices (primary data) in West London rather than secondary resources. To make this possible REAP builds contacts with extensive networks of individual refugees, groups and professionals who work with them. We originally aimed to create a group of individual refugees and REAP members though found that people had strong interests in specific equalities issues, eg. Gender, disability rather than 'equalities' in general. Also the concept of 'equalities', whether research or lobbying was too abstract for many, even if they had previously or during the year shown higher interest in 'advocacy' work where they felt they were able to make a more direct contribution to improving their own and other individual's lives. Over the year we were able to gain the participation of a wide number of individual refugees in one or more equalities related activities but the communication was effectively directly between REAP staff and the individual, rather than a network or group structure as we had planned. A growing number moved from a casual curiosity to a keener interest and willingness to engage in the issues and this there seems to be potential to continue this progression over time.

To seek insight into the attitudes of refugees towards equalities issues across all 6 'strands' we used a questionnaire (see Appendices) as a starting point for interviews and where possible broader discussions with individual refugees and some other migrants. Confidentiality was assured and after 2 pilots we developed a series of open questions and questions in the style of scenarios to encourage people to express their personal views towards gender issues, disability, sexual orientation etc. Many of the interviews were carried out by individual refugees who contributed in many ways to 'Refugees for Equalities' and often used their own community group links.

## Refugees and Multiple Inequalities



Material regarding non-refugee organisations' (single equality and mainstream) awareness and attitudes to refugees was also gained through a short questionnaire, input from organisations at workshops and REAP's own accumulated experience of seeking services for individual refugees from other organisations. The questionnaire was designed to identify if the individual representing their organisation was aware of differences between refugee and asylum seeker situations and entitlements and take up of services, and questions relating to their efforts to provide services (see Appendices). We also gained greatly from exchange, collaboration and conversation with other organisations, our experiences of capacity-building work under other funders, and professional contacts in statutory or other voluntary bodies whom we have at times called 'friends within'.

REAP ran a series of workshops/conference (Disability 17/9/08, Multiple inequalities 15/10/08, LGBT 4/2/09, BME organisations and equalities law 26/3/09), plus a number of events specifically for 'Refugees for Equalities' group or network participants. We were fortunate and grateful for opportunities to run related workshops at other organisations' events (Supporting People 05/09, 3SA/LVSC 07/08, Sure Start/cross-cultural working 09/08, MST/Disability 11/09, WL-LGBT 11/08, LGBT consortium 01/09) and also several sessions of the WL-BMER Network. The background papers for each of these moved thinking forwards and write ups provide raw data and many will be available in the resource bank (rb). Various staff attended a wide range of related meetings and other organisations' workshops during the year, gather both primary and secondary data, eg. Ealing PCT Equality and Diversity policy launch 02/09)

We gained from research and secondary material relating to certain combinations of refugees' lives and other equalities issues, eg. Older refugees (rb), female asylum seekers (rb), and there was active research about disabled refugees during the same period (rb), but there were certain gaps: eg LGBT refugees.

### **3.0 REFUGEES' EXPERIENCES OF EQUALITY & DISCRIMINATION**

In the introduction it was noted that refugees are aware of and sensitive to discrimination though often accepting it as normal and unchangeable. It has also been noted even from setting this project up, that discriminatory views exist in refugee populations and several quotes used to illustrate this section are drawn from the 'individuals' survey' done for this project.

#### **3.1 What refugees face**

Refugees face certain issues specific to their refugee backgrounds that put them in an inequitable position from the start as they try to rebuild their lives in the UK. This was not a needs identification exercise, but the following issues have been highlighted.

'Preflight' factors, eg.

- aggression, prolonged persecution, violence, harm
- forced departure, often in crisis
- bereavement/loss,
- Traumatic experiences
- experiences during transition,

Arrival/asylum

- prolonged insecurity, partly related to the long periods of waiting for asylum decisions and applications for extending temporary LTR
- very low income (AS no work),
- stigma/hostility,
- homesickness
- fear of deportation
- PTSD, crises
- disempowering dependence on others, on limited social contacts, on bureaucratic systems

After receiving LTR – strong overlap with migration issues

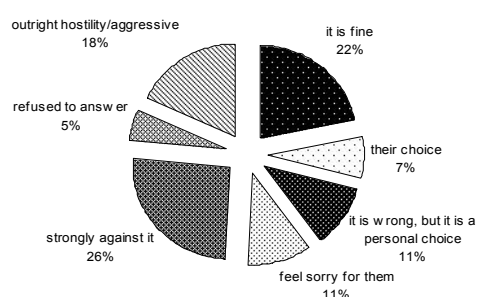
- Continuing impact of bereavement, PTSD - chronic, loss of identity, homesickness
- Isolation, lack of social support
- Continued poverty, lack of capital, lack of credit
- Hostility, fear of hostility
- Lack of English language, skills in communication, cultural understanding
- Lack of familiarity with British systems
- Few contacts
- Inconsistent support and inaccurate advice
- Vulnerability, low ability to cope with crises or ‘shocks’
- Caring for dependents

### 3.2 Refugees own views of equalities groups

A very wide range of views and attitudes to different equalities populations and issues were revealed through the ‘individual questionnaire’ and other direct input. Views from egalitarian ‘it’s all fine by me’ to highly discriminatory ‘I don’t care because they will burn in hell’ were expressed. Also many people were liberal on one front but not on another. There was recognition that British law promotes equality and protects certain groups from hostile views and actions; ‘I know here people have rights so I would never say anything’. Many were clearly aware that it was unacceptable to make racist or anti-religious comments but had little understanding of sexism, usually expressing highly positive views of women, but in very restrictive roles. Questions relating to age and disability puzzled some people to whom the concepts of equality for older or younger people or for disabled people was new, or that treating older people differently, eg. Automatically having ‘do not resuscitate on hospital notes for people over a certain age, was discriminatory in any way. Attitudes towards same sex relationships were the most hostile, but not across the board.

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#### Attitudes toward same sex relationships



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Although we did not explore whether or how far people’s attitudes translate into actions, these attitudes – whether expressed or not – featured as a strong part of refugees’ social context which they had to take into account when making choices about lifestyle or relationships for example. These attitudes in the social environment around people were felt to be especially significant for those refugees and migrants who had not been able to build up social or economic links outside their own ethnic identity group, perhaps because of limited English.

On a number of occasions we found participants speaking in a way that assumed people facing or who had faced discrimination would naturally feel and show solidarity with other people facing discrimination. People expressed surprise, disappointment, criticism that people who experience discrimination often do not empathise or even sympathise with others facing similar struggles. Having arisen several times (eg. 17/9/08 strong calls to look at inter-ethnic racism, eg. at Pride, gay men shouting insults to lesbian Muslims wearing the 'rainbow' hijab), the subject was discussed at the workshop on LGBT refugees (04/02/09) and it was commented that illiberalism and bigotry amongst equalities groups was a very difficult issue for equalities campaigners to cope with, or even acknowledge as they feared that hostility by one group to another undermines equality arguments as a whole. It was concluded however that as discriminatory attitudes are a reality in any social group it must be seen as an important issue for inclusion in any debate, pre-empting any implication that negativity by some individuals undermines pro-equality arguments. In addition, it was felt, to ignore bigotry and hostility within equalities groups is to condone it and to abandon individuals within those groups who suffer from this form of multiple discrimination. If people do not understand or respect the principles of equality for all, or if they respect it but still hold negative opinions of other equalities groups, they must at the very least be clear that discrimination is illegal.

### 3.3 Combinations of issues faced by refugees

The research raised dozens of 'combined' issues that refugees face. Refugees constantly have to make choices about which of the large number of their 'combined' issues they should prioritise:

Refugees are migrants: they have moved from one country to another, and therefore face life- and equalities-issues of unfamiliar with culture, systems, language, law; limitations on language or lack of English language; unrecognised qualifications etc. -

English is essential for any kind of integration, access or negotiating power. But the acquisition of language is not a neutral process – gender roles, older age groups, poverty, the way refugees are constantly directed back to their 'communities', mental health issues all have an effect, regardless of whether classes are available or not.

Language is not only about words, but the ability to express skilfully and effectively.

- Many migrants come from countries with more rigidly defined and less negotiable gender roles, less liberal attitudes to sexuality. Migrants come across a range of more liberal attitudes and equalities legislation in the UK that they are completely unfamiliar with.

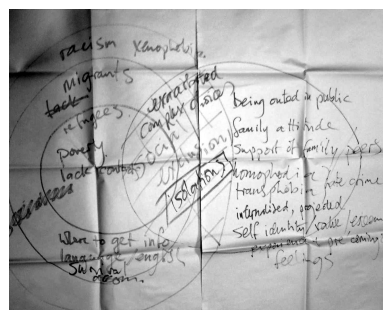
Refugees are ethnic minorities: they face the full range of racism and race hate, cultural assumptions etc. and also inter-ethnic tensions as well as cultural pressures from their ethnic and cultural neighbours.

We are all gendered, refugees are men, women, girls, boys: refugees may have faced gendered aggression before fleeing their country of origin, eg. rape of females, violent conscription of young men; have faced gendered abuse during transit, found gendered issues under-recognised in the asylum process. Even after a getting LTR, gendered aspects of relationships for men and women people are likely to be greatly affected by dependence, insecurity, the need to maintain a home and care for children. There is evidence of high incidence of relationship breakdown and of male to female domestic violence and sexual exploitation but many women are unable to access refuge support if

they have ‘no recourse to public funds’(rb) or fear rejection from ethnic, religious and social support networks if they are seen to break with expected gender roles. Gender roles and relationships are often more differentiated, less negotiable in recently arrived cultures; pressures and undercurrents are not necessarily recognised by professional contacts who are not of same culture, dependency (anecdotal evidence from REAP interpreters). “A woman has very important role in a community if her husband allow her to get involve in a community”.

We are all affected by social assumptions and structures of age: older refugees may be a relatively small proportion of refugee populations, but can be highly vulnerable where dependent socially and/or economically on tenuous family links, especially if families have been dispersed on claiming asylum. Younger refugees, especially unaccompanied children, face even greater uncertainty than other children who have been looked after when they reach 18 and both leave care institutions and enter into the adult asylum system at the same time.

Not only are there the same proportions of LGBT people in refugee populations as in any wider population, but significant numbers of people seek asylum on grounds of persecution for their sexuality or transgender experiences, though few achieve it (See UKLGIG). Many migrant populations retain less liberal views than are enshrined in British equalities law. One workshop identified 23 combined issues faced by LGBT refugees. Perhaps the most crucial was the fact that LGBT refugees, if they remain dependent on ethnically based support structures, must often choose between retaining that support and living openly as lesbians or gay men.



There are high levels of disability and experience of long term, disabling health problems amongst refugees, particularly extremely high levels of mental health difficulties and depression, often at least partly related to long term insecurity and anxiety as well as isolation. PTSD, bereavement and loss of identity are also significant contributory factors to mental ill health. Stigma associated with seeking help for depression or mental illness prevents many from accessing support. Language difficulties reduce access to counselling. It was also noted on 17/9/09 that mental health provision is skewed nationally, away from the kinds of services that would also be valuable to refugees.

Issues of mobility, employers’ attitudes, dependence on carers, isolation, access to facilities were also highlighted. Ignorance and confusion by providers was raised repeatedly at all occasions where experiences of disabled refugees were discussed, including cases of people being refused access to entitlements eg. Freedom Passes to which they were eligible, and being refused initial assessments by social services, without which refugees cannot access social support other than voluntary sector and often then limited as many voluntary organisations provide services funded by local authorities and therefore with access restricted by local authority criteria (see section 4).

**Key issues identified by the Metropolitan Support Trust, presentation 17/9/08:**

- RCOs picking up most of the work especially at early stages.
- Main stream voluntary sector say they don't work with asylum seekers and refugees. May be they are not accessing the services or organisations are not monitoring the immigration status of clients.
- Statutory sector – often people get their too late. Experience confusion and frustration in trying to access the services. Most social workers don't know the law.
- NASS does not refer to appropriate services.
- Asylum seekers are eligible for support with their disability but there is misapplication of the law. Social Services say asylum seekers are not eligible for support. This can be challenged by going through a solicitor and taking the case to judicial review but this is an extremely tedious process. This is not so much of a problem with refugees.
- Language issues – there is a lack of interpreters. GPs tell them to bring family and friends. Sign language is also an issue.
- Culture – in many cultures amongst refugees and asylum seekers the disabled are kept at home. In some cultures disability is considered a punishment from God.
- Gender – women with children find it particularly difficult.
- Lack of social networks. Case study of Kurdish man 25 came when 16. At home for 9 years. No friends. Can't get benefits because he is unable to communicate with the GP.

Religion and belief may have been a part of the reason people had to flee their country of origin, and often play an important role in retaining identity and social support networks in times of duress when in a new land. There are many differences in observance, even within families, causing tensions and divisions between believers. Although refugees, as others, may face religious-hate many expressed pleasure in the amount of attention and effort non-religious or people of other religions pay to understanding and respecting the customs of their religions. We found that many organisations do not distinguish between ethnicity and religion/belief as issues, even where they do undertake equalities monitoring. Many non-refugee contributors to the research assumed that refugees are strong believers, but this was not how refugees themselves presented their beliefs.

**Refugees sit right in the middle of all 6 formal equalities strands:**

- Refugee: They face issues specific to refugees including asylum-hate, extreme insecurity, trauma from before arriving.
- Migrant: they face issues faced by all migrants including language, unfamiliarity with British culture, law, systems
- Ethnic Minority: they face direct, indirect and institutional racism,
- Gender: we are all gendered, refugee women, refugee men, refugee girls, refugee boys will also be facing gendered roles, structures and sexism
- Age: we are all of ages, older refugees, child refugees, refugees at 17-21 in particular facing transition from Child Law to Adult law and immigration law are highly vulnerable
- Religion and belief: a significant issue for many refugees, even related to their need for asylum in the first place
- Disability: physical, sensory, learning disabilities are higher than national average amongst refugee populations because of war, torture, poor health care, prolonged vulnerability and stress. Mental health difficulties are at extremely high levels, up to 50% of people at any one time.
- LGBT: not only almost completely invisible in refugee organization agendas, but in some nationalities, eg. Iranian, likely to be a higher than average proportion of at least the male population because of state sponsored persecution on grounds of sexuality.

During this research we worked directly on combined and compounded issues faced where the following equalities populations overlap:

- refugee and migrant issues, ethnic minority issues
- refugee and LGBT

- refugee and disability

Work was being done elsewhere on

- refugees and older people
- refugees and younger people / children / unaccompanied minors
- refugees and disability
- refugees and gender/women

This research however paid no close attention to the combined or compounded issues caused by the intersection of *refugee populations and religious populations*. Nor did we hear of any such research. Attention is needed.

### 3.4 Compound

Compounded issues faced when one aspect of a refugee's life complicates, alters or reinforced challenges in another aspect of their life started to emerge in the September even on Disability and Equality for refugees, when compounded isolation rose to the fore. However, it became clear that the compound issues created by one combination of equalities issues are often similar to those faced by other combinations. A small range of compounded issues were identified in the research, but it also became obvious that these compounded issues could be firmly entrenched, even intransigent.

Compounded issues faced by people dealing with multiple inequalities include:

- Isolation, lack of communication (includes language), interaction, lack of social support networks
- Loss of identity, negative self identity, low self-esteem, low confidence
- Sense of powerlessness, hopelessness, depression
- Mental ill health, depression
- Low mobility, fear of going out, fear of neighbours, strangers
- Poverty and lack of resources
- Ill health
- Failure to access support, entitlements
- Vulnerability to shocks/crises, to misuse, to abuse, experiences of abuse in UK

The last of these, vulnerability as an inability to withstand crises or avoid abuse, emerged as a significant issue late on in the research and needs further attention. Vulnerability is about whether people can cope when things go wrong, without long term or even permanent harm to their future, or without resorting to actions or survival strategies that will do them long term harm. For example, a pregnant woman who had temporary LTR finds her request for an extension has been refused. Does she cope? Does she get her appeal lodged within the limited time limit? Does she have to abandon her job to get the solicitor in time? Does she continue to eat well, go to ante-natal clinic?

#### Why are people vulnerable?

*Combined and*  
Insecurity of status,  
Quals, capital, credit etc.  
Historical health/treatments  
poverty,  
Homesickness, bereavement  
Loss of status, language ability,

>>

*Compounded issues:*  
results in insecurity in other ways  
Inflexible and minimal livelihoods  
  
Chronic ill health, self-harm,  
Isolation, cultural alienation,

cultural ability  
 Fear of / hostility, discrimination  
 Minimal social networks for support

Loss of identity, self-esteem, confidence  
 Overlapping multiple sets of discrimm.  
 Mental health, wellbeing, depression.

Along with the concept of vulnerability goes the concept of protective factors, though support systems, assets, physical and mental reserves that people need to draw on if they are to avoid a crisis becoming a disaster, and cope with long term harm.

Protective factors : 15/10/08 & 04/02/09

Love is good!: Family, social support,  
 Capital and liquid cash, reliable income  
 Good health, physical needs, nutrition, sleep, warmth  
 Knowledge of access to information – web, libraries, adviser  
 Contacts  
 English language  
 Confidence and wellbeing  
 Strong sense of positive identity  
 Range of experience in British context  
 Contact with and support from responsive holistic services  
 Supportive policy and legislative environment

One of the areas of concern under ‘vulnerability’ and survival strategies is vulnerability to discrimination: whether people are able to resist or fight discrimination or whether they simply accept it and restrict their lives accordingly. In order to negotiate potentially discriminatory structures effectively, people need knowledge, confidence, contacts, skill with language etc. In other words, many of the ‘protective factors’ listed above. Refugees often don’t have these resources – even if they know their rights, without language, experience, contacts, confidence they are unlikely to speak and negotiate effectively. Participants on 17<sup>th</sup> Sept identified as highly significant for refugees the division between ‘those who know and can speak, and those who don’t or won’t’.

“those who know  
 and can speak,  
 and those who  
 don’t or won’t”  
 17/09/08

#### 4.0 HOW AND WHERE DISCRIMINATION TAKES PLACES

The project was concerned with equalities and the formal sector – primarily the voluntary and community sector - and did not explore public attitudes except as background. Many of the quotes used for illustration below are drawn directly from the ‘organisations survey’ completed during the project.

We used standard definitions of direct and indirect and institutional forms of discrimination:

Direct discrimination Eg. ‘race-‘ ‘gender- ‘ ‘social-hate’	Overt actions by a party that has some power or influence to disadvantage or harm people seen to be of a certain social group, purely because they are of that social group.
Indirect discrimination	Actions that fail to take into account features of a person’s life which are related to being of a certain social group or population, and therefore unnecessarily disadvantage that person.

Institutional discrimination	The socially influenced structures and systems which underpin collective priorities and behaviour, resulting in processes and actions which disadvantage people of a certain social group. This may include allowing or inadvertently encouraging behaviour by others which disadvantages people of a certain social group.
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Another set of established concepts which proved useful relates to access:

The gate,	Point at which application must persuade the representative of the organisation ('gatekeeper') that they are eligible and entitled to the service which the organisation controls access to. Where there are more applicants than the organisation can serve, the applicant has not only to argue they are eligible, but that they are more entitled than other applicants.
The queue,	The waiting period before the applicant's claim is considered. The applicant is competing with other applicants for who is considered soonest.
The encounter	Face to face meeting between the applicant and the person who decides on the detail of the service to be provided and/or provides the service.

All three 'access' stages are negotiable, some organisations having more 'grey' areas than others and all three can be competitive. Discrimination is always a possibility at any point, as providers make decisions based on their personal beliefs and assumptions, expectations based on previous 'applicants' or 'clients' who are perceived as similar, habits that they and their colleagues have got into, the organisational pressures on them eg. to meet targets.

Organisations survey: Across the board, language was seen as the major difficulty for refugees in using organisations' services; also 'not having documents' not knowing about services, not being in contact with other services that may refer them, refugee fear of disclosing status in case of deportation, practical life circumstances, refugee failure to identify with the specific equalities strand. Also respondents expressed concerns about prejudice amongst workers, volume of work, lack of professionalism, lack of funding for publicity.

In terms of the mechanisms through which discrimination becomes real, the point was strongly by people discussing disability and refugees (17/9) that many refugees, in that case, disabled refugees in particular, never get as far as the 'gate'. Not only are there those who never escape the persecution and discrimination in their original country, but those who fail in their asylum claims. However, the main theme of the discussion around 'pre-gate' was the way in which ignorance, depression, isolation, lack of mobility and such 'compounded' issues mean many refugees have no idea what their entitlements are, let alone how to go about accessing them. Where this occurs, which by all accounts is right across the refugee population (and beyond, including many 'born and bred British'), it is a serious criticism of a failure to communicate between services that have a duty and mandate to provide support services to those who need them. Often the difficulty is not ignorance but the many other choices or struggles a refugee faces; money for travel, the urgency of a child's medical needs taking priority over a parent's wish for job training. But equity demands extra efforts to make access possible, and where particular excluded, marginalised populations are most likely to be stuck, invisibly, 'pre-gate' it becomes a matter, not just of institutional ineffectiveness, but of institutional discrimination.

#### 4.1 Direct discrimination

Although the research gained evidence of actual cases of direct discrimination in the public arena, we only learned of one clear case of direct discrimination in a formal context, and then by a volunteer, albeit one who was police checked and working with young children in a school environment. The situation was dealt with swiftly and emphatically by the school with police involvement and the full engagement of the parent.

However we received anecdotal evidence from individuals (including the testimony of advocacy workers and staff of other organisations) of paid staff of service bodies who give poor service to refugees, migrants or people from ethnic minorities because they do not like people with that migration status or ethnicity. One example given was workers choosing not book interpreters for appointments, even though they had the power to do so and under a duty to provide equitable access, they had a duty to do so. Two professionals who contributed to the project had complained to their own management and management of the services involved about such cases. Although disguised, if the worker is conscious of their failure to serve as well as they could, it is direct discrimination.

A few expressions of overt hostility towards refugees; “people who are not meant to be here”.

#### 4.2 Indirect discrimination

Many examples of discrimination were described which were brought about because of how workers saw the situation of refugees, even where there was no hostility or even at times despite supportive attitudes.

##### a) Ignorance and confusion about rights and entitlements

There is widespread ignorance and doubt about significant distinctions between refugees (here, with LTR) and asylum seekers, that results in people being refused their entitlements. This happens frequently at ‘the gate’ where staff with little or no specialist training and apparently little access to information or advice are deciding who is eligible to apply for services.

“We don’t encourage (access), our services are for UK only”

Disabled asylum-seekers and supportive workers (17/9/08) reported being wrongly refused community care assessments because social workers did not believe asylum seekers are entitled to them, and even at times because they did not believe that refugees with LTR are entitled to assessments. As the care assessment is ‘the gate’, without it people cannot even start the process of accessing the social support they need in order to live equally with non-disabled people.

There is also tremendous confusion about entitlements, as policy changes constantly and rapidly, not least as case law is built up through judicial reviews, for example recent rulings that people who are ‘ordinarily resident’ are entitled to health care in the UK, contrary to earlier Government policy. However the vast majority of health and social care professionals, including hospitals are still ignorant of this ruling and its implications for providing services to asylum seekers, failed asylum seekers, and others.

## b) Labelling

Where professionals see people as refugees first and only, and this is combined with ignorance and confusion about entitlements, refugees face a ‘double whammy’ of discrimination. Not only does labelling refugees allow the assumption that all refugees have similar experiences and needs, despite there often being no objective grounds for such an assumption, but it allows a standardised response as well. If that response is based on ignorance or confusion it is doubly likely to be inappropriate. It is, for example assumed that “we can’t handle the language issue”.

How does this labelling and boxing come about? We have not made a close study of this but the impression is that rather than seeing refugees as ordinary people, they are seen to be intriguing, exciting, exotic even, and perhaps scary having survived torture, trafficking, rape and other traumas outside most people’s experience, and assumed to be outside workers’ ‘mainstream’ training. In 2004, PCT counselling service in one West London borough reported that its counsellors were unwilling to take on refugees because they did not believe they had the training to cope with experiences of torture, rape, war, PTSD etc. Refugees become ‘other’, strange and unknowable, people whom only their own kind – other refugees – or specialist trained experts can deal with.

“most of the time refugees go to their RCOs for support”

Some refugees also box themselves, emphasizing their background of seeking refuge over other issues, denying any apparent similarity of interest with non-refugees (eg. “those BME-types”), protecting a sense of identity perhaps? or possibly developing a position to strengthen negotiation with other bodies?

### 4.3 Institutional discrimination

Institutional discrimination may be about the culture, attitudes, habits and established patterns of behaviour of people in an organisation or other institution, but to allow or challenge it is the responsibility of the decision-makers and governors of that body, especially where there is responsibility for complying with equalities and public law. Thus ignorance, confusion and the failure to equitable services when they could be provided are presumably the responsibility of managers and directors. Confusion about interpretations of the law and government policy, the responsibility of Government. We came across no effective equalities monitoring relating to refugees. It is already wide accepted that there are no reliable sources of statistics on distribution or numbers of refugee populations. Without such data, it will never be clear whether or not organisations are serving refugees adequately. Managers and executives have nothing to judge the quality of their services against.

One finding was that equalities categories get merged together as is currently happening throughout the policy environment with refugee and asylum seekers’ issues being subsumed into ‘impact of migration’ or ‘migrant’ agendas; for example the transformation of the Board for Refugee Integration in London into the London strategic migration partnership. This work has show that refugees face all the issues that migrants face, but not all migrants face the issues refugees are likely to face, not least because many migrants can choose to come and go. It was also commented in section 2 that the term ‘migrant’ has recently become closely associated with immigrant workers from the A8 countries. REAP’s observation in several contexts is that issues specific to refugees are disappearing from the debate. This also occurs when it is assumed that services from

ethnic minorities are equally accessible to refugees and non-refugees. One extremely large employment and training scheme for ethnic minorities completed its target of over 2000 ethnic minority individuals but had no statistics on how many were refugees and had made no referrals to 'NARIC', the body that accredits qualifications gained overseas, and a crucial resource for programmes getting refugees into work. In August 2008 our office building receptionist referred a young black man to REAP for housing advice on the grounds that we were a refugee support organisation. REAP does not provide housing advice, and the man was not a refugee, but the reception felt that as he was from an ethnic minority we would be his best contact point rather than referring him to the CAB down the road.

Other cases have emerged where the specific needs of one equalities population become invisible or marginalised when policy or service delivery merges it with a related population. When organisations were asked about different equalities groups in their client profile, answers given to 'religion and belief' included 'Iraqi and Somali' and 'Somali and Asian'. (See National Equalities Partnership Minorities in Minorities project.)

There is an unfinished debate in REAP about value or otherwise of the term 'community'. Throughout this report we have avoided the term except in very specific uses. Noone in REAP refers to a or 'the refugee community' but there is still a split on whether referring to 'equalities communities', or eg. 'the Somali community', or 'LGBT community' is useful in fighting discrimination. Arguments against the word's use include its vagueness, emotional and sentimental overtones, the unrealistic impression the word gives about people providing one another with mutual support. Also opposing its use is the argument that it is the unnecessary creation of an idea that a population of 'Somali's' forms a cohesive group, most of whom know each other, with shared views and hopes that can have 'a voice' which can be 'represented' by one or two people or a single organisation. The flip side of this sense of 'community' is the implication that all Somalis are the same, inward looking and therefore different and potentially resistant to other people and that there is no justification for more than one Somali organisation to exist at any one time. Arguments for 'community' are the widespread use of the word, the disadvantage of being/being seen to be pedantic and semantic, the positive implications of encouraging a sense that one can 'belong'. The debate continues...

## **5.0 REDUCING THE IMPACT OF MULTIPLE INEQUALITIES**

The project has only started to look at reducing the impact of discrimination in the past few months. National Equalities Partnership has provided funding to develop draft guidance on working with 'Minorities in Minorities'. This section gives some of the points we are starting from, looking at ways of reducing the impact of combined issues, compounded issues and strengthening refugees voices.

### **5.1 Tackling combined issues**

Participants gave examples, often from their own lives of how they had overcome what appeared to be dauntingly large combinations of issues, by tackling them one by one over time, often with support from services, but crucially the support of other people; familie, friends, supportive individuals including individual workers. Many issues they faced were not specific to them as refugees but support services need to make sure that services

of any kind are accessible and equitable for refugees as group that faces so many issues with so few resources.

We find the following a useful way of grouping support or delivery organisations in terms of likely different relationships to refugees and refugees' equality issues:

- Identity-based organisations, mostly ethnically-based including ones linked to 'refugee communities' (RCOs) but not exclusive to refugees.
- Other specialist/equalities groups, sometimes with 'refugee' or 'BME' workers, eg. UKLGIG, Women's Resource Centre, Age Concern.
- Common denominator providers eg. CAB, Housing Associations
- Statutory services
- Coalitions of equalities organisations, often involved in infrastructure support and policy, eg. WL-BMER Network, HEAR, LGBT Consortium with the LGBT-BMER network
- Potential and actual funders.

a) RCOs

Many RCOs were created and recreated in the early and middle years of the decade, but funding has dropped and demands on RCOs increased in recent years. Larger, established RCOs that can cope with funder demands are still surviving, but small volunteer-led groups are disappearing. RCOs provide a first contact point as people start to rebuild their lives, and can act as a communication channel reaching larger numbers, often through extensive personal and family networks of key members who act as a 'gate' when support or policy workers wish to contact refugees. RCOs provide a training ground for individual refugees and people from that ethnic group who will become voluntary and statutory workers in the future. They tend to serve 'a community', here meaning a group of individuals with a range of interconnections and some sense of shared identity and 'belonging', mutual interests and mutual support. Internal relationships and power hierarchies tend to reflect the pre-existing social and political structures of that community. To outsiders, a geographically local ethnic or refugee population may appear to coincide with that RCO, but the 'community' and the 'population' are very unlikely to be contiguous. Many in the population will not be served by it, nor are the RCOs structures likely to be able to serve the whole population to the degree they can serve its own 'community' where there are already the assets of familiarity, interconnectedness, communication, shared knowledge.

RCOs get used as 'proxy clients' when formal bodies need 'representation' or 'consultation' and it has been noted that many organisations too readily refer individual refugees to RCOs that appear to outsiders to serve that person on the basis that eg. he is a Somali, it is a Somali group, therefore it will be suitable and adequate for his needs. However if one takes into account the description in the preceding paragraph and the attitudes described in section 3 it is clear that RCOs may be the last place a vulnerable person can choose to turn to seek assistance with equality issues that attract social stigma or condemnation. Seen from the other side, if equalities organisations want to publicise their services, RCOs can be highly effective in certain situations. However, given their potential 'gate-keeping' role, issues that are not considered significant, such as age discrimination, or that are considered controversial, such as LGBT rights, mental ill health, domestic violence may not be adequately addressed by RCOs, nor even passed

along existing communication networks. Support organisations need to consider what strategies are best for each population and minority in minorities they are trying to reach.

b) Other equalities bodies

On the other hand, are non-refugee single or multiple equalities organisations able to deliver equitable to people who have sought refuge in the UK and who cannot turn to ‘their communities’ for help? Ignorance and confusion can be overcome if there is willingness. But are attitudes within equalities groups conducive? For example, can LGBT groups provide for LGBT refugees, or are separate lesbian refugee, gay refugee and bisexual refugee groups needed, or at perhaps more designated projects? This is not a new question, but the research has not yet had time to address it. However, from anecdotes at the LGBT Consortium conference, it seems some gay refugees who are not stuck ‘pre-gate’ do access LGBT support and also LGBT social and sexual opportunities by seeking refuge for the weekend in other cities, where they are not known, returning to their more discreet lives on Sunday night.

‘Gaps and Solutions - *Support for frontline equality organisations*’ HEAR (rb)

- Acknowledge that discrimination exists
- Recognise equality can be a complicated concept
- Increase opportunities for networking
- Use the support available
- Draw on the expertise of equality organisations
- Disseminate information
- Encourage frontline equality organisations to access ‘mainstream’
- Encourage support for/development of single strand and cross strand equalities networks
- Use cross-strand networks
- Use the race, disability and gender duties to encourage public bodies to support equalities organisations
- Develop a communications project to evidence value of equalities organisations
- Further develop human rights support
- Take a proactive approach to ensuring take up of grants by equalities organisations
- Provide more long-term investment

c) The “One Plus One” Principle

We have learned that people constantly get deflected away from ‘mainstream’ services because many professionals refer them automatically to explicitly refugee services, even when there is no objective reason for doing so. To tackle this REAP has adopted the ‘One plus One’ principle: whenever a refugee is referred to an organisation that specialises in supporting refugees, s/he must also be referred to a related organisation that has no special focus on supporting refugees. For example, if you refer an female Iranian refugee to the Iranian Women’s Association, you must make the effort to find and help her contact another women’s support organisation that is not specifically related to a refugee community. Sometimes it becomes ‘One Plus One plus One plus...’, as most of the time people face multiple inequalities: a refugee male with a disability who wants to find a training course may gain from being referred to a refugee (or ethnic) community organisation that runs trainings, a man’s group that does IAG and a disability support

body that can help with access, but good referral would also include at least one mainstream training body which aims to help all people, as it says in so many Equal Ops policies, 'regardless of race, gender, disability' etc..

The person gains:

- a choice of contacts with organisations of different sorts which can be empowering for the individual as s/he gains knowledge and opportunities from a wider range of sources;
- reduced dependence on cultural links (and therefore reduced vulnerability);
- reduced sense of being labelled primarily as 'refugee'.

The 'plus one' principle may counter the tendency shown clearly even in this initial research for both specialist and generic organisations to divert people who happen to have sought refuge in the UK away from accessing their services when there is no objective basis for doing so. Ideally it will create greater contact between mainstream and grass-roots, community groups.

The 'Plus One' principle may push 'common denominator' organisations to:

- pay greater attention to people with specific and specialist needs,
- seek out specialist bodies for advice rather than simply deflecting people in need
- if they cannot cope with such needs now, put them under greater pressure to learn how to cope with them in future.

## 5.2 Tackling compounded and 'pre-gate' issues

Compounded issues cannot be tackled so simply by good outreach and good referral. Self-esteem, ability to cope, social inclusion are not easy for a person to rebuild, even with support. Tackling combined issues one by one may make it possible to start to lift compounded issues. Holistic, responsive services may be able to strengthen the protective factors and personal resources a person can draw on.

We have also been told (17/9/08) that the following are essential to surviving and escaping compounded issues:

- a first step, ice-breaking, one to one, person to accompany you even sometimes physically on the first steps - human contact
- responsive, personal, trusted, holistic, flexible, respectful, non-judgemental listening support
- communication, good referral, accessible high quality, instant information and services you trust enough to refer people to them
- opportunities to build up personal, social support networks.
- Ability to be self-critical, self-aware, self-observing

As the range of compounded issues emerging was quite small, it seems likely that these issues are a feature of the lives of many or all people facing discrimination, perhaps even part of what defines discrimination – the systematic disempowerment of people to the point that they lose control of their own lives.

It is possible that pan-equalities and common denominator organisations are better placed conceptually than single and multiple equalities organisations to tackle compounded equalities issues. This question deserves further thought.

### 5.3 Voice

From the ‘refugee-side’ what do refugees feel about equality and discrimination; what do they want or need to cope with and resist it; to deal with multiple inequalities and tackle multiple discrimination? ‘Knowledge’ is often an immediate response, but how to gain it? Not, when asked, through training sessions but perhaps through advocates or case workers, through focused information tailored to the needs of the users (and in plain English), perhaps by having opportunities to gain experience directly?

someone to witness, respect, listen, someone to hear your voice

a) Those who know and speak, those who don’t or won’t

It was felt by many refugee participants that all situations are negotiable, and nothing is guaranteed. The question is, can a person negotiate it effectively? Refugees can end up losers in a 2 class system:

‘Those who know and can speak’  
 ‘Those who don’t know or can’t/won’t speak’

But several factors push individuals in one direction or the other:

<b>‘Those who know and can speak’</b>	<b>Factors</b>	<b>‘Those who don’t know or can’t/won’t speak’</b>
Born, raised and living in Britain British education British working experience	Familiarity with British systems/ organizational cultures	New or recent contact with British systems,
Equally bi-lingual in English First language English, Higher education in English Experience communicating in similar technical context	English language	English as new or second, third language Interacting with professionals who speak specialist and technical ‘insider’ language
Being of similar cultural background ‘Bi-culturalism’ Being effective in engaging with people of a different culture	Cultural skill ; Effectiveness in the culture of the professional	Being of a dissimilar cultural background Not being effective when engaging with people of a different culture
Knowledge, access to information Representation, potential political or powerful support.	Knowledge Contacts	Knowledge only of systems in another country Newly gained knowledge skewed to specific needs, eg. asylum appeals No or low engagement with political system or with people in positions of power.

Experience Peer and social network support Security and stability	Confidence	Isolation Fear of contact with potentially hostile new people Insecurity, instability Anxiety about other aspects of livelihood Degree of dependency
	Ability to act strategically	Insecurity, instability
Awareness of potential for advocacy, knowledge of sources, ability to access.	Advocate or mediator	No idea of potential to obtain advocate, or no knowledge or access to people who could advocate or mediate

It was felt that many of these push and pull factors are more significant with certain populations. Eg. Middle class British nationals are more likely to have higher English language abilities, awareness of potential for advocacy, access to internet etc. A great proportion of recent migrants are likely to still be unfamiliar with British systems, struggle with English, especially specialist, technical English. In particular large proportions of asylum-seekers or people who have been through the asylum process will be isolated, having been dispersed, or unable to connect with familiar cultural groups for political or safety reasons, to face ongoing insecurity making strategic thinking less likely etc.

b) A duty to talk

One lesson is the duty on pro-equality refugees and other workers to talk about equalities with refugees; about how they feel, about what they know, about the law. Our experience was that even if reticent at first, once people felt safe to talk they were keen to do so and very few topics were refused. People commented they had never discussed some of these topics before, at least not with people outside their own cultural group but that now they had considered them afresh, they would keep thinking about the issues. People who oppose equalities work across all the 7 formal strands also have a right to speak of their views as long as they do so in ways that are not offensive or that incite hatred or aggression. It was commented above that hostilities and inter-equality tensions are real and widespread and must not be ignored or denied. To refuse people a voice is to prevent communication and change, to reject interaction, enforce isolation. It might be uncomfortable, but for an organisation like REAP that is refugee-led, our legitimacy depends on it.

c) Does the law help?

On the day of this report's launch, REAP is jointly, with the WL-BMER Network, facilitating a workshop on equality law, rights and community organisations. It will look at practical implications for organisational management and governance through the case of equalities policies and human resource management; at using equalities law in case work and using equalities law to lobby for the interests of your community and constituents. In the context of the needs and interests of BME and refugee community organisations, we expect three questions to structure the discussions:

Is the law known?

Is the law understood, accepted, seen as legitimate and complied with?

Is the law enforced?

The workshop takes place in the context of waiting for the Single Equality Bill later this Spring. A write up will be available (rb) in due course.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

This project has not reached its conclusion. However some lessons from the year seem unlikely to change no matter how long the research can continue:

- A. the importance of understanding and addressing discrimination faced by refugees, both for refugee's own quality of life and for wider lessons and implications for society;
- B. the need for methods to identify, organise, interpret situations faced by people struggling with multiple inequalities and discrimination;
- C. the current, critical importance of ensuring equalities and voluntary organisations have easy access to simple, clear guidance on distinctions between and entitlements of asylum-seekers and refugees;
- D. the value of having single-, multiple- and pan-equalities approaches and working towards strong effective communication between specialist organisations and provision of holistic, responsive services by 'common denominator' organisations;
- E. the importance and potential for change inherent in making sure refugees have a voice and are listened to when they talk about experiences and equalities.

### 6.1 Next steps

REAP hopes to:

NOW / SOON

- Refine and disseminate findings and conclusions, including appendices and access to data via web-based resources bank, partly through further opportunities for discussion;
- Remain actively involved in HEAR, 3SA and MiNET, respond to LSMP developments;
- Seek ways to improve knowledge of status and entitlements of asylum-seekers and refugees across the voluntary and community sector and reaching into statutory areas as well;
- Prepare guidance for working with refugees as 'Minorities in minorities'
- Apply for resources to continue this area of work as a major strategic direction for REAP;
- Hold conference, 1<sup>st</sup> July 2009 'Allowed to Remain!! But... Allowed to Belong??'.

## ONGOING / LATER

- Further data collection and interpretation, particularly of refugees experiences and views, mapping of equalities related services most pertinent to refugees;
- Address combined and compounded issues of refugee and religious populations;
- Further develop concept and methods, and promote attention to multiple equalities and to compounded issues;
- Continue internal dialogue amongst members, MC, staff; of real value to the organisation;
- Continue to develop degrees of involvement, commitment and knowledge of growing numbers of individual 'refugees for equalities' in West London.