



**GLOBAL COMMISSION ON
INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION (GCIM)**

COMMISSION MONDIALE SUR LES MIGRATIONS INTERNATIONALES (CMMI)
COMISIÓN MUNDIAL SOBRE LAS MIGRACIONES INTERNACIONALES (CMMI)

www.gcim.org

GLOBAL MIGRATION PERSPECTIVES

No. 34

May 2005

**Why asylum seekers seek refuge in particular destination countries:
an exploration of key determinants**

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Global Commission on International Migration

In his report on the 'Strengthening of the United Nations - an agenda for further change', UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan identified migration as a priority issue for the international community.

Wishing to provide the framework for the formulation of a coherent, comprehensive and global response to migration issues, and acting on the encouragement of the UN Secretary-General, Sweden and Switzerland, together with the governments of Brazil, Morocco, and the Philippines, decided to establish a Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM). Many additional countries subsequently supported this initiative and an open-ended Core Group of Governments established itself to support and follow the work of the Commission.

The Global Commission on International Migration was launched by the United Nations Secretary-General and a number of governments on December 9, 2003 in Geneva. It is comprised of 19 Commissioners.

The mandate of the Commission is to place the issue of international migration on the global policy agenda, to analyze gaps in current approaches to migration, to examine the inter-linkages between migration and other global issues, and to present appropriate recommendations to the Secretary-General and other stakeholders.

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Potential contributors to this series of research papers are invited to contact the GCIM Secretariat. Guidelines for authors can be found on the GCIM website.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to explore the reasons leading refugees to seek asylum in particular destination countries.¹ As Crisp (1999: p.5) observes, arguments about refugees tend to be highly polarised. Governments and politicians focus on notions of 'economic migrants' and 'bogus refugees' cynically 'abusing' asylum procedures. On the other hand, asylum advocates focus on presenting asylum seekers as people who have been 'forced to flee' and whose behaviour is determined solely by the need to escape an immediate danger. The idea that refugees may be able to make choices regarding the final destination, as Crisp argues, does not sit easily between these two simplified world views. As such, the reasons why refugees go to particular destination countries are little understood (Morrison & Crosland, 2001: p.87; Ramakers, 1997: p.113; Schuster, 2000: p.123).

This paper's first objective is to review the existing literature on the destination countries of refugees. It is argued that notions of 'forced' and 'voluntary' migration should be conceptualised as occurring on a continuum rather than as dichotomous categories. Citizenship is argued to be an important concept in understanding forced migration. It is exclusion from citizenship in the country of origin that leads to forced migration, whilst the policies of Western states are increasingly orientated towards restoring the state citizen link in the country of origin. An overall lack of research on the destination countries of refugees is highlighted whilst explanations are considered in terms of colonial and historical ties, the use of agents, social networks and asylum policies. Consideration is also given to the stage of the migration at which a refugee makes a decision regarding the destination country.

The second objective of this paper is to examine patterns of origin and destination of asylum applications in the EU Member States between 1980 and 2001 with a particular emphasis on updating previous research². It is argued that the critical determinants of asylum applications received in the EU are conditions in the countries of origin. Patterns of asylum migration within the EU are shown to be complex with no simple underpinning explanation. Although asylum migrations often follow colonial and historical ties, a key finding is that asylum migrations are becoming increasingly diffuse. Part of the explanation for this seems certain to be an increased role of agents in recent asylum migrations. Consideration is given to the impact of policies in determining patterns of asylum migration.

The paper's third objective was to carry out interview research in Birmingham to gain insights into how and why a sample of refugees selected the UK as a destination. Within this objective, emphasis was to be placed on why, within the UK, they came to live in Birmingham. The findings of twelve qualitative interviews are reported. The key findings are that the experiences of refugees in countries proximate to their

¹ This paper is a revised version of my MA Refugee Studies dissertation submitted in 2002 at the University of East London. I am very thankful to all those who assisted me in this research including the Midlands Refugee Council and, especially, to each of the individual interviewees. I am also extremely grateful to my family & friends who supported me throughout my MA and to my research supervisor Dr Patricia Ellis.

² This paper examines patterns of asylum seeking in the fifteen EU Member States prior to the accession of the ten new Member States in May 2004.

country of origin involve living clandestinely, exclusion from citizenship rights and on-going fears of identification and deportation. The role of agents in bringing asylum seekers to the West is discussed. The key consideration of refugees regarding the destination country is to find protection after which secondary concerns become important, essentially involving settlement issues. The multicultural character of Birmingham is identified as its main positive feature for refugees.

The fourth objective of this paper is to examine the arguments adopted by politicians regarding why asylum seekers arrive in the UK as a destination country. Politicians proclaim the UK as a destination country where 'genuine' refugees can find protection whilst simultaneously constructing asylum seekers as 'non genuine' refugees. This is looked at critically, and as asylum recognition rates support many asylum seekers to actually be in need of international protection politicians have focused upon the arrival of asylum seekers in the UK as ipso facto evidence of their 'non genuine' character. A further objective of this paper is to compare and contrast the arguments of politicians with the findings of research. Politicians generally overemphasise asylum seekers as 'proactive' migrants whilst fundamentally imposing a massive simplification upon asylum migrations.

The conclusion argues strongly for the importance of seizing the current opportunities presented in the creation of a common European asylum system to result in an 'upward' movement of asylum policies and to reverse the current trend of individual Member States adopting increasingly restrictive legislation.

Literature review

Traditionally the distinction between forced (political) and voluntary (economic) migration has been viewed as discrete. However, since the end of the Cold War it has become increasingly hard to differentiate between 'economic migrants' and 'political refugees' (Cohen, 1996: p.xiv). At a (macro) structural level, it is difficult to separate the economic from the political causes of migration (Menjívar, 1993; Ghosh, 1998: p.47). Similarly at an individual (micro) level notions of a continuum between forced and voluntary migration have gained in currency (e.g. Hammar & Tamas, 1997: p.17; Faist, 2000: p.23). Almost all migration involves some compulsion as well as some choices so that forced migrants make choices but within a narrower range of possibilities (Van Hear, 1998: p.42).

Richmond (1993, 1994) proposes that the forced-voluntary dichotomy should be replaced by a multivariate model emphasising reactive and proactive migration:

Under certain conditions, the decision to move may be made after due consideration of all relevant information, rationally calculated to maximize net advantage, including both material and symbolic rewards. At the other extreme, the decision to move may be made in a state of panic during a crisis that leaves few alternatives but escape from intolerable threats. (1994: p.55)

Thus there are examples of true reactive migrants, such as 1951 Convention refugees (1994: p.61). However, as Richmond goes on to argue, between the two extremes of proactive and reactive migrants are a large proportion of people crossing state borders who combine characteristics responding to economic, social and political pressures over which they have little control, but exercising a limited degree of choice in the selection of destinations and the timing of their movements (ibid.).

Citizenship and forced migration

Citizenship is put forward here as an important concept for understanding forced migration. As observed by Richmond, many of those migrating are those for whom the state is unable to meet their basic needs. States can be unable or unwilling to provide protection to its citizens. In situations of conflict, parts of a state's territory can exist under the control of rebel factions or be characterised by lawlessness so that the perpetration of human rights abuses go unchecked. In such scenarios the source of persecution may be non-state agents but the state is either unable or unwilling to provide protection so that citizenship is denied, creating the conditions for outward forced migration.

A state may persecute individuals that it perceives as a threat. Citizenship is fundamentally about inclusion and exclusion. The state may adopt a definition of citizenship that is not consistent with the reality of those living within its territory. Nationalistic definitions of citizenship can result in the exclusion of minority groups. This may result in discrimination, the denial of protection or the state may go even further and actively persecute its members fundamentally breaking the state-citizen link. Constraints on a state's action towards its members have been codified in human rights law and the 1951 Convention. When a state actively persecutes its members this again creates the conditions for outward forced migration.

Policy responses of western states

The refugee's experience of exclusion from the country of origin means that inward migration is determined by the desire to find inclusion and membership in a state elsewhere. Refugees may head to the West with the belief that they will be able to find protection in the liberal democracies that profess support for principles of human rights. However, rather than granting membership, the policies of Western states towards refugees are increasingly orientated towards restoring the state-citizen link in the country of origin (Harvey, 2000). This has not always been the case however. During the Cold War, individuals fleeing communism were largely welcomed as refugees in the West seen as 'fighters for liberty' (Lavenex, 1999: p.1). Western states have also accepted occasional ad hoc quotas of refugees into their societies as exemplified by the Vietnamese.

The end of the Cold War and increasing asylum applications from the early 1980s onwards provides a context in which Western states have sought to make it increasingly difficult for refugees to arrive in their territories. Policies aimed at

achieving this include imposing a visa requirement on refugee producing countries, reinforced by carrier sanctions and airline liaison officers³. Western states have interdicted asylum seekers at sea. In August 2001 the Tampa ship was carrying 433 asylum seekers rescued at sea and was boarded by Australian SAS troops to stop the ship's arrival in Australian territory (Barkham & Aglionby, 2001). Using Royal Navy warships to prevent the arrival of asylum seekers in the UK has reportedly been considered by Tony Blair (Milne & Travis, 2002).

Exclusion from territory is the most effective policy option for Western state's attempting to reduce their obligations towards asylum seekers. In recent times an increased importance of human rights discourse has led some authors to argue that access to entitlements in Western states is less predicated on formal citizenship than on concepts of 'universal personhood' (Soysal, 1994; Jacobson, 1996). Soysal and Jacobson seem to represent the most optimistic authors regarding any emergence of 'universal personhood' but most authors will now concede that the advance of a human rights culture has led to fundamental changes in how liberal democracies conceive of their obligations to foreigners within their territory (Gibney, 2001: p12)⁴. However, for those remaining outside of the state's territory their exclusion is absolute (Lister, 1997: p.43).

The recent use of 'temporary protection' provides refugees with access to the territory of the West but instead of granting membership into the society focuses upon the 'turnaround time' after arrival (Black et al, 1998: p.8). The granting of temporary protection is based on the implicit assumption of the return of those concerned after the end of conflicts in the country of origin that has caused them to flee (ibid.). However, in practice, this has been more difficult to enforce and, as argued above, once an individual is inside the territory there are constraints on state action. Amongst Bosnians granted temporary protection in the EU all Member States except Germany have had a de facto regularisation of their status (ibid.).

Other Western policies include the use of 'safe havens' and 'safe areas' in conflict zones. These can actually be tragically unsafe, as witnessed in Srebrenica when Bosnian Serb forces killed 7,000 in 1995 (UNHCR, 2000: p.224). There have been significant increases in UNHCR's budget and an increased citing of refugee issues as a basis for military intervention by the UN Security Council (Roberts, 1998). All of these policies are linked by the aim of restoring the state-citizen link in the country of origin rather than granting refugees' inclusion into the societies of the West.

In addition to policies aimed at territorial exclusion there exist only extremely limited opportunities for refugees to actually request the protection of Western states when they are geographically located outside of the West. Resettlement through UNHCR can be applied for by refugees unable to find protection in a country of first asylum or refugees with special needs such as victims of torture who need specialist treatment

³ These practices are now well established in the literature. Suggested reading includes Lahav & Guiraudon (2000) and Vedsted Hansen (1999).

⁴ For example, Castles & Davidson (2000: pp.17-19) argue that 'Soysal seems to overstate' the gains made; and Schuck (1998: pp.202-205) also disagrees that any real sense of 'post-national' citizenship has emerged to date.

(UNHCR, 2002a: chapter 1, unpaginated). However, only 33,000 refugees were resettled by UNHCR in 2001 (table 1), out of a world-wide refugee population of over 12 million (UNHCR, 2002b).

Chatelard (2002: pp.20-21) found that many Iraqi forced migrants in Jordan did not contact UNHCR regarding resettlement, preferring instead to keep a low profile. Some believed UNHCR to be infiltrated by Iraqi agents and feared to contact the organisation.

Table 1: refugee resettlement under UNHCR-auspices, 2001

<i>Country of resettlement</i>	<i>Number of resettled refugees accepted</i>
Australia	2,559
Austria	6
Belgium	97
Benin	62
Canada	5,136
Chile	9
Denmark	1,034
Finland	746
France	47
Germany	66
Iceland	23
India	21
Ireland	54
Italy	68
Mozambique	27
Netherlands	282
Norway	1,797
New Zealand	473
Pakistan	1
Poland	3
Sweden	1,719
Switzerland	5
United Kingdom	204
USA	18,347
Various	312
Total	33,098

Source: UNHCR (2002a: annex 5)

Noll & Fagerlund (2002) examine the potential for refugees to apply for protection at embassies or other diplomatic representations of EU Member States abroad with Austria, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK having relevant

provisions⁵. However, the report reveals that, apart from family reunification requests, applications are very rarely successful. Following a change in legislation, Danish diplomatic representations abroad ceased accepting asylum applications in 2002 (ECRE, 2003a: p.70, pp.79-80). Whilst opportunities for resettlement may change in the future, the current reality is that individuals who wish to gain protection in the West must first of all be within the territory of the West.

A shortage of research on the destination countries of refugees

We currently know very little about the reasons why refugees seek protection in particular destination countries (Crisp, 1999; Morrison & Crosland, 2001: p.87; Ramakers, 1997: p.113; Schuster, 2000: p.123). In the UK, the Home Office has funded three recently released reports relating to the destination countries of refugees. The first, by Robinson & Segrott (2002), involved 63 qualitative interviews with asylum seekers and recognised refugees regarding their arrival in the UK as a destination country. The second, by Koser & Pinkerton (2002), examined asylum seekers' social networks and the role of these in information dissemination about countries of asylum. The third report, by Zetter *et al* (2003), assesses the impact of asylum policies in Europe between 1990 and 2000. Each of these reports argue that there is an overall lack of research on the destination countries of refugees.

The role of colonial and historical ties

Robinson & Segrott (2002: p.30) found that colonial ties influenced the decisions of asylum seekers arriving in the UK in three ways. First were notions of linguistic and cultural similarities between the UK and its former colonies. Secondly, it was often felt that although the UK had granted its colonies independence there remained a deep bond between them and the motherland. Finally, some of their respondents felt that the UK had a duty to look after citizens from its ex-colonies that were fleeing persecution.

Böcker & Havinga (1998a: p.40) conducted a multivariate analysis of EU asylum applications and found that the presence or absence of colonial ties was the most important factor predicting an asylum seeker's country of destination. There are, however, complications to this basic pattern. Instances exist where the former mother country receives disproportionately small numbers of asylum applications from the former colony (Böcker & Havinga, 1998a: pp.38-39) (see also Hovy, 1993). They found, for example, that Indian, Ghanaian and Nigerian asylum seekers are over-represented in Belgium rather than the UK (Böcker & Havinga, 1998a: p.39).

Koser & Pinkerton (2002: p.2, pp.20-21) have argued that we are currently seeing 'new geographies' of asylum migration. Whereas traditional approaches have seen the migration of asylum seekers to countries with which they have had colonial and historical links, asylum seekers are increasingly arriving in countries with which they

⁵ Italy has also been putting forward proposals to allow for asylum applications to be lodged outside of Italian territory (Noll & Fagerlund, 2002: p.47).

or their country of origin have no previous link. New asylum source countries in the UK including from China, Colombia, Ecuador and Romania exemplify these new patterns (ibid.).

Collyer (2003) has studied specifically the increasingly diverse migration of Algerians from very established movements to the former colonial power, France, to a wider range of destinations. Collyer's research focused on the movement of Algerians to the UK and France. He primarily found that Algerians sought asylum in the UK because it has few connections with Algeria at a governmental level and a perception of the UK as being more tolerant towards Algerian nationals (p.1).

The role of agents

Western state policies aimed at the territorial exclusion of asylum seekers have been accompanied by increasing numbers using agents when arriving in Western Europe⁶. A survey of 371 asylum seekers and recognised refugees in the UK found that 72 per cent had used an agent to help them flee (Bateman, 2002: p.18). To use an agent requires the investment of substantial resources⁷. Agents heighten the vulnerability of refugees (Koser, 1998, 2000; Morrison, 1998: pp.47-53). For example, the discovery of 58 dead Chinese at Dover Docks in June 2000 tragically illustrates these dangers (Hopkins *et al*, 2000).

Studies suggest that agents hold fairly detailed knowledge regarding asylum policies in Western Europe; that the travel routes which they adopt are responsive to changing policies; and that they can act as a source of information to the individual asylum seeker (Ghosh, 1998: p.72; Koser, 1997a: p.168; Koser, 1998: p.192; Salt & Hogarth, 2000: p.111). It should also be remembered that our current knowledge regarding agents and trafficking is still largely speculative (Salt & Hogarth, 2000: p.14).

One factor accounting for the extent to which agents' influence asylum migrations is the extent to which a refugee has already selected a particular destination. Wahlbeck (1999) found a difference between Kurdish refugees from Turkey and Iraq arriving in the UK. Kurdish Turks tended to select the UK as a destination from the beginning (p.50), whereas Kurdish Iraqis tended to have a very poor knowledge of possible destinations prior to flight so that in practice agents determined the destination (p.55). Morrison's (1998) report based upon twenty-seven refugees trafficked to the UK found that in a large number of cases the agent played an important if not decisive role in determining the destination (p.23).

⁶ Regarding agents it is important to distinguish between traffickers and smugglers. Trafficked migrants experience elements of coercion and exploitation, whereas smuggled migrants are when an individual requests assistance to cross into another nation state where (s)he has no right of residence and the smuggler's involvement goes no further than crossing the border (Salt & Hogarth, 2000: p.21). It is not known to what extent asylum seekers use smugglers or traffickers (ibid: p.108).

⁷ Salt & Hogarth (2000: p.96) provide a useful table summary of payments to agents, based on the available evidence, of journeys from various countries of origin to different countries of destination. For example, it is estimated to travel from Iran to Europe using an agent costs 5,000 US dollars per person (ibid.).

Robinson & Segrott (2002: p.19) found that agents were 'critical determinants' of the destinations reached by asylum seekers. They found that agents act to both negatively channel asylum seekers, by denying access to certain countries, and to positively channel asylum seekers, by offering a range of possibilities including advice on different destinations (pp.22-24). Robinson & Segrott found that, in general, the eventual destination became a joint decision between the individual and the agent, based on the asylum seeker's preferences, the availability of migration networks, the proximity of the preferred country and the asylum seeker's ability to pay (p.25).

The role of social networks

Social networks can be defined as '...sets of interpersonal relations that link migrants or returned migrants with relatives, friends or fellow countrymen at home' (Arango, 2000: p.291). Social networks rank amongst the most important explanatory factors of migration (ibid.). Social networks tend to emphasise migration selectivity, migration timing and migration channelling (Koser & Pinkerton, 2002: pp.10-11). Yet explanations have developed around voluntary migration and little is known about how the concept applies to refugees (Boyd, 1989: p.655). Although social networks can be influential in asylum migrations, asylum seekers may also migrate without contacting social networks, even where they exist (Koser & Pinkerton, 2002: p.13).

Koser (1997a, 1997b) found that social networks impacted upon the decision making process of Iranian asylum seekers in the Netherlands. In conventional social network approaches it is expected that the migrant will join a community in the destination country. However, Koser (1997b: p.600) observed a spatial disassociation between the country of destination and the actual location of family and friends. Instead, Koser found that the main reason for selecting the Netherlands as a destination was due to information about its asylum policy that was derived, in part, through social networks along with other sources, such as agents. Koser's research conflicts with Robinson & Segrott's (2002) study that found the presence of a friend or family member to be the most important influence on the destination within the West (p.62).

The presence of communities and social networks in destination countries tends to follow colonial and historical ties, and thus the two considerations are not distinct. However, part of the 'new geographies' emerging is that some asylum seekers are effectively pioneers, as they are arriving in countries in which there are no pre-existing social networks, although it is to be expected that social networks will build around these new arrivals (Koser & Pinkerton, 2002: p.20).

The role of asylum policy

Although the 'harmonisation' of European asylum policies is often talked about, they are still very much characterised by difference. This applies not only to the support provided to asylum seekers (see Danish Refugee Council, 2000), but also to

definitions of protection throughout the EU (see ECRE, 2003b; UNHCR, 2000:p.163).

Evidence regarding the impact of policy on the destination of asylum seekers is conflicting. At an aggregate, statistical level Holzer *et al* (2001) identified that unilateral policy deterrence strategies did have an effect when adopted by Switzerland, but that these did not always influence refugee flows from certain states. This contrasts with Böcker & Havinga (1998a: p.85) who argue that asylum policy and reception conditions are not dominant factors when explaining patterns of asylum seeker destination. However, again they qualify this by commenting that policy may be important for some groups at some times (*ibid.*)⁸.

Zetter *et al* (2003: p.xi) found in their assessment of European asylum policies a need to emphasise caution in asserting direct links between asylum policy and impacts. Instead they found the relationship to be muted and a difficulty in attributing, from the available literature and statistics, direct causal relationships between policy and outcomes.

As previously mentioned Robinson & Segrott (2002: pp.62-63) found the main influence on the destination country within the West to be the presence of a family member or friend. They argue that asylum policy is not an important factor determining the destination, finding instead that asylum seekers arrived in the UK without a detailed knowledge of policy (p.47). Survey research in the Netherlands has similarly found that asylum seekers arrive with only a poor knowledge of Dutch society and asylum procedures (Brink & Pasariboe, 1993: p.83). In Collyer's (2003) aforementioned study he found asylum policy to not be an important consideration for Algerians who have sought asylum in the UK (pp. 10-11).

Barsky's (2000) study of 56 asylum seekers in Quebec, Canada found that the central concern of asylum seekers' consideration of destination countries is the type of status that they will eventually obtain and the measure of protection that the claimant will feel from the persecution previously endured (pp.230-231). Yet, within this, Barsky found that the knowledge asylum seekers had of Canada and other potential destination countries tended to be only 'extremely sparse' (p.12).

However, for some policy does influence the destination country selected. Mentioned was Koser's (1997a, 1997b) study which found primarily that Iranian asylum seekers did select the Netherlands for its policy. Important was the perceived chance of being granted status (1997a: p.163). McDowell (1996) found that policy did feature in the decision making of Tamil asylum seekers arriving in Switzerland. Important was the provision of public assistance, promising social security payments, housing and, for most, jobs (p.25).

Chatelard (2002) found that Iraqi forced migrants in Jordan were able to develop an 'amazingly accurate knowledge' of the countries in which they have connections (p.24). However, the most important consideration regarding the destination country

⁸ See also Havinga & Böcker (1999: p.53).

was found to be the presence of family members, friends and co-religionists rather than policy (p.24).

At what stage of the journey are decisions about the destination made?

It is important to consider at what stage of the migration decisions about the destination are made. After the initial flight the position of the refugee along the forced voluntary continuum, and the ability to make decisions, may alter. For asylum policy to be an important consideration for Tamil asylum seekers it is important that they are able to flee persecution to find relative peace in southern Sri Lanka. The second stage of their flight to Europe or North America becomes largely 'proactive and anticipatory' (McDowell, 1996: p.24). The imposition of visa restrictions, carrier sanctions and other exclusionary measures has made it very difficult for refugees to arrive directly by air in a particular European country. Instead refugees embark upon long and complex journeys to potential destinations (Barsky, 2000; Koser, 1997a; Morrison, 1998; Morrison & Crosland, 2001: p.8).

As the international migration regime has become increasingly stringent recent research has emphasised the role of class in shaping forms, patterns and impacts of forced migration (Van Hear, 2004). Class can affect the routes taken by forced migrants, their means of migration and destinations reached (ibid: p.1).

For the vast majority of the world's refugees, the destination country is proximate to their country of origin (UNHCR, 2000: pp.316-318). Experiences in proximate countries vary but the exclusion from the country of origin is commonly repeated in that refugees tend again to be excluded from citizenship rights and are, at best, tolerated within the territory. Palestinian refugees in Lebanon have no political or social rights and are prohibited from working in over 50 professions (Dorai, 2002: p.91). Similarly, in what Chatelard (2002: p.6) terms a 'semi-protectionist' policy, Jordan tolerates Iraqi forced migrants within its territory but deprives them of any status in an act to encourage their onward migration.

For many refugees it is in third countries, where the position along the forced voluntary continuum is such that they experience relative safety, that they find out about potential destination countries in the West. Refugee exile communities have formed in cities such as Cairo, Nairobi and Istanbul which '...have become centres of refugee activity in which exile groups attempt to establish a framework for social and political activity which is often directed towards onward movement' (Marfleet, 1998: pp.74-75). In such cities, information about the international refugee regime including specific country practices may be more freely obtained and in which '...notions of a defined refugee status and an associated package of rights have become part of the exile's world view' (ibid: p.75).

It is important to emphasise that outside of the West there are not the same norms of human rights and constraints on state action. Refugees in proximate countries often fear inadequate security conditions, a threat of deportation plus fear physical harassment and detention from police and security services (Loescher & Milner, 2003: p.4). For example, there are frequent reports of Turkish authorities attempting to deport refugees back to the countries that they have come from, including

individuals awaiting resettlement (Wahlbeck, 1999: p.59). Even in countries like Jordan, where no mass expulsion of Iraqis has so far occurred, Jordan remains like all Middle Eastern countries in that it can exercise its right to expel 'illegal aliens' back to the country of origin whatever the situation there (Chatelard, 2002: p.26).

In recent times, Western Europe's asylum polices have transformed the Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs) into an asylum 'buffer zone' (Collinson, 1996). Many transiting the CEECs show indications of being refugees (Juhász, 2000: p.210; Okólski, 2000: p.272). The experience of transit migration can be very long, with survey research in Turkey indicating an average transit period of four years (IOM, 1996: p.19). There is also evidence that some individuals are now actually arriving in the CEECs viewing them as destination countries rather than as transit countries (Juhász, 2000: p.221; Okólski, 2000: p.275).

A refugee may decide upon the destination country, or re-evaluate an initial decision, once they are within the West. The Sangatte refugee camp in northern France, now closed, became the subject of particular controversy as it operated largely as a staging post for asylum seekers who sought to seek asylum in the UK as a destination country rather than France. Smain Laacher conducted over 300 interviews in Sangatte (quoted in Henley, 2002). He found that the vast majority in Sangatte did not plan to reach the UK upon leaving their country of origin but made the decision only upon arrival in France when they became in a position to compare and contrast the two countries' asylum regimes.

Patterns of origin and destination of asylum seekers within the EU

The objective of this section is to examine patterns of origin and destination of asylum seekers within the EU Member States between 1980 and 2001. The focus of analysis is upon asylum applications rather than 'refugees'. Asylum applicants are people who have lodged claims for protection with a state and are awaiting their claims to be determined. As will become clear later in the paper in the UK context, it is regarding asylum applications that governments direct their concern and policies primarily intend to impact upon. Although asylum statistics are often referred to in the literature this takes place in a largely *ad hoc* fashion. The most systematic analysis of asylum statistics within the EU to date is that by Böcker & Havinga (1998a, 1998b). However their analysis uses asylum statistics up until only 1994 so a particular emphasis in this section will be on updating this previous research.

The following analysis uses asylum statistics published on the UNHCR web-site⁹. The focus is upon the EU Member States and takes this to be defined as the grouping of fifteen states prior to the accession of the ten new Member States in May 2004. There are a number of limitations to the asylum data used so that the emphasis in this section should be on the broad trends identified rather than the precise figures¹⁰.

⁹ Statistics on the UNHCR web-site are posted on <http://www.unhcr.ch/statistics>.

¹⁰ Included in the appendices is a breakdown of asylum applications received in the EU Member States 1980 – 2001 and also a discussion of the main data limitations.

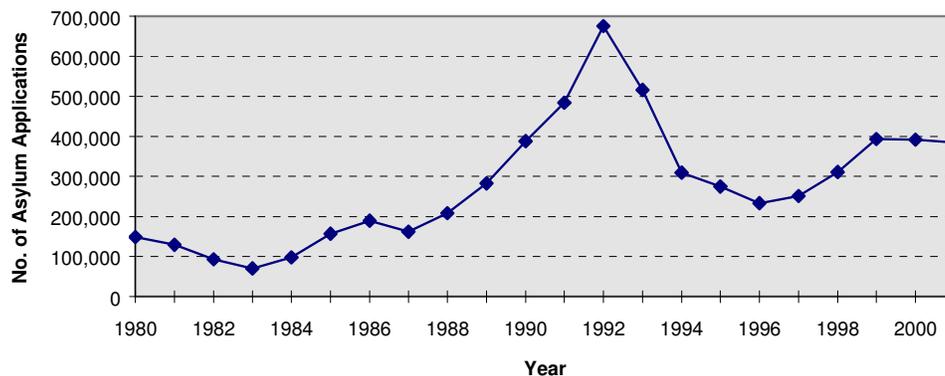
Figure 1 shows that the total number of asylum applications received in the EU have shown a general trend to growth during the 1980s and 1990s. In 1980 there were 149,000 asylum applications lodged within the EU, whilst this had increased to over 384,500 in 2001. However, as figure 1 demonstrates, there has not been a simple linear relationship between time and increasing asylum applications. Asylum applications peaked in the EU in 1992 with 675,500 applications.

The EU as a destination for asylum seekers and refugees in context

It is important to place the EU as a destination for asylum seekers and refugees in a global context. In 2000 there were 391,500 asylum applications submitted in the EU out of 947,200 asylum applications submitted world-wide (see appendix - 1 & UNHCR, 2002c: table 1.1). This indicates that the EU Member States received approximately 40 per cent of the total asylum applications lodged world-wide in 2000, a relatively large proportion.

However, the relatively high number of asylum applications received in the EU actually masks a much smaller participation in world refugee issues. In 2000 there were an estimated 1.6 million refugees within the EU but representing only 13 per cent of a world-wide refugee population of over 12 million (UNHCR, 2002c: table 1.2). There are also a number of other measures, such as in terms of GDP, which demonstrate the relatively small participation of the EU in world refugee issues (see UNHCR, 2002d).

Figure 1: total asylum applications in EU Member States, 1980 - 2001



Source: UNHCR (2001a, 2002f)

The origin of asylum seekers in the EU

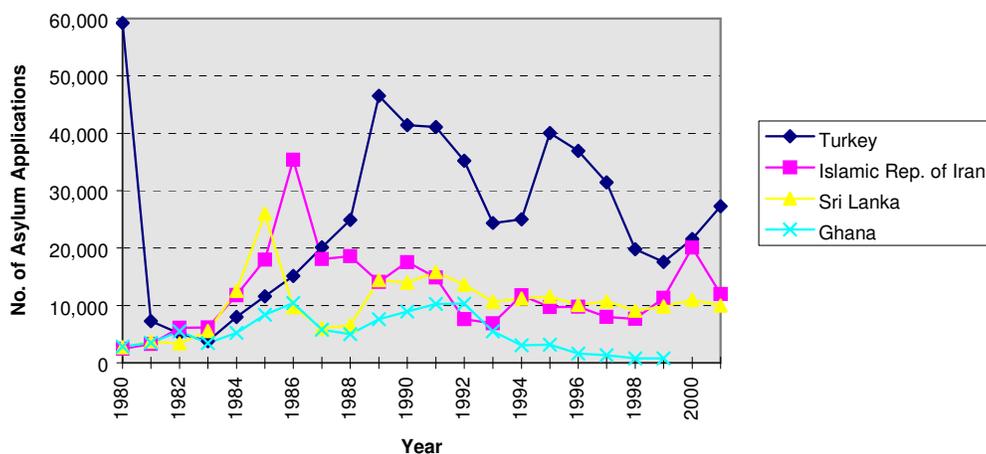
As Böcker & Havinga observe (1998a: p.35) it is primarily political developments in the country of origin which affect asylum flows. Asylum seekers tend to arrive from countries characterised by general instability, war, conflict or repressive regimes.

Further, as conditions in the countries of origin change, this tends to have a direct impact in terms of asylum applicants received in the EU. Included in the appendices is an annual ranking of the top ten countries of origin of asylum applicants in the EU between 1980 and 2001. The table provides constant support for the notion that it is conditions in countries of origin that directly impact upon asylum applications received in the EU.

Particular countries have been constant sources of asylum seekers in the EU. Turkey has ranked within the top 5 source countries every year after a military coup between 1979-1980, whilst most of those seeking asylum since have been Kurds (Kirisci, 1991; Wahlbeck, 1999; Wilpert, 1998: p.274). Iranian asylum seekers have arrived since the Iranian Revolution in 1979, as widespread human rights abuses in Iran continue (e.g. Amnesty International, 1997: pp.184-187). 1983 is generally regarded as the start of the ongoing civil war in Sri Lanka (Van Hear, 2002: p.204). Figure 2 shows asylum applications from these countries plus Ghana. Ghana was characterised by a general insecurity in the 1980s (ibid.). Conditions improved after presidential elections in 1992 but in 1994 6,000 died in ethnic violence whilst the last major rioting was in 1995 (Briggs, 1998: p.30). Since then a general stability has been reflected with reduced Ghanaian asylum applications submitted in the EU.

Figure 3 shows asylum applications from the CEECs. In the 1980s asylum seekers from the CEECs were fleeing communism and were largely welcomed in the West on ideological grounds. Since the collapse of communism it has been predominantly Roma from the CEECs seeking asylum in the West (Young, 1999). In absolute terms figure 3 shows that the CEECs, especially Poland, were more important source countries in the 1980s. Romania continued as an important source country, although asylum applications from its nationals peaked in 1992.

Figure 2: asylum applications in the EU from Ghana, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Sri Lanka and Turkey, 1980 - 2001



Source: UNHCR (2001a, 2001b, 2002e)

Figure 4 shows four of the main source countries into the EU during the 1990s. The disintegration of the former Yugoslavia has largely dominated asylum migrations into the EU during the 1990s, ranking as the most important source country every year between 1991 and 1999 except in 1996, when it ranked second (see appendix - 2). Similarly those arriving from Bosnia and Herzegovina were initially fleeing the war and a political situation which has remained 'complex' since (Black *et al*, 1998: p.10).

Iraqi refugees increased after the 1991 Gulf War when failed uprisings against Saddam Hussein by the Kurds and Shiites were followed by repression and ongoing human rights violations (Chatelard, 2002: p.1). Since 1994 Iraq has ranked amongst the ten main source countries of asylum seekers in the EU (appendix - 2). Revolution in Afghanistan during 1978 - 1979 and subsequent ongoing war (UNHCR, 2000: pp.115-121) has contributed to the continual arrival of Afghans in the EU seeking asylum. However, it is after the Taleban came to power in 1996 that asylum applications in the EU sharply increased from 11,300 in 1996 to 16,800 in 1999 (UNHCR, 2001a: p. 138).

Examining the absolute distribution of asylum applications clearly reveals Germany as the main destination, receiving approximately 45 per cent of the total asylum applications submitted within the EU between 1980 and 2001 (table 2). Between 1980 and 1990 France received the second highest number of asylum applications although France actually then experienced an absolute decrease in asylum applications between 1991 and 2001. Greece was the only other Member State to experience such a decrease.

The destination of asylum applications within the EU

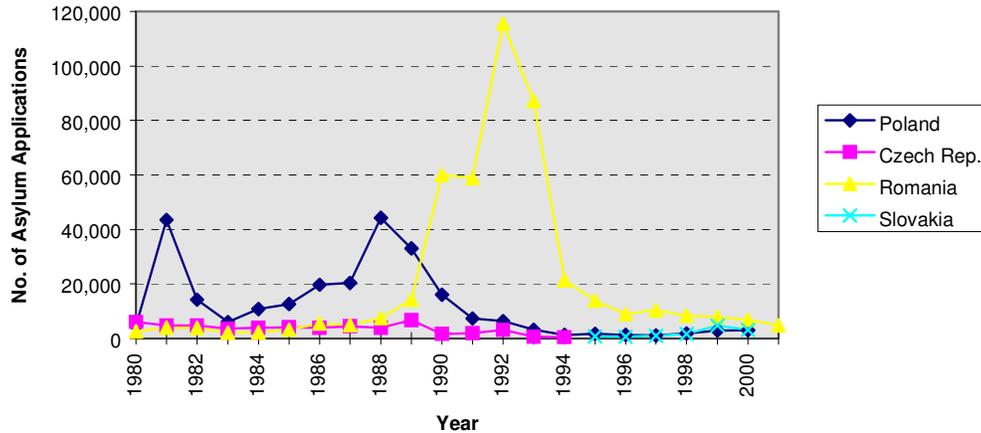
Asylum applications received in the EU are not evenly distributed across the 15 Member States. Table 2 shows summary information on asylum applications submitted in the EU Member States between 1980 and 2001; data broken down annually is included in the appendix.

The countries experiencing the largest absolute increases in asylum applications between the periods 1980 to 1990 and 1991 to 2001 are Germany (+955,600 applications); the UK (+545,500 applications); and the Netherlands (+300,500 applications). These three states and France received the highest number of applications overall between 1980 and 2001. They are graphed in figure 5 that, again, conveys the dominance of Germany as an asylum destination until the late 1990s when there is a convergence with other Member States. In 2000 the UK actually ranked as the main destination within the EU, receiving 98,900 asylum applications, whilst in 2001 Germany and the UK both received approximately 88,300 applications.

Table 2 also shows that Southern European Member States are still only relatively minor asylum seeking destination countries. The figures for 2001 show that Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal received 24,800 asylum applications between them equalling approximately 6 per cent of the total EU applications. Under the terms of the Dublin

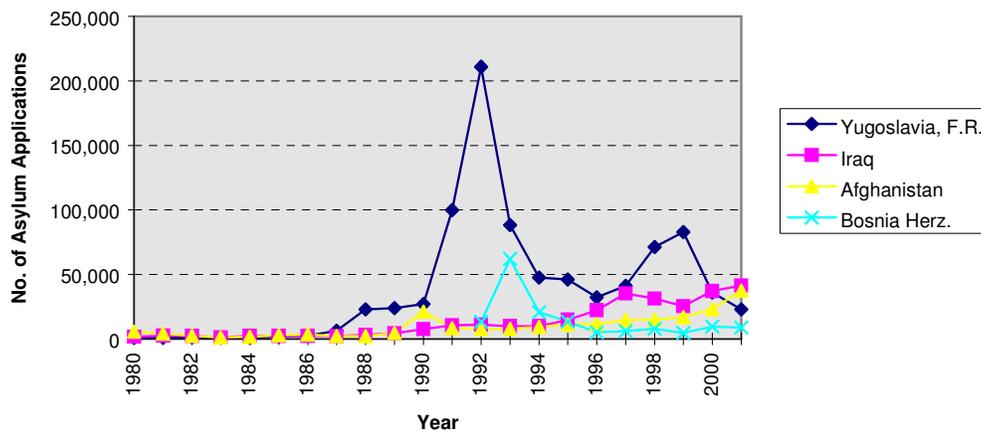
Convention it is the states on the borders of the EU that would be expected to receive the highest number of asylum applications but, as can be seen, here this is not the case.

Figure 3: asylum applications in the EU from the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, 1980 - 2001



Source: UNHCR (2001a, 2001b, 2002e)¹¹

Figure 4: asylum applications in the EU from Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Iraq 1980 - 2001



Source: UNHCR (2001a, 2001b, 2002e)

¹¹ Asylum applications received in Czechoslovakia are included under the Czech Republic prior to 1995, from which separate data for Slovakia is available although after which figures for the Czech Republic are unavailable.

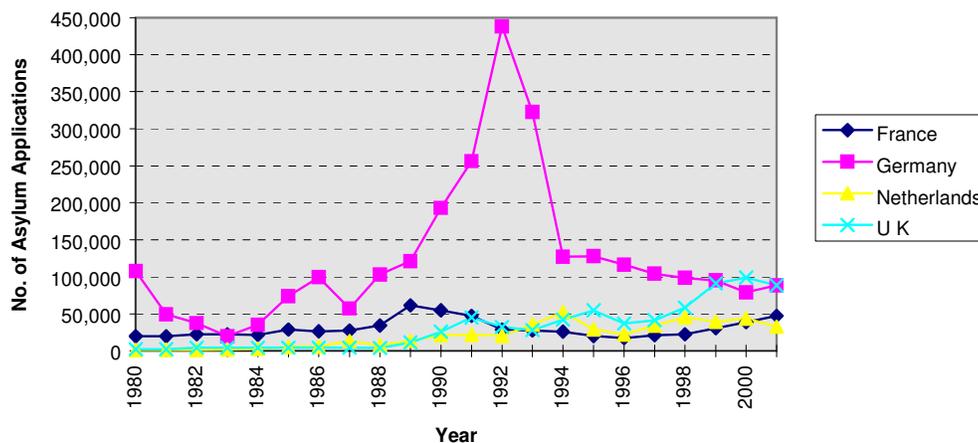
Table 2: asylum applications in EU Member States, 1980 – 2001

Rank	Country	1980-1990	Country	1991-2001	Country	1980-2001
1	Germany	897,964	Germany	1,853,591	Germany	2,751,555
2	France	339,838	U K	617,730	U K	689,951
3	Sweden	168,490	Netherlands	376,801	France	667,915
4	Austria	150,466	France	328,077	Netherlands	453,140
5	Netherlands	76,339	Sweden	255,949	Sweden	424,439
6	U K	72,221	Belgium	234,681	Austria	305,787
7	Belgium	59,548	Austria	155,321	Belgium	294,229
8	Italy	47,610	Italy	109,878	Italy	157,488
9	Denmark	40,869	Denmark	101,880	Denmark	142,749
10	Greece	36,589	Spain	92,315	Spain	122,051
11	Spain	29,736	Ireland	39,779	Greece	63,629
12	Portugal	5,682	Greece	27,040	Ireland	39,779
13	Finland	3,144	Finland	20,366	Finland	23,510
14	Luxembourg	114	Luxembourg	7,002	Portugal	11,558
15	Ireland		Portugal	5,876	Luxembourg	7,116
	Total	1,928,610	Total	4,226,286	Total	6,154,896

Source: UNHCR (2001a, 2002f)

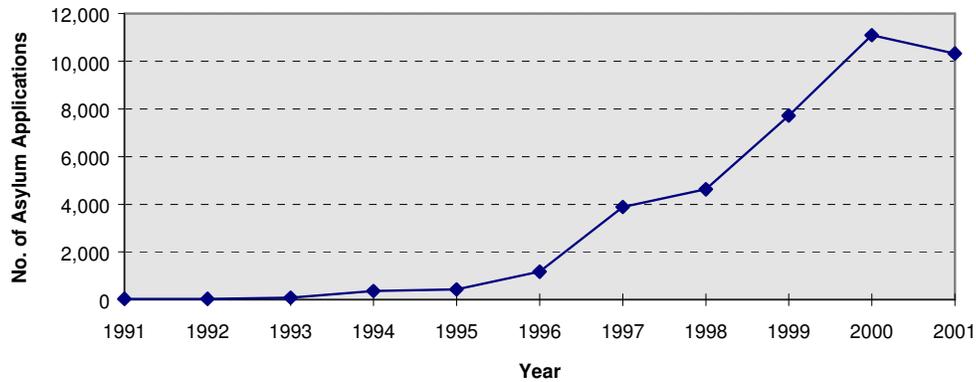
A final observation is some Member States that have tended not to receive high numbers of asylum applications in the past have started to become more significant destination countries. Luxembourg exemplifies this but also, in particular, Ireland (figure 6).

Figure 5: asylum applications in France, Germany, Netherlands & UK, 1980 - 2001



Source: UNHCR (2001a, 2002f)

Figure 6: asylum applications in Ireland, 1991 - 2001



Source: UNHCR (2001a, 2002f)

It is useful to consider measures other than the absolute distribution of asylum applications. In relation to population size Sweden, the Netherlands and Belgium receive the highest number of asylum applications (table 3). The ratio of asylum seekers to gross domestic product per capita again reveals the UK and Germany to receive the highest number of asylum applications in 2000 (table 4).

Table 3: annual average numbers of asylum applications in EU Member States per 1,000 inhabitants, 1992 - 2001

Member State	Annual average asylum applications per 1,000 inhabitants
Sweden	2.57
Netherlands	2.27
Belgium	2.16
Germany	1.94
Denmark	1.84
Luxembourg	1.62
Austria	1.56
Ireland	1.07
U K	0.97
France	0.48
Finland	0.35
Greece	0.23
Spain	0.21
Italy	0.15
Portugal	0.06

Source: UNHCR (2002f)

Table 4: EU Member States, ratio asylum applications submitted: GDP per capita in 2000

<i>Member State</i>	<i>Ratio</i>
Germany	5.2
U K	3.4
Belgium	1.9
Netherlands	1.9
France	1.8
Austria	0.8
Italy	0.8
Ireland	0.6
Spain	0.6
Sweden	0.6
Denmark	0.3
Greece	0.3
Finland	0.1
Luxembourg	0
Portugal	0

Source: UNHCR (2002d: p.23)

Specific patterns of origin and destination within the EU

Table 5 is taken from the study by Böcker & Havinga (1998a: pp.36-37) showing specific patterns of origin and destination for asylum seekers in the EU between 1985 and 1994, whilst table 6 represents an updated version using 2001 asylum statistics. The key difference between the two tables is that whereas Böcker & Havinga (1998a: p.33) identify that asylum seekers from a particular country of origin tend to go to a particular destination country within the EU the updated table reveals much more diffuse patterns of migration.

Table 5: most important destination countries for asylum seekers from the 44 largest countries of origin in the EU, 1985-1994¹²

<i>Country of origin</i>	<i>Total no. of applications</i>	<i>More than 90% of applications made in one country</i>
Mali**	16,885	F*
Cambodia**	8,416	F*
Haiti **	6,999	F*
Mauritania**	4,877	F*
Laos**	4,353	F*
Cape Verde**	4,035	F

¹² Refer to the list of abbreviations for the various country codes.

Uganda**	7,017	UK*	
Surinam**	3,712	NL*	
Dominican Republic	3,135	E*	
<i>Country of origin</i>	<i>Total no. of applications</i>	<i>75-90% of applications made in one country</i>	<i>More than 90% of applications made in the following countries</i>
Yugoslavia	485,047	D	D,NL
Czechoslovak.	15,595	D	D,NL
Hungary	11,329	D	D,NL
Afghanistan	52,661	D	D,NL
Bulgaria	90,457	D	D,B
Romania	330,407	D	D,F,B
Poland	133,370	D	D,E,F
Lebanon	70,215	D	D,DK,NL
Albania**	23,297	I	I,F
Peru**	9,098	E*	E*,F
Guinea**	1,719	F*	F*,B
Syria**	3,661	NL	NL,B,DK
		<i>60-75% of applications made in one country</i>	<i>More than 90% of applications made in the following countries</i>
Vietnam	66,221	D	D,F*
Turkey	264,491	D	D,F,UK
Algeria	27,068	D	D,F*,NL
Iran	115,154	D	D,NL,DK,UK
Nigeria	43,773	D	D,UK*,B,NL
Sudan**	3,509	UK*	UK*,NL
Senegal**	8,802	F*	F*,E
		<i>40-60% of applications made in one country</i>	<i>More than 90% of applications made in the following countries</i>
Sri Lanka	124,068	D	D,F,UK*,NL
Ghana	66,215	D	D,F,UK*,B
Pakistan	57,879	D	D,UK*,F,B
India	66,544	D	D,UK*,B,F
Ethiopia	31,054	D	D,UK,NL,I*
Togo	8,160	D	D,UK,B,NL
USSR	34,811	D	D,NL,F,DK
Colombia**	3,982	F	F,UK,NL
Angola**	30,459	F	F,UK,NL,E/B
Zaire	81,309	F	F,B*,UK,D
Bangladesh**	8,668	F	F,NL,B,UK
Chili**	3,383	F	F,E*,B,NL
China	23,336	F	F,NL,D,E,UK
Somalia**	42,211	NL	NL,UK*,DK,I*
Liberia**	5,067	NL	NL,B,E,F

		<i>More than 90% of applications made in the following countries</i>
Iraq**	32,888	GR,NL,DK,UK*

* Country of origin is in this case a former colony, protectorate or mandated territory of the country of destination.

** Relevant country of origin is not listed within the German statistics.

Source: Böcker & Havinga (1998a: pp.36-37)

For example, in table 5 there are nine countries of origin with over 90 per cent of their asylum claims lodged in one destination country within the EU whereas in table 6 there are only two such cases. Part of the explanation is that table 5 is based upon the 44 largest countries of origin into the EU, whereas table 6 is based upon the 29 largest countries of origin. As Böcker & Havinga observe (1998a: p.33) countries of origin with relatively small numbers of asylum applications tend to be more concentrated. However, for example, in table 5 all states except Iraq have over 40 per cent of asylum applications lodged in one destination country within the EU. Table 6 shows that in 2001 over half the countries of origin listed have less than 40 per cent of asylum applications lodged in any single destination country. There is clear evidence of more diffuse migrations in 2001.

From tables 5 and 6 it can be seen that asylum migrations often follow colonial and historical ties. The reasons for this were outlined in the literature review including linguistic and cultural similarities plus perceptions of a deep bond remaining between the colonies and the motherland even after independence (Robinson & Segrott, 2002: p.30). Immigrant communities in the motherland also mean that social networks often follow colonial and historical links. Böcker & Havinga (1998a: pp.37-39) identified that colonial ties often lead to an over-representation of asylum applicants between a country of origin and destination. The same is true in 2001 with, for example, Haitians seeking asylum in France; Colombians in Spain; and Algerians in France.

Patterns of asylum migration similarly follow histories of labour migration. This is exemplified by Turkish and Yugoslav asylum seekers who in both tables have their main destination as Germany, where they often have numerous social and family links to persons who arrived as labour migrants (Gastarbeiter) during the 1950s and 1960s (Santel, 1995: p.80). Again, although Germany remains the principal destination for both of these countries of origin in 2001 the migrations have become much more diffuse. Only 34 per cent of Yugoslav asylum applications and only 40 per cent of Turkish asylum applications were submitted in Germany in 2001.

There are, however, exceptions to asylum migrations following colonial and historical ties. Between 1985 and 1994 Böcker & Havinga (1998a: pp.38-39) observed that, for example, extremely few Lebanese sought asylum in the former colonial power France. They also identified cases where asylum seekers do arrive in the former mother country but have a larger over-representation in other European countries.

Examples included Indians, Ghanaians and Nigerians having a greater degree of over-representation in Belgium than the UK.

Anomalies continue in 2001. Angolans tend to seek asylum in the Netherlands rather than the former colonial power, Portugal, which will be discussed below. In 2001 the Netherlands received a higher number of asylum applications from Sierra Leone (2,400 applications) than the former colonial power, the UK (1,870 applications).

As referred to in the literature review, Koser and Pinkerton (2002) have identified 'new geographies' of asylum migration. Table 6 provides further evidence of these new geographies. For a particular country of origin a consequence of increasingly diffuse movements is that increasing numbers of asylum applicants are arriving in countries with which they do not have colonial or historical links, even if this country remains the main destination. Table 6 also emphasises that what is important in these new geographies is not simply the arrival of new countries of origin in a particular destination country but the overall pattern of increasingly diffuse asylum migrations.

Table 5 shows that the main destination of asylum seekers from the CEECs has been Germany. Historical ties include Germany having a long record of receiving refugees from the CEECs, a history of labour migration, Germany grants more scholarships for students from the CEECs than other EU countries and geographical proximity (Böcker & Havinga, 1998a: p.39). The change in asylum migrations from CEECs has been outlined above, from those fleeing communism to now predominately Roma movements, whilst there has been an overall absolute decrease in applications. This can be identified as one factor in the reduction of asylum applications in Germany from 1992 onwards.

Part of the current research literature, notably that of Robinson & Segrott (2002), has argued that asylum policies are not important in determining the destination countries of asylum seekers. However, this research does not completely discount the role of policy in influencing asylum migrations.

Table 6: destination countries for asylum seekers in the EU, 2001

<i>Country of origin</i>	<i>Destination country</i>	<i>Number of applications</i>	<i>Percentage of total applications in EU</i>	
<i>More than 90% of applications made in one country</i>				
Haiti	F	2,712	100	
Vietnam	D	3,735	91	
<i>60 - 89% of applications made in one country</i>				
				<i>More than 90% of applications made in the following</i>
Colombia	E	2,428	70	E, UK, F, D, I
Somalia	UK	6,415	65	UK, NL, DK, SWE, A

<i>40 - 59% of applications made in one country</i>				
Angola	NL	4,111	57	NL, UK, F, D
Sri Lanka	UK	5,465	55	UK, F, NL, D, I
Guinea	NL	1,467	44	NL, B, D
Dem Rep Congo	F	3,779	44	F, B, UK, D, NL
Pakistan	UK	2,685	44	UK, D, F, A, GR, B, DK
Iraq	D	17,357	42	D, UK, SWE, DK, A, I
Turkey	D	10,887	40	D, F, UK, A, I, NL
Nigeria	IRE	3,461	40	IRE, E, A, UK, F, D, NL
<i>20 - 39% of applications made in one country</i>				
China	F	2,953	37	F, UK, D, NL
Rep of Moldova	F	806	36	F, IRE, D, B, A
Russia	D	4,543	36	D, B, F, NL, SWE, UK, A, E
Afghanistan	A	12,957	35	A, UK, D, NL, DK
India	D	2,646	34	D, A, UK, F, B
Yugoslavia, Fed Rep	D	7,842	34	D, SWE, UK, B, A, F, I, DK
Algeria	F	2,924	33	F, D, B, UK, NL
Albania	UK	1,125	32	UK, B, F, G, SWE, NL, A
Bangladesh	A	949	32	A, F, UK, I, D, SWE
Bosnia & Herz.	SWE	2,774	32	SWE, D, DK, NL, B
Georgia	D	1,218	30	D, F, A, B, NL, SWE
Armenia	A	1,259	30	A, D, B, F, NL
Iran	D	3,450	29	D, UK, NL, B, SWE, A
Romania	UK	1,375	28	UK, IRE, B, I, E, F
Sierra Leone	NL	2,405	28	NL, UK, D, F, B, E
FYROM	D	1,159	28	D, A, B, SWE, F, DK, NL
Ukraine	F	895	22	F, D, B, UK, IRE, SWE, NL, A, E

Source: calculations by the author based upon UNHCR (2002e)

Imposing visa restrictions on a country can reduce asylum applications. The number of asylum applications from Yugoslavia in the UK reduced from 5,635 in 1992 to 1,830 in 1993 after the imposition of visas (Guild, 2000: p.71). However, as previously outlined in the literature review, it is now common practice for Western states to impose visas upon countries producing asylum seekers so that large numbers of asylum seekers now arriving in the EU are using agents.

Reduced asylum applications in France between 1991 and 2001 compared to between 1980 and 1990 corresponds with strong policy measures adopted by France in the late eighties and early nineties aimed at deterring asylum seekers (Joly, 1996: p.119). The impact of policy should not be over-rated, however, as France remained the fourth main destination for asylum seekers within the EU between 1991 and 2001.

The dominance of Germany as an asylum-seeking destination has been accompanied by strong German responses to tighten asylum policy. The constitutional right to asylum meant that Germany focussed on excluding asylum seekers from citizenship rights, so that already in 1981 asylum seekers were excluded from work permits during the first two years of stay (Bosswick, 1997: p.53). The constitutional right to asylum was removed in 1993 and asylum applications in Germany reduced sharply. Germany proclaimed neighbouring countries as 'safe third countries'. Readmission agreements followed with Romania in 1992 and Bulgaria in 1994 which, at the time, were amongst the ten main sources of asylum applicants in Germany (Noll, 1999: p.42). As Noll (1999: p.42) argues, although it would go too far to establish causality between the conclusion of readmission agreements and a decreasing number of claims, the relationship certainly does not appear to be entirely coincidental.

Rising asylum applications in the Netherlands, from 22,170 asylum applications in 1996 to 43,900 asylum applications in 2000 (see appendix - 1), led to the passage of tough new legislation entering into force in 2001 (ECRE, 2002: p.158). The legislation was characterised *inter alia* by an increased use of accelerated decision-making so that many asylum applications started to become rejected within 5 or 6 days (ECRE, 2002: p.155). Following the legislation, asylum applications reduced to 32,580 applications in 2001 and statistics published for 2002 show that the Netherlands received only 18,665 applications (UNHCR, 2003: p.7). Although, again, it is impossible to assign causality between policy changes and reduced asylum applications it does not appear to be entirely coincidental.

If varying recognition rates of asylum applications influence the destination of asylum seekers is difficult to assess. Recognition rates are generally low throughout the entire EU and certainly, for example, *vis-à-vis* Canada (UNHCR, 2002g). However recognition rates do also vary between Member States. For example, first instance decisions on Sri Lankan asylum applications in 2001 granted 14 per cent refugee status in the UK, 33 per cent refugee status in France and 72 per cent refugee status in Canada (UNHCR, 2002g: table 17). The UK, with colonial and historical ties, received more asylum applications from Sri Lanka than France (table 6). Asylum recognition rates are actually extremely difficult to interpret with the need to consider appeals and so forth. The notion of asylum-seekers fully considering all this information before selecting a destination during the reality of asylum migrations is, in my opinion, a difficult proposition to up-hold.

A partial explanation for increasing asylum applications in Ireland maybe the adoption of increasingly restrictive legislation in 'traditional' asylum seeking destinations is leading asylum seekers to try their luck elsewhere. Nigerians, in particular, have gone to Ireland. However, refusal rates on asylum applications in Ireland remain high (UNHCR, 2002g).

Table 6 shows the Netherlands as the main destination in the EU for Angolan asylum seekers. This has been attributed to the Netherlands being a popular destination for unaccompanied minors (ECRE, 2002: p.155). The former colonial power in Angola, Portugal, in contrast received just 29 Angolan asylum applications in 2001 (UNHCR,

2002e: table 8). Angolans, therefore, seem to exemplify asylum migrations as not following colonial and historical links.

Evidence suggests, however, that large numbers of Angolans are actually in Portugal, but that they are not necessarily applying for asylum. Portuguese regularisation programmes for undocumented migrants during 1992 and 1996 received more Angolan applications than from any other national group (Baganha, 1998: pp.370-371). Throughout Europe *de facto* refugees form a substantial proportion of irregular migrants, with reasons for not applying for asylum including a distrust of state determination procedures, a reluctance to be detained and fears about return (Gibney, undated).

It can be argued that many, if not all, Angolans are *de facto* refugees entitled to protection under humanitarian statuses if not the 1951 Convention. The Netherlands has not deported Angolans back to Angola since August 1998 due to conditions there, although this has recently changed in a policy decision criticised by UNHCR (ECRE, 2002: p.166, p.197). Portugal grants status to only a few of the small number of Angolan asylum applications it receives, arguing instead that the situation in Angola does not amount to generalised conflict and that an internal flight alternative exists (ECRE, 2002: p.197). For Angolans in Portugal it may simply be easier and more secure to remain undocumented and working in the informal economy than to seek asylum.

Similar to Angolans in Portugal, whereas Italy and the UK were both colonial powers in Somalia table 6 reveals the UK to be a significant destination for Somali asylum seekers. In 2001 Italy received only 145 Somali asylum applications (UNHCR, 2002e: table 8). Italy has developed as a country of transit rather than destination for refugees (Dell Donne, 1997). In 2001 Italy setup, for the first time, a national asylum programme to facilitate the accommodation of asylum seekers in reception centres but Italy has still been lacking comprehensive asylum legislation (ECRE, 2002: p.132). New asylum legislation that entered into force during 2002 was restrictive, aiming to combat illegal immigration and ‘abuse’ of the asylum procedure (ECRE, 2003a: p.154, p.156). As with Angolans in Portugal, Somalis may avoid seeking asylum in Italy. Somali refugees may initially live in Italy as immigrants before seeking asylum in the UK (Polese & Ellis, 2002).

The importance of agents in asylum migrations has already been established from the research literature. It remains unclear from the available evidence the extent to which agents actually determine destinations, if agents act more as facilitators to destinations chosen by asylum seekers or if the reality falls in-between these two extremes. However, migrations normally occur within social networks and it seems certain that at least part of the explanation for these new geographies of asylum migrations is a growing role of agents (Koser & Pinkerton, 2002: p.22).

In sum, patterns of asylum migration within the EU are diverse and complex with no simple underpinning explanation. Asylum migrations often follow colonial and historical ties and this is linked with the presence of social networks facilitating migrations. Asylum migrations are becoming increasingly diffuse and it seems

certain that agents are an important part of the explanation for this. The paper will now go on to report the findings of interview research giving further insights into how refugees make decisions regarding the destination country.

Why do asylum seekers go to particular destination countries?

The objective for this section was to carry out in-depth qualitative interviews to gain insights into how and why a sample of refugees in Birmingham selected the UK as a destination country. Within this objective an emphasis was to be placed on why, within the UK, they came to live in Birmingham. In April 2000 the UK Government introduced a policy of 'no choice' dispersal for asylum seekers in need of accommodation. However, the interviewees all had refugee status and were therefore free to live anywhere within the UK. The research aimed to get a flavour of whether refugees are looking to leave Birmingham once they receive their status, perhaps to join larger refugee communities in London, or alternatively if refugees are looking to settle in Birmingham as a destination. Prior to dispersal one estimate is that 90 per cent of asylum seekers were housed in London (Kundnani, 2001: p.45).

Methodology

The research for this section was essentially sensitive in two ways. Firstly, when talking about individual experiences these are, in light of the refugee experience, often distressing and highly personal. I attempted to acknowledge this by not including reasons for flight in the interview schedule but, similar to Robinson & Segrott's experience (2002: p.7), some participants wanted to talk about this as it was critical in making sense of their decisions and arrival in the UK¹³. Secondly, the sensitivity of a topic is largely defined by the social context within which the research is conducted (Lee & Renzetti, 1993: p.5). As will be discussed later in the paper, the asylum issue has recently become extremely politicised in the UK.

The sensitive nature of the research had implications for recruiting participants. The Midlands Refugee Council (MRC) in Birmingham assisted me both with directly recruiting participants and accessing local Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs). Interviews with RCOs tended to be with representatives of the organisations. I also approached a church worker involved with asylum seekers and refugees in his Birmingham parish. He agreed to be interviewed and also arranged interviews with two refugees on my behalf (for which he interpreted).

The sample included two Afghans, two Angolans, two Ethiopians, one Iranian, two Kurdish Iraqis, one Somali and one Sudanese interviewee plus the church community worker. In qualitative research it is more important for the sample to be illustrative than representative (Valentine, 1997: p.112). It was felt that a favourably illustrative sample was achieved for the purposes of this research although all interviewees were male. All interviewees were refugees except one who was the church community worker acting as a 'key informant'.

¹³ A summary of the interview schedule is included in the appendix.

The eventual sample size of twelve was smaller than that originally planned. The main difficulty with recruiting participants related to the sensitive nature of the research. It was difficult to arrange interviews unless, as a researcher, I could obtain the recommendation of someone who the interviewee knew and trusted. It was also felt that financial incentives would have been beneficial. Members of RCOs often mentioned how their organisations were under-funded so that financial reciprocation would have helped create a more even-handed exchange. Others actively researching this topic have expressed similar methodological difficulties (Koser & Pinkerton, 2002: p.7; Robinson & Segrott, 2002: pp.9-10).

Qualitative interviewing was selected as a research method due to its emphasis on process, depth, complexity and roundness when explaining phenomena (Mason, 1996: p.41, Maxwell, 1998: p.84). The open structure of qualitative interviewing allows for unexpected issues to emerge (Bryman, 1988: pp.66-67). These relate to the research aims of attempting to gain insights into how refugees make decisions regarding the destination country, whilst research is still essentially at a speculative stage.

Qualitative interviewing suited the sensitive nature of the research. Some interviewees were reluctant to talk from their personal experiences and instead preferred to discuss the topics in more general terms. Community leaders also preferred to talk as 'key informants' on behalf of their communities. Qualitative interviewing allowed each interview to be orientated towards what the interviewee was comfortable to discuss.

All of the interviews were conducted in Birmingham, except for one carried out in London. Interview length was generally one hour, but ranged from forty minutes up to two hours. Ten separate interview sessions took place between June and August 2002¹⁴. Interviews were carried out at the MRC, in RCO' offices, individuals' homes and even in one participant's car. Approximately half of the interviews were taped. The objections of others seemed to relate to the sensitive nature of the material and they were much more willing to slow down for me to take notes.

For interviewees talking from their own experiences issues of reliability and validity are similar to those encountered by Robinson & Segrott (2002). These include that the interviews involve the retrospective recollection of experiences and thus might involve *ex post facto* rationalisation (p.6). With all interviews the same issue was addressed through different questions in an attempt to verify understanding. Concerns that I had about community leaders and other 'key informants' acting as advocates rather than revealing the 'real' reasons about why refugees arrive in the UK seemed to have been unfounded as their interviews were largely consistent with the individual experiences.

¹⁴ The two Angolan nationals were interviewed together. The church worker was not interviewed separately but acted as an interpreter for two interviews when he also put his own opinions forward. Quotations through an interpreter are labelled as such in the text.

Asylum migration and the initial decision to migrate

The interviews stressed, as has other research (e.g. Barsky, 2000; Robinson & Segrott, 2002), that refugee migrations are characterised by those fleeing from war, conflict, actual persecution or a fear of persecution. It is the 'push' factor that is decisive in the decision to migrate, rather than the 'pull' of any particular destination country. Although asylum migrations are clearly non-homogenous it seems that many are not aware of the eventual destination upon taking the initial decision to migrate. The aim of the initial migration is essentially to escape the immediate threat. Geography often determines initial migrations, as refugees either migrate internally or enter into neighbouring countries. Individuals may make use of family members and friends in alternative locations, so that social networks can act to determine the precise destination.

Experiences in proximate countries

Interviewees' experiences of proximate countries were, essentially, similar to that outlined in the literature review. Interviewees stressed that although travel to a proximate country may provide relative safety from an immediate danger faced it is impossible to find secure protection outside of the West. The reality of life in proximate countries is to live clandestinely, excluded from citizenship rights and with an on-going fear of identification and deportation.

The actual degree of safety felt by a refugee in a proximate country will vary along the forced voluntary continuum. Similar to Wahlbeck (1999: pp. 59-60) the two Kurdish Iraqi interviewees expressed real concern about their potential treatment by the Turkish authorities if identified and potential deportation to Iraq. But fears were not limited to Kurds in Turkey and were emphasised throughout the interviews. An Afghan interviewee told me that although he had fled to Pakistan he equally felt threatened there by al-Qaida and the Taliban as in Afghanistan. He managed to live under a false Pakistani identity for a year until he was identified and only then he made the decision to migrate to the West.

For those who are towards the forced end of the continuum the emphasis is for onward migration as quickly as possible, whilst others may be able to delay their migration so that they can consider the destination. However, even for those who experience relative safety refugees in proximate countries are still fundamentally viewed as 'illegal immigrants' and face an exclusion from citizenship rights that acts to encourage onward migration to the West.

Resettlement by UNHCR

The interviews revealed that, in general, resettlement through UNHCR is not considered to be an effective option for refugees looking to find protection. Three reasons emerged for this.

Firstly, interviewees could observe refugees that had applied to UNHCR and that they were waiting a number of years both for their claims to be determined and for resettlement places to become available. This encourages 'spontaneous' onward migration to the West.

Secondly, the first comment should be understood in terms of refugees often feeling unsafe in proximate countries. Interviewees emphasised that applying to UNHCR would not provide them with any protection during the application. Wahlbeck (1999: p.59) mentioned that refugees awaiting resettlement in Turkey are under a constant threat of being sent back. For refugees who perceive themselves to be under threat in the proximate country, applying to UNHCR is not considered to be an effective option.

Thirdly, one interviewee expressed serious concerns similar to those mentioned previously by Chatelard (2002: p.21); he believed that information given to UNHCR could potentially be obtained by governments from which refugees are fleeing:

“It has been proven in the past that when you make enquiries through UNHCR it is not really a sound and secure way to go because the information gets leaked out and that puts you in trouble and since the information, since I had a high position in the government and that kind of information was very crucial and important to my status, I never wanted to go to them or, reveal to them who I am, and why I wanted asylum. I just chose to go through an agent.” (Iranian interviewee through interpreter)

The Somali and Sudanese interviewees did make positive comments regarding UNHCR Resettlement, acknowledging the resettlement of their nationals from Kenya.

Implications of these comments are that UNHCR needs to review the protection offered to those attempting to claim refugee status through the organisation whilst Western states need to significantly increase their participation if resettlement it is to be considered as an effective option for those seeking protection.

The role of agents

Interviewees made clear that, consistent with the literature, it is extremely difficult to consider migrating to the West without the services of an agent. Although, for example, Robinson & Segrott (2002: p.45) found that decision making on the destination country was often a relatively equal process between agents and asylum seekers the interviewees were keen to stress the reality of accessing agents. This is done often in a highly secretive and clandestine manner. Agents were regarded as expensive but the necessity of migration meant that resources had to be obtained. As information sources on potential destination countries agents are hardly seen as impartial but instead for what they are, business people, who try to promote the countries which they can gain access to. Agents are not trusted. Even when a journey

has been agreed to delays in departure are common. Interviewees stressed the control which agents operate over destinations:

“So the main problem is, you see, asylum seekers when they are leaving the country do not have any choice. The possibility is depending on the agent who is doing your travel document.”
(Angolan)

Agents can simply promise to take asylum seekers to a 'safe country' rather than a specific destination. One interviewee advised me that agents tend not to reveal destinations prior to departure, but make a choice depending upon the amount the individual can pay. The asylum seeker only finds out the destination upon arrival¹⁵.

These comments can relate to asylum seekers travelling by air but can also apply to those travelling overland. An Afghan interviewee accessed an agent in Pakistan who simply promised to take him to a 'safe country'. His journey to the UK took 3 months, realising the eventual destination only after arriving in Dover underneath a truck and being greeted by British police officers. He described the reality of being smuggled as being treated like an object, being taken from 'A' to 'B'. Although another interviewee found an agent to specifically bring him to the UK his comments regarding the smuggling experience are similar:

“The agent doesn't even talk to you, doesn't explain anything.”

The agent explains nothing?

“They just push you or shove you, they just say get in, go, do this, do that.” (Afghan interviewee through interpreter)

Agents can become critical determinants of the destination when individuals have not previously made a decision. An Iraqi Kurdish interviewee told me that he found an agent in Istanbul who, again, simply promised to take him to a 'safe country'. At some point during the journey (he did not know in which country) the agent suggested that they go to the UK. The agent was decisive in the destination as he had not considered it until this point, but then images he held of the UK reinforced this selection. These included the strong role of the UK in world history, including in Persia; English as an international language; the reputation of the British education system; and also the importance of the UK vote in the UN Security Council. The decision to arrive in the UK, as Robinson & Segrott (2002) found, did not reflect any knowledge of UK asylum policy but was influenced by the image of the country.

Time operates as a critical factor in terms of travelling to a specific destination country through an agent. Those towards the 'forced' end of the forced voluntary continuum have to take the first destination available:

¹⁵ Ethiopian interviewee.

“I found the agent. It was about six to seven thousand dollars to bring me to any safe country in Europe. And, when I paid this, the way the agents are working, nobody knows where they are going to send you.”

They don't tell you?

“They don't tell you. Or sometimes they will tell you, for example one or two days before, but you haven't got any choice. If you are in a difficult situation, in a country like Turkey, you can't choose.” (Iraqi Kurdish)

Thus for this interviewee the destination country was a direct result of the airport terminal on which the agent's contact in the border police was posted on that day. His arrival in the UK represented something akin to a 'lottery'.

However, for those with sufficient safety to delay travel then this will either enable the agent contacted to gather the necessary documents for the particular destination country or alternatively allow for another agent to be found. An Iranian interviewee had taken the decision to arrive in the UK as a destination before fleeing Iran. He initially went to Syria, because of a relatively open border, and when asked about the ease of finding an agent to bring him to the UK he responded:

“It is not an easy task and it took me about a year to find the right agent and they are all in competition, and they are not very straightforward people and that is why it was a task to find the right person. It took a year to find the right person.” (Iranian interviewee through interpreter)

Thus those able to delay their migration can operate greater control over the destination.

The role of social networks

It has already been mentioned that social networks, such as the presence of a friend or family member, in a proximate country can guide the initial flight. In terms of engaging with social networks in the West there can, however, be real difficulties. The circumstances of flight may not allow sufficient time and it can also be a dangerous strategy when telephone lines maybe tapped and mail vetted¹⁶.

The reality is that social networks can also break down in situations of conflict and refugee migrations. Individuals may go to seek asylum in the West but be unable to maintain contact with those in the country of origin so that they cannot even pass on their destination country. An Afghan interviewee was keen to emphasise that even

¹⁶ Ethiopian interviewee.

close family members lose contact with each other during situations of war and that to keep contact with those who have taken flight to the West can be much harder.

Whilst the literature has shown for social networks and related concepts of diaspora to be important (Koser, 1997a, 1997b; McDowell, 1996) this, again, emphasises asylum migrations as non-homogenous. The ability to engage with social networks depends on the circumstances of flight, 'acute' or 'anticipatory', and not just the initial flight but during the entire journey. Refugees able to find a place of relative safety are then in a position to engage with communities in the West.

Finding protection: the key consideration regarding the destination country

The interviews revealed that, consistent with the literature, finding protection is the key concern of refugees selecting a destination country (e.g Robinson & Segrott, 2002; Barsky, 2000: pp.230-231).

In general, as Robinson & Segrott (2002) found, asylum seekers assume all Western countries will provide protection. However, the interviews revealed that within this a particular destination country maybe positively differentiated to provide them with protection. One of the Afghan interviewees literally selected the UK on the basis of a rumour circulating around his community that the UK was providing protection to those fleeing Afghanistan. This rumour contained no specific details of UK asylum policy or any other information, simply that he would find protection.

An asylum seeker may select the destination country with the belief that it will have a particularly good understanding of conditions in their country of origin and will therefore understand their need for protection. This belief maybe due to colonial or historic ties or, in this example, a perception held of the UK's intelligence service:

“He thought that if he came here he would have less hassle to get things done here than anywhere else because they could attach the information about him, proving, and bring him for extra information and that was the reason. He felt that the UK had a better intelligence service than any other country.” (Iranian interviewee through interpreter)

Alternatively if a particular destination is perceived as unsafe, even if it is within the West, then this can lead to its rejection as a destination country:

“When you say Portugal not take the people, it is not safe. It is not safe because, you know, if Portugal sends people back to Angola they know if they were asylum seekers in Portugal, they give their own information to the government in Angola. They say these people were coming here to be asylum seekers, and when they get to Angola they, they kill them because we don't know them, because, you know, we hear, they come back to

Angola but we cannot see them outside. We don't have the people to ask.”

You don't know what happened to them?

“We don't know what happened to them. But for our mind, we fear these people are dead.” (Angolan)

That asylum seekers can migrate with only a vague notion of receiving protection can mean that they are not aware of asylum as a specific concept, simply that they will be able to find protection from what they have fled:

“I didn't know the way, how to claim asylum. When the lady asked me for the passport, I said I haven't got, then it means that I am an illegal person here, and why you are illegally here? Because I was scared, I couldn't stay in my country, and when you can't stay in your country then you are asking for asylum. You know, it comes by its way, it's not up to you to say it, you know? When you haven't got a passport, you are illegal. Why you are illegal? Because I left my country. Why you left it? Because of the difficult situation that I had in my country, then you are an asylum seeker.” (Kurdish Iraqi)

Secondary considerations: settlement & rebuilding lives

The fundamental consideration of a refugee is to arrive in a destination country in which they will find protection. After this secondary considerations become important that essentially involve refugees selecting a destination country in which they feel they will be able to settle and get on with rebuilding their lives. This is true at least until conditions improve in the country of origin and return is possible.

This can involve selecting a destination on the basis of a family member or friend which, whilst not reflected in this small interview sample, clearly happens in practice (e.g. Robinson & Segrott, 2002). One interviewee mentioned that whilst in Istanbul he came into contact with other asylum seekers who had already selected destinations on the basis of the presence of a family member or friend¹⁷.

Language is essential for being able to effectively participate in a society, including for employment and study prospects. Arriving in a destination country and being able to speak the language helps settlement and allows individuals to get on with rebuilding their lives quicker.

Comments previously made regarding Somalis migrating from Italy to the UK are again consistent with this. An insecure status in Italy encourages a re-evaluation of the initial destination decision. Perceived improved prospects of finding inclusion in

¹⁷ Kurdish Iraqi interviewee.

other destination countries, where there are better opportunities for obtaining a secure refugee status, encourages onward migration.

The Somali interviewee mentioned specifically the difficult time that Somalis can experience in Germany. He believed that this was due in part to a more exclusionary asylum policy operating in Germany but also different sources of post-war labour migrations resulting in an absence of black communities in Germany:

“... people in Germany, I mean I have spoken to some Somalis who say that people look at you like that, I mean as if you are some kind of an animal.”

Because you are black?

“Yes...they tend to be surprised when they see blacks and people they haven't seen before. And some, some certain sections of relations are nuts, you know. They tend to burn houses and make threats to the refugees. That is very, very unsettling for refugees who fled war to experience, you know, violence and these sort of things.” (Somali)

Refugees migrate searching for inclusion after experiencing exclusion from their country of origin. Hostility against asylum seekers repeats the experience of exclusion, with an absence of black communities making it harder to identify with the destination country.

Arrival in the UK

Some brief comments shall be made here regarding the experience of arrival in the UK as a destination country. It is important to emphasise that, from this research, refugees are grateful for finding protection in the UK. However, they can also arrive with expectations of protection that are too high:

“None of these guys are complaining that the government doesn't give anything. They are all thankful to the British government, they are all thankful to the British people but they are frustrated and they are disappointed with the way they handle it, the way they treat them....Like his name is misspelled, his information is wrong. He has to go back with the wrong name, the wrong information, correct that, nobody believes this set of documents, nobody believes that set of documents.....How this country is not even doing properly, can't process a simple application. They get very disappointed. But they are still thankful for what they are doing, you know!” (Church community worker)

Immigration status is extremely important in the settlement of refugees (Bloch, 2000a). Until an asylum claim is determined there is a critical insecurity of status. Although interviewees appreciated the need for an asylum system, individuals find it stressful until their exclusion from the country of origin and need for protection is recognised:

“I was, I expected them to, I had some secret and important documents with me, and I expected them to just take that information and process it really quick and let me have the answer as soon as possible but they didn’t do that, they just put me through the system, and they wanted me to wait for the Home Office to get back with them and give them the answer.” (Iranian interviewee through interpreter)

Why Birmingham?

It seems clear that almost all asylum seekers arriving in the UK have not planned the journey in sufficient detail for a specific town like Birmingham to be the destination. An exception maybe those planning to join friends or family members in the UK but such people were not encountered in the interviewing. It is also clear that a large number of asylum seekers are now arriving in Birmingham as a direct result of government dispersal.

The feature which interviewees emphasised most positively about Birmingham was its multicultural character, with which they could identify and feel a sense of inclusion. One interviewee had previously been living in Dover but, arriving in 1999 before dispersal, requested to be moved to Birmingham. He visited Birmingham for a day and whereas he had experienced hostility against asylum seekers in Dover he found Birmingham to be 'friendly' and 'multicultural'¹⁸. Another interviewee had been living in Newcastle and although he emphasised that he had not experienced any hostility there he preferred Birmingham's multicultural environment¹⁹.

In addition to this general multicultural environment, refugee communities are becoming established in Birmingham. Birmingham has, to an extent, a history of refugee communities (see Dick, 2002). In 2001 more than 3,000 asylum seekers were living in NASS supported accommodation in Birmingham, more than any other town or city in the UK (Heath & Hill, 2002: para. 29)²⁰. Interviewees emphasised the presence of refugee communities as a reason why either they came to Birmingham or are happy to stay in Birmingham. Apart from the social benefits communities bring there is the establishment of ethnic businesses (such as shops, cafes and restaurants), employment opportunities in interpretation and RCOs are established carrying out

¹⁸ Kurdish Iraqi interviewee.

¹⁹ Kurdish Iraqi interviewee.

²⁰ The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) is a directorate of the Home Office established by the UK Government to administer asylum support.

important advocacy services²¹. Refugee support services also exist in Birmingham through the Midlands Refugee Council and Refugee Council offices.

Individuals may migrate to Birmingham to join a specific friend or relative. One interviewee informed me that only once he arrived in Dover and he interacted with the various refugees there he became aware that a close friend he had from Afghanistan had also arrived in the UK and was living in Birmingham. He came to Birmingham to live with this friend rather than being dispersed by NASS. Although, as discussed above, refugees may not be able to engage with social networks during flight these can subsequently become re-established in countries of destination.

Most interviewees were happy living in Birmingham but in addition to the positive qualities of Birmingham there were also specific objections against moving to London. In particular, the cost of living in London was cited. Asylum seekers moving away from Birmingham also lose access to certain support entitlements²². The Asylum and Immigration Act 2004 amends homelessness legislation by stipulating that a local connection will develop with the local authority in which dispersal accommodation is located (Refugee Council, 2004a: p.7). Refugees who relocate from their NASS accommodation to another town or city once granted leave to remain will find it extremely difficult to access social housing. In this way NASS dispersal as an asylum seeker de facto leads to a more long-term dispersal.

Generally, for interviewees, it is not just one of these factors that make them happy with Birmingham as a destination but a combination of these factors together. The position along the forced voluntary continuum is also now much more towards the 'voluntary' end so that individuals are able to give greater consideration to these issues which are essentially about settlement and refugees rebuilding their lives.

Why do politicians argue that refugees arrive in the UK as a destination country?

The first objective of this section is to examine the arguments adopted by politicians regarding why asylum seekers and refugees arrive in the UK. This is important for several reasons. Firstly, the most important reason is that the arguments of politicians provide the justification for policy. Secondly there is some evidence, which seems very tentative in my opinion, but some evidence that newspapers tend to accept the refugee agenda as defined by politicians and government officials rather than vice versa (Kaye, 1998). Thirdly, the statements of politicians tend to be seen as normative and respectable, thus providing an important influence on public opinion. It is difficult to assess the exact impact but when there is public leadership in favour of refugees, such as with the Bosnians and Kosovars, '...the discourse of 'bogus' and 'scroungers' as epithets for people in search of international protection loses its attraction' (Guild, 2000: p.85).

²¹ Nationalities which have RCOs in Birmingham include Afghans, Albanians, Algerians, Angolans, Bosnians, Burundians, Eritrean, Iranians, Kurdish, Somalis, Sudanese, Vietnamese and Yemeni. Often one nationality will have more than one RCO in Birmingham (list provided to the author by the MRC).

²² Angolan interviewee.

This section does not, in any way, claim to be the first examination of asylum in UK political discourse. However, there is a focus on the specific question of why refugees arrive in the UK as a destination country. In addition, from approximately April 2000 onwards the asylum issue became subject to an extremely high level of politicisation in the UK (Zetter & Pearl, 2000: p.692); partly due to a sharp increase in asylum applications. The research for this section draws upon this recent period.

A second objective for the section is to compare and contrast the arguments adopted by politicians regarding the arrival of asylum seekers in the UK with the findings of research. This comparison is important because the central justification for the research process is being able to develop a greater understanding of phenomena and thus being able to claim some sort of expertise. However, it is the arguments of politicians rather than the findings of research that provide the basis for policy.

Methodology

Parliamentary debates were accessed through Hansard²³. I examined the second readings of debates for legislation adopted in 1993, 1996, 1999 and 2002²⁴. The intention of this was to introduce a temporal element into the analysis, so that it could be examined how the arguments have changed over time and in light of previous legislation. After 18 years of Conservative rule 1997 also saw the re-election of a Labour government so that the paper can consider the positions of both parties in power and opposition. Several other parliamentary debates in 2002 were also included in the analysis and all quotations are referenced accordingly. Other information sources utilised included press releases issued by the IND section of the Home Office and relevant web-sites such as the Refugee Council and media sites, especially the Guardian²⁵.

Approaching this research there appeared to be two potentially appropriate analytical techniques: content analysis and qualitative content analysis²⁶. The main limitation of content analysis is that it analyses manifest rather than latent content (Bryman, 2001: p.191). Qualitative content analysis involves examining the material for underlying themes (ibid: p.381). Whilst this becomes a matter for the researcher's interpretation of what these 'themes' are, it seemed to be a more appropriate technique for analysing arguments that politicians construct.

The findings of this section make use of quotations and examples that are necessarily selective in light of the large amount of material analysed. It would have been quite

²³ Hansard is posted on <http://www.parliament.uk>.

²⁴ I examined the second reading of the following: the 1993 Asylum & Immigration Appeals Act (2nd November 1992); the 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act (11th December 1995); the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Bill (22nd February 1999); plus the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill (24th April 2002). Subsequently there has been more recent legislation passed in the UK, the Asylum and Immigration Act (2004).

²⁵ The IND web-site is posted on <http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk>; the Refugee Council's web-site is posted on <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk>; and the Guardian's web-site is posted on <http://www.guardian.co.uk>.

²⁶ For a discussion see Bryman (2001) chapter 9 & p.381.

possible to draw upon different examples whilst still attempting to make the same points. The information sources used for this research are publicly available and the reader is encouraged also to view these.

The UK as a destination country for refugees

The first point to emphasise is how politicians constantly proclaim the UK as a destination country that has a 'long and honourable' tradition of granting protection to genuine refugees²⁷. Politicians do not argue that the UK should not accept 'genuine' refugees and legislation is justified in that it will not impact upon, or will even benefit, 'genuine' refugees. For example:

I do not foresee any diminution in the number of genuine applications that we accept in this country. I have always made it clear that it is no part of our intention, in making these proposals, to place any further obstacles in the way of refugees who are genuinely entitled to asylum... (Michael Howard, *Hansard*, 11th December 1995, Col. 700)

Upholding the right of asylum is critical to the identities of liberal democracies (Steiner, 2001: pp.18-19). Upholding the right to asylum is about governments' demonstrating their commitment to human rights, also exemplified by the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into domestic law by the New Labour government in 2000. However, in the UK asylum seekers have had to face an increasing dual exclusion: exclusion from territory and exclusion from citizenship entitlements.

The construction of asylum seekers as non-genuine refugees

Politicians have acted to construct asylum seekers as 'disguised economic migrants' in order to achieve the deconstruction of the morally untouchable category of the 'deserving political refugee' (Cohen, 1994: p.82). The key evidence that politicians have provided for this has been rising asylum applications (figure 7) coupled with low recognition rates (table 7)²⁸.

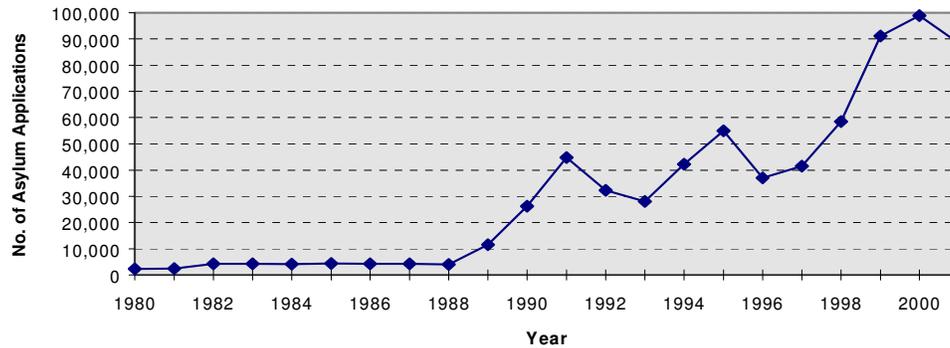
Asylum recognition rates need to be considered in a critical fashion and two reports authored by Asylum Aid (1995, 1999) have found Home Office asylum decision making to often be arbitrary and unfair. Issues surround the quality of legal representation that asylum seekers receive (Hayter, 2000: p.87). Individual MPs have questioned UK asylum procedures:

‘All the evidence points not to bogus applications, but to bogus refusals and unjust determinations.’ (David Alton, *Hansard*, 11th December 1995, Col. 735).

²⁷ Kenneth Clarke, *Hansard*, 2nd November 1992, Col. 21.

²⁸ For example, see Kenneth Clarke, *Hansard*, 2nd November 1992, Cols. 27-28; Michael Howard, *Hansard*, 11th December 1995, Col. 699; Sir Norman Fowler, *Hansard*, 22nd February 1999, Col. 53 but the quoting of asylum recognition rates are actually much more widespread than this.

Figure 7: asylum applications in the UK, 1980 - 2001



Source: UNHCR (2001a, 2002f)

This is one quotation but such concerns are actually quite widespread. Prior to becoming New Labour's first Home Secretary Jack Straw asked if it was not 'incredible' that of 1,495 asylum applications from Nigeria in 1994 only two were accepted²⁹. Concerns about the country assessments used by the Home Office have led the Refugee Council (2002a: p.12) to lobby for the establishment of an independent documentation centre. This proposal has found some support, including with the then shadow Home Secretary Oliver Letwin³⁰. Essentially, there are serious concerns about the quality of the UK asylum determination procedure and its ability to separate 'genuine' from 'non genuine' refugees³¹.

The actual interpretation of asylum recognition rates is extremely difficult. Table 7 shows generally low recognition rates for refugee status, but that the 1951 Convention contains a narrow definition of a refugee is reflected by Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR) being granted on humanitarian grounds³². For example, in 1992 only 3 per cent received refugee status but 44 per cent received ELR.

Changes in asylum legislation can be responsible for changes in the recognition rate. The 1999 Act introduced the 'Statement of Evidence Form' (SEF). The SEF must be returned to the Home Office within 10 working days with preliminary information on the asylum claim and in English. Campaigning groups have objected to the tight timetable, emphasising difficulties of obtaining legal advice in that time³³. After the SEF's introduction 2000 and 2001 show a dramatic increase in 'non-compliance' refusals (table 7).

²⁹ Jack Straw, *Hansard*, 11th December 1995, Col. 719.

³⁰ See, for example, Oliver Letwin, *Hansard*, 24th April 2002, Col. 361.

³¹ See Morgan *et al* (2003) for an evaluation of country information used in deciding asylum applications by the Home Office.

³² From 1st April 2003 ELR has been replaced by Humanitarian Protection (HP) and Discretionary Leave (DL) as the available subsidiary protection in the UK (see ECRE, 2003b: pp.57-61).

³³ For example Amnesty International in the UK operates a 'Refugee Advocacy Project' which involves campaigners lobbying MPs on specific issues. The first issue that they campaigned on, during the fall of 2001, was 'non-compliance' refusals (copy of campaigning documents on file with author).

Significant numbers of initial decisions go on to be appealed, especially after the introduction of the SEF (table 8). Although only 9 per cent of initial decisions in 2001 resulted in the awarding of refugee status, it is expected that after appeals and including ELR approximately 42% of applications submitted in 2001 will result in a positive determination (Heath & Hill, 2002: para. 24). Home Office statistics released in 2004 estimate that 40 per cent of asylum applications submitted in 2002 will result in positive determinations after appeals and including grants of ELR (Heath *et al*, 2004: p.16). Although the estimated figure falls slightly in 2003, to 28 per cent of asylum applications expected to receive a positive determination (*ibid.*), these recognition rates demonstrate that politicians' arguments that the vast majority of asylum seekers are not 'genuine' refugees are actually misplaced.

In addition to these recognition rates, the Home Office refuses asylum applicants who cannot actually be deported. As an example, the UK government until recently operated a policy of no forcible returns to Zimbabwe even though individual Zimbabwean asylum applications were refused, leaving people with no right to work.

Table 8: adjudicator appeals against asylum decisions in the UK, 1994-2001

<i>Year</i>	<i>Appeals received by the home office</i>	<i>Appeals determined by IAA</i>	<i>Of which appeals allowed</i>	<i>Appeals allowed %</i>
1994	10,580	2,440	95	4
1995	14,035	7,035	230	3
1996	22,985	13,790	515	4
1997	20,950	21,090	1,180	6
1998	14,320	25,320	2,355	9
1999	6,615	19,460	5,280	27
2000	46,190	19,395	3,340	17
2001	74,365	43,415	8,155	19

Source: Heath & Hill (2002: table 1.1)

As recognition rates have struggled to sustain the notion that asylum applicants are not 'genuine' refugees, there has been a subtle shift in politicians' arguments to concentrate on asylum seekers' arrival in the UK as a destination country:

“...those who have come through European countries where they would not have been at risk but where they failed to make a claim—so it could be presumed that they were heading for Britain for reasons other than that their life and well-being were at risk.”
(David Blunkett, *Hansard*, 11th June 2002, Col. 798).

Table 7: initial decisions on asylum applications in the UK, excluding dependants, 1991 - 2001³⁴

Year	<i>Cases considered under normal procedures</i>						<i>Backlog clearance exercise</i>				
	<i>Total decisions</i>	<i>Granted full refugee status</i>	<i>% refugee Status</i>	<i>Not recognised as refugee but granted ELR</i>	<i>% ELR</i>	<i>Total refused</i>	<i>Refused asylum ELR after consideration</i>	<i>& Refused on full safe third country grounds</i>	<i>Refused on Non-compliance grounds</i>	<i>Granted asylum or ELR backlog criteria</i>	<i>Refused under backlog criteria</i>
1991	6,075	505	8	2,190	36	3,380	2,325	270	785		
1992	34,900	1,115	3	15,325	44	18,465	2,675	595	15,195		
1993	23,405	1,590	7	11,125	48	10,690	4,705	745	5,240		
1994	20,990	825	4	3,660	17	16,500	12,655	865	2,985		
1995	27,005	1,295	5	4,410	16	21,300	17,705	1,515	2,085		
1996	38,960	2,240	6	5,055	13	31,670	28,040	1,615	2,015		
1997	36,045	3,985	11	3,115	9	28,945	22,780	2,550	3,615		
1998	31,570	5,345	17	3,910	12	22,315	17,465	1,855	2,995		
1999	33,720	7,815	37	2,465	12	11,025	8,110	1,830	1,085	11,140	1,275
2000	109,205	10,375	11	11,495	12	75,680	50,145	1,240	24,290	10,325	1,335
2001	119,015	11,180	9	19,845	17	87,990	66,070	700	21,220		

Source: adapted from Heath & Hill (2002: table 1.3)

³⁴ 2001 data is provisional only. More detailed information on the data can be found at the source. Note the percentages granted full refugee status and ELR for 1999 and 2000 are the percentages based on total decisions minus those decisions taken under the backlog clearance exercise.

“So many people choose to seek asylum in the United Kingdom because it is a much more attractive destination than many other European countries. Why else would they travel through so many other safe, democratic countries without seeking asylum along the way? Why else would so many gather at Sangatte without seeking asylum in France—another safe, democratic country—awaiting their chance to smuggle themselves into Britain on lorries, freight trains or Eurostar, often in extremely dangerous circumstances?” (Angela Watkinson, *Hansard*, 24th April 2002, Col. 401)

For comparative purposes Kenneth Clarke, as Home Secretary in 1992, had argued:

“...if a Yugoslav has been living in Paris for some years, he is not entitled to come here and claim asylum from a war in which he has not been engaged.” (Kenneth Clarke, *Hansard*, 2nd November 1992, Col. 25).

It is instructive to note just how much the 'safe third country' concept has tightened during the 1990s so that those arriving in the UK from other 'safe' countries are now labelled *ipso facto* 'non genuine' refugees.

As discussed in the literature review, the Sangatte refugee camp in northern France became a key focus of attention in 2002. Asylum seekers in Sangatte were mostly Kurdish Iraqis, Afghans and Iranians (Courau, 2002: p.21). It is hard to argue that these people were not 'genuine' refugees and it is to be expected that a large number of those who made it into the UK would have been recognised as such. Until July 2002 granting ELR to Afghan asylum seekers in the UK was mandatory (Home Office, 2002a). Under Saddam Hussein's regime it was not possible to enforce returns to Iraq. Post Saddam UNHCR is still calling upon states to refrain from the forcible return of Iraqi nationals due to the unstable and dangerous situation there (UNHCR, 2004a). Iranians can face a risk of persecution in Iran by the very act of seeking asylum abroad (Koser, 2001: p.94). The UK government almost seemed to tacitly acknowledge that those in Sangatte were 'genuine' refugees:

Most of the people at Sangatte are Iraqis and Afghans and almost all - 80 per cent - are single young men and they cannot be returned to those countries at the moment. (Angela Eagle, *Hansard*, 29th January 2002, Col. 10WH).

As politicians could no longer use recognition rates, they sought to tighten the concept of 'safe third country' in order to keep the construction of the asylum seeker as 'economic migrant' alive.

Why do politicians argue that asylum seekers arrive in the UK as a destination country?

Politicians argue that 'non genuine' refugees arrive in the UK as a destination country because it is a 'soft touch' and an 'attractive' destination in which to seek asylum:

“...the majority of countries in Europe say that asylum seekers take the view that the United Kingdom is the most attractive place for them.” (David Blunkett, *Hansard*, 24th April 2002, Col. 346)

“...they think they can get more money and better accommodation in this country than in any other country in Europe.” (Michael Howard, *Hansard*, 21st May 2002, Col.56WH³⁵)

“I remind the Minister why they come here: it is because this country is a more attractive place and a softer touch for immigrants than other continental countries.” (Peter Lilley, *Hansard*, 29th January 2002, Col. 5WH)

The policy response therefore seeks to make the UK 'less attractive' as a destination country. Up until the 1990s, both asylum seekers and refugees had the same access to the post-war welfare state as British citizens (Fekete, 2001: p.30; Schuster & Solomos, 2001: para. 2.2). Since then legislation in 1993, 1996, 1999 and 2002 has progressively reinforced the exclusion of asylum seekers from citizenship rights, a trend likely to continue in future governmental legislation.

The 1996 legislation removed benefits from 'in-country' asylum applicants, as well as those refused asylum after an initial decision. The then Home Secretary Michael Howard argued that an objective of the legislation was to 'reduce economic incentives, which attract people to come to Britain in breach of our immigration laws'³⁶. If asylum seekers were arriving in the UK because of benefits knowledge one would expect the proportion of at-port applications to increase, but nearly 50 per cent of asylum applications were still lodged in-country in 1997 (Home Office, 1998: p.8). The High Court ruled that local authorities had a duty to support asylum seekers not receiving benefits under the 1948 National Assistance Act (Minderhoud, 1999: p.139). The Act also attempted to clamp down on 'illegal working' by introducing sanctions on employers. The total number of asylum applications received in the UK continued to increase.

In opposition Labour opposed the asylum legislation but did not allow too large a gap to appear between themselves and the Conservatives, often focusing upon the precise details of proposals (Schuster & Solomos, 1999: p.68). In 1997 Labour became elected into government and essentially continued the Conservative asylum agenda (Bloch, 2000b). Jack Straw argued that asylum seekers were 'economic migrants' attracted to the UK by the 'pull' of cash benefits thus providing the justification for the voucher scheme³⁷. The level of support was set at 70 per cent of income support levels, with a cash allowance of £10 and the rest in vouchers (Refugee Council, 2000: p.10). Again, asylum applications failed to reduce accordingly so that the voucher scheme became discredited and abolished in 2002.

In 2002 the UK government abolished the right to work for asylum seekers. The Home Office Minister, Beverley Hughes, argued that the right constituted a potential 'pull factor' for asylum seekers towards the UK, whilst again reinforcing the notion of asylum seekers as economic migrants (quoted in Home Office, 2002b).

Asylum seekers' access to housing has been similarly curtailed. The 1993 Act denied asylum seekers access to permanent council tenancies and were granted access to temporary accommodation only if they had no housing of any other kind (Morris, 1998: p.961, p.966). A key part of the 2002 proposals aimed to establish accommodation centres, with four centres

³⁵ The use of the abbreviation WH refers to debates taking place in Westminster Hall.

³⁶ Michael Howard, *Hansard*, 11th December 1995, Col. 699.

³⁷ Jack Straw, *Hansard*, 22nd February 1999, Cols. 45-47.

proposed in rural locations, each holding 3,000 asylum seekers. The parliamentary debates were characterised by a relative consensus, with the three main parties endorsing the second reading although the Liberal Democrats opposed the third reading. All three parties supported the piloting of accommodation centres, although there were disputes regarding their set-up. Letwin argued for the Conservatives that accommodation centres should be 'small scale and situated in the centre of cities'³⁸. A seemingly convenient coincidence of this would be to displace the centres from Conservative to Labour constituencies.

At the time of writing the UK government is still yet to construct its first accommodation centre. The government originally identified nine sites as being suitable for the trials of accommodation centres. Eight of these sites have subsequently been rejected, partly due to sharp opposition from locals (Travis, 2004)³⁹. The Refugee Council (2002a) have expressed concerns about the size of the centres and campaigned strongly against children being educated within the centres rather than in local schools. Accommodation centres will essentially act to deepen the exclusion of asylum seekers by creating their physical separation from UK society.

The UK is also regarded as a 'soft touch' because of a 'more generous' interpretation of asylum law. Jack Straw, when Home Secretary, for example argued:

“...at the moment I think that you do get what has been called "asylum shopping", where slightly different interpretation in different countries leads to people being attracted to one country of another.” (Quoted giving evidence to the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee 2001, para. 135)

It does seem that the UK definition of the 1951 Convention is, however, consistent with international norms. Germany, which in any case has received high numbers of asylum applications, has been amending its legislation so that victims of gender-specific and non-state agents of persecution will be included within its interpretation of refugees under the 1951 Convention (ECRE, 2003a: p.113).

The arrival of asylum seekers into the UK is also accounted for by a lack of deportations:

“When one asks asylum seekers, they say, and all the surveys show, that it is because they know that when they get to this country, they face the least likelihood of being returned to their country of origin.” (Peter Lilley, *Hansard*, 4th February 2002, Col. 639)

The 2002 Act included measures to reduce this 'pull' by removing suspensive appeal rights from 'clearly unfounded' claimants being deported to their country of origin and with removals to 'safe' third countries. The Refugee Council protested that non-suspensive appeals are not effective appeals (2002b: p.2). The Liberal Democrats also objected to these proposals⁴⁰; and Jack Straw had strongly opposed similar measures whilst in opposition⁴¹. The Home Secretary David Blunkett provided reassurance by arguing that he is 'desperately

³⁸ Oliver Letwin, *Hansard*, 11th June 2002, Col. 743.

³⁹ In the face of strong local opposition, the government has recently won a hearing in the Court of Appeal upholding planning permission for the remaining site in Bicester, Oxfordshire (Travis, 2004).

⁴⁰ For example, see Simon Hughes, *Hansard*, 11th June 2002, Cols. 799-800 & 810-815.

⁴¹ Jack Straw, *Hansard*, 11th December 1995, Col. 719.

keen' to ensure that asylum seekers will not be returned if at risk⁴². However, as already argued in this paper, it is when individuals are within the territory of the state that constraints on state action exist. The most effective strategy for states seeking to reduce their obligations towards asylum seekers is to prevent their arrival and, when this is not possible, to reduce the 'turnaround time' removing them from the territory as quickly as possible.

Easy access to UK territory is also seen as part of the 'pull', with politicians citing rising asylum applications as evidence. The media, in particular, have picked up on this and, especially, with Sangatte. Headlines such as 'March of the Brazen' are accompanied with photographs of asylum seekers marching towards the UK (Gysin, 2002). The Daily Star (2002) even argued that the Channel Tunnel should be closed until the asylum 'problem' is resolved. French police believed that as many as two dozen 'investigative' journalists a night were joining asylum seekers in Sangatte making the journey to the UK (Dowling, 2002). The policy response becomes to tighten borders even further. In northern France the UK government has been making payments to France as well as providing technology, such as millimetric and heartbeat technology, to strengthen the border⁴³.

Similarly, with the closure of Sangatte the UK government has focused upon strengthening the border between the UK and Belgium (Home Office, 2002c). For passengers travelling to the UK on Eurostar, agreements now exist for British immigration officers to operate in both Belgium and France (Home Office, 2004). Home Office Minister Des Browne made the following announcement upon reaching agreement with Belgium officials:

“Our strategy of moving more border controls abroad is already paying dividends. At French Eurostar stations, introducing UK document checks has cut asylum applications at Waterloo by more than 90 per cent.”

“Today’s agreement with Belgium will enable us to move our controls from London Waterloo to Brussels, stopping would-be illegal immigrants before they set off for the UK” (quoted Home Office, 2004b).

The policy measures adopted here amount to a re-definition of borders so that entrance into the UK is denied but with the emphasis on preventing exit from the country of departure. The construction of asylum seekers as ‘non genuine’ refugees by focusing upon their arrival from ‘safe’ countries has allowed politicians to subsume the refugee issue under an illegal immigration debate. This, in turn, frames the appropriate policy response in terms of reinforced border controls that act to exclude all asylum seekers from the UK, irrespective of the merits of their claims.

It is, however, becoming increasingly difficult to see how 'genuine' refugees will be able to arrive in the UK as a destination country at all. The Home Office is now funding the Gateway Protection Programme, which aims for the UK to accept a quota of 500 refugees per year from overseas, referred by UNHCR (Refugee Council, 2004d). Whilst this is a welcome initiative the numbers of beneficiaries will still be small vis-à-vis the 17 million population of concern to UNHCR at the end of 2003 (UNHCR, 2004b: p.2)⁴⁴.

⁴² David Blunkett, *Hansard*, 11th June 2002, Cols. 800-801.

⁴³ David Blunkett, *Hansard*, 26th June 2002, Col. 881.

⁴⁴ The population of concern to UNHCR includes refugees, asylum seekers and others of concern (UNHCR, 2004b: p.2).

Finally Prime Minister Tony Blair's explanation for the arrival of asylum seekers in the UK is that:

“...the pull factors here are often to do with the strength of the economy, particularly in the south-east.” (Tony Blair, *Hansard*, 24th June 2002, Col. 618)

Emphasising the UK economy serves a dual purpose. Firstly it emphasises the role of Labour as good stewards of the economy, an area where they are traditionally perceived as being weak. Secondly, again, it reinforces the construction of asylum seekers as 'economic migrants' rather than refugees seeking protection.

The arguments of politicians and the findings of research

Overall, politicians act to massively simplify the migratory movements of asylum seekers. Politicians simplistically dichotomise asylum seekers into 'genuine' and 'non genuine' refugees. This section has outlined problems with this but fundamentally forced and voluntary migrations need to be conceptualised as occurring on a continuum so that categorisations, which politicians and campaigners draw, have become increasingly difficult to sustain.

Politicians tend to stress asylum seekers as, to use Richmond's (1993, 1994) terminology, proactive migrants who are in the possession of detailed information about potential destination countries and are then able to make calculated, rational decisions. Some studies have found that policy can influence the destination of asylum seekers (Koser, 1997a, 1997b; McDowell, 1996). However many, perhaps the majority, of asylum seekers do not arrive in the destination country with a detailed knowledge of asylum policy but on the basis of a vague notion that they will receive protection. This is supported by the interview research for this paper in addition to other existing studies (e.g. Brink & Pasariboe, 1993; Robinson & Segrott, 2002). The realities of asylum migrations mean that, often, asylum seekers are not in a position to give the consideration to destinations which politicians presuppose.

The fundamental aim of refugees is to arrive in a destination country in which they will find protection and then after this secondary concerns become important. These can involve the presence of family members and friends, language and other considerations that are essentially about settlement and the ability of refugees to rebuild their lives. Although politicians acknowledge these as potential influences in the selection of the destination country they use it to reinforce the idea that those arriving in the UK are not 'genuine' refugees:

“Asylum is not a matter of whether people would rather be here. It is fair if people really want to be here because they have learned our language over the Internet or have friends or family here. Those people should apply through the other routes, many of which we are just opening up in new ways. That is a different matter from facing death or torture.” (David Blunkett, *Hansard*, 11th June 2002 Col. 799)

That asylum seekers may arrive in the UK due to a lack of deportations may be true to an extent but, essentially, this is an issue affecting all Western countries so that rejected asylum applicants are forming an increasing proportion of undocumented populations (e.g. Delouvin,

2000: p.71; Gibney, undated; Muus, 1997a: p.93; Noll, 1999; Van Selm, 2000: p.79-80). Likewise Blair's assertion that asylum seekers arrive in the UK because of the strong economy does not find any substantiation in research. It is not an important consideration in the decision making process regarding the destination; whilst Robinson & Segrott (2002: pp.62-63) found that asylum seekers assume all Western states to be modern and affluent so therefore offering opportunities for employment, education and social advancement.

This paper acknowledges that asylum seekers may migrate within Western countries, including to the UK. A decision to migrate to the UK maybe taken prior to arrival in Europe but it may also be taken post arrival (Laacher quoted in Henley, 2002). Refugees' experiencing exclusion, to be understood in a broad sense, may feel that they have better prospects for inclusion in the UK. Having a detailed knowledge of UK asylum policy may not be important but, for example, difficulties in seeking asylum in Italy can encourage movement to the UK if they perceive improved prospects of achieving a secure refugee status. Alternatively asylum seekers arriving in France may observe, what they perceive, as the difficult situation of refugees there and feel that they have better prospects in the UK. Important to emphasise is the critical desire of refugees to get on with rebuilding their lives, at least until return to the country of origin is possible, rather than any notion of exploiting the UK as a 'soft touch'.

Concluding comments

This paper has shown asylum migrations to be a very diverse and complex phenomenon that are only partially understood. Explanations for the destination countries of refugees have been considered in terms of colonial and historical ties with countries of origin, the role of social networks, the role of agents and the role of policy. Neither of these singularly accounts for the destination countries of refugees, whilst it is likely that they are all part of the explanation. Although the scope for choice can be limited during asylum migrations human agency precludes the formulation of simplistic rules. Recent asylum migrations into the EU have become increasingly diffuse and it seems certain that an increased role of agents is important in this.

Concepts of forced and voluntary migration should be understood as occurring on a continuum with the position along the continuum shifting during any migration. The position along the continuum has implications regarding the consideration of the destination country. After facing exclusion from the country of origin, the forced migrant's destination becomes determined by the desire to find inclusion elsewhere. At a minimum this involves finding protection, but after this the position along the forced voluntary continuum changes so that secondary considerations become important which involve settlement and the desire of refugees to rebuild their lives. Politicians massively simplify these migrations. Politicians promote the UK as a country where refugees can find protection but they simultaneously construct asylum seekers as 'non genuine' refugees to legitimise policies that *de facto* act to exclude refugees from the UK.

Finally I would like to address some concluding comments towards the current movement towards a common European asylum system. Although, as emphasised in the literature review, each Member State still has very different asylum policies it is clear that across the entire EU asylum policies have become increasingly exclusionary (Muus, 1997b). It needs to be acknowledged that it is currently very difficult to seek asylum in some EU states and this

paper has referred to Italy and Portugal as examples. A difficulty in finding inclusion and protection in such countries encourages the onward migration of asylum seekers to states where they perceive improved prospects for seeking asylum and obtaining a secure status.

As asylum policies continue to become increasingly restrictive there needs to be a questioning of how far Member States can go towards the exclusion of individuals within their territories. For example, in Austria approximately only 30 per cent of asylum seekers are granted federal assistance during the asylum procedure due to strict eligibility criteria (ECRE, 2003c: p.19). Although individual provinces may grant assistance the reality is that in Austria there are several thousand needy asylum seekers without assistance and who therefore need to rely on support from charitable organisations or private individuals (ibid.).

Similarly, exclusionary policies continue at the end of the asylum process. This paper has already mentioned 'hard case' support in the UK that provides individuals who cannot be deported with literally the bare minimum to survive instead of being granted, as a minimum, humanitarian protection that has greater, if still limited, citizenship rights.

It has been suggested that the current process of EU policy harmonisation after the Treaty of Amsterdam represents a 'golden opportunity' to push for an asylum policy amongst Member States that reflects best practice (ECRE, 2001: p.7). At the time of writing, the first phase towards a common European asylum system is near completion with the agreement or near agreement on minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers; establishing the state responsible for examining an asylum claim; the definition of refugees and a subsidiary protection status; and minimum standards on procedures for making decisions on asylum claims (see ECRE, 2004b & Refugee Council, 2004e).

There have been some positive developments, for example the inclusion of non-state agents of persecution in the proposed directive defining those in need of international protection (Refugee Council, 2004e: p.11). The provisions are also contributing towards the improvement of reception conditions for asylum seekers in Greece and the recognition of gender specific forms of persecution in Spain (ECRE, 2004b: p.24).

However, on too many occasions Member States with restrictive national practices have been successful in lowering standards in the proposed EU legislation. For example, the UK government sought and secured amendments to the draft Directive on Reception Conditions for it to be consistent with its controversial policy of allowing the education of children in accommodation centres under the 2002 Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act (Refugee Council, 2004e: p.7). The minimum standards set allow for the restriction of asylum seekers' movement plus for social benefits to be denied on the grounds of a claim being submitted 'late' (ECRE, 2004b: p.24). The overall outcome has been extremely disconcerting with the codification of standards that have been set so low that they risk violating international human rights law (Refugee Council, 2004e: p.3).

Although the EU legislation represents minimum standards thus allowing individual Member States to adopt policies at a higher level the danger is that policy harmonisation will lead to an overall lowering of standards. The standards adopted assume an added significance with the recent accession of the ten new EU Member States that are still developing their asylum infrastructure.

Therefore, this paper concludes by adding its voice to those urging the EU Member States to stop the race towards the 'lowest common denominator' and instead seize the current opportunities offered in creating a common European asylum system to move asylum policy in an 'upward' direction. The time has come to reverse the exclusion of refugees and instead, as politicians proclaim, to ensure that refugees are able to find protection in the EU.

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Abbreviations

A	Austria
B	Belgium
D	Germany
DK	Denmark
E	Spain
FIN	Finland
F	France
GR	Greece
I	Italy
IRE	Ireland
L	Luxembourg
NL	Netherlands
P	Portugal
UK	United Kingdom
SWE	Sweden

CEECs	Central and Eastern European Countries
ECRE	European Council on Refugees and Exiles
ELR	Exceptional Leave to Remain
EU	European Union
IAA	Immigration Appellate Authority
IND	Immigration & Nationality Directorate
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
MRC	Midlands Refugee Council
NASS	National Asylum Support Service
RCO	Refugee Community Organisation
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
1951 Convention	1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees

Appendices

Appendix 1: asylum applications received in the EU Member States, 1980-2001

Country	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Austria	9,259	34,557	6,314	5,898	7,208	6,724	8,639	11,406	15,790	21,882	22,789
Belgium	2,727	2,287	2,908	2,908	3,646	5,299	7,644	5,976	5,078	8,112	12,963
Denmark	65	123	298	800	4,312	8,698	9,299	2,726	4,668	4,588	5,292
Finland		15	12	16	25	18	23	49	64	179	2,743
France	19,912	19,863	22,505	22,350	21,714	28,925	26,290	27,672	34,352	61,442	54,813
Germany	107,818	49,391	37,423	19,737	35,278	73,832	99,649	57,379	103,076	121,318	193,063
Greece	1,792	2,240	1,194	447	764	1,398	4,230	6,934	8,424	3,000	6,166
Ireland											
Italy	2,126	3,638	3,136	3,037	4,559	5,423	6,478	11,032	1,236	2,118	4,827
Luxembourg											114
Netherlands	1,350	1,594	1,214	2,015	2,603	5,644	5,865	13,460	7,486	13,900	21,208
Portugal	1,636	600	1,115	609	378	70	275	442	326	156	75
Spain		325	2,459	1,416	1,179	2,360	2,280	2,477	4,516	4,077	8,647
Sweden		12,651	10,225	7,050	12,000	14,500	14,600	18,114	19,595	30,335	29,420
U K	2,352	2,425	4,223	4,296	4,171	4,389	4,266	4,256	3,998	11,640	26,205
Total	149,037	129,709	93,026	70,579	97,837	157,280	189,538	161,923	208,609	282,747	388,325

Source: UNHCR (2001a, 2002f)⁴⁵

⁴⁵ UNHCR (2001a) for all data up to 1999 whilst data for 2000 & 2001 is from UNHCR (2002f). Exceptions are that UK data from 1992 onwards and Danish data from 1998 onwards are from UNHCR (2002f). This is for comparative purposes. UK data from 1992 onwards reflects the number of applicants (people) rather than the number of applications (cases). Danish data reflects only applications submitted in Denmark (excluding overseas applications) and Danish statistics from 1998 are "gross" figures which include people returned to a safe third country under the Dublin Convention. Where the table lacks entries the data is either unavailable, not applicable or zero in the sources consulted. German data includes only new and not re-opened asylum applications, which is consistent with the tables regularly produced by UNHCR. Data limitations are discussed in greater depth in the source publications.

<i>Country</i>	<i>1991</i>	<i>1992</i>	<i>1993</i>	<i>1994</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>1996</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2001</i>
Austria	27,306	16,238	4,745	5,082	5,919	6,991	6,719	13,805	20,096	18,280	30,140
Belgium	15,173	17,647	26,882	14,353	11,420	12,433	11,788	21,965	35,780	42,690	24,550
Denmark	4,609	13,884	14,347	6,651	5,104	5,893	5,092	9,370	12,330	12,200	12,400
Finland	2,134	3,634	2,023	839	854	711	973	1,272	3,106	3,170	1,650
France	47,380	28,872	27,564	25,964	20,170	17,405	21,400	22,375	30,907	38,750	47,290
Germany	256,112	438,191	322,614	127,210	127,937	116,367	104,353	98,644	95,113	78,760	88,290
Greece	2,672	1,850	813	1,303	1,312	1,643	4,376	2,953	1,528	3,090	5,500
Ireland	31	39	91	362	424	1,179	3,883	4,626	7,724	11,100	10,320
Italy	26,472	6,042	1,647	1,786	1,732	675	1,858	11,122	33,364	15,560	9,620
Luxembourg					394	240	427	1,709	2,912	630	690
g											
Netherlands	21,615	20,346	35,399	52,573	29,258	22,170	34,443	45,217	39,300	43,900	32,580
Portugal	255	686	2,090	767	450	269	297	365	307	200	190
Spain	8,138	11,708	12,615	11,992	5,678	4,730	4,975	6,654	8,405	7,930	9,490
Sweden	27,351	84,018	37,583	18,640	9,047	5,753	9,662	12,844	11,231	16,300	23,520
U K	44,840	32,300	28,000	42,200	55,000	37,000	41,500	58,490	91,200	98,900	88,300
Total	484,088	675,455	516,413	309,722	274,699	233,459	251,746	311,411	393,303	391,460	384,530

Appendix 2: ranking countries of origin of asylum applicants in the EU by year of application, 1980 - 2001

Rank	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
1	Turkey	Poland	Poland	Islamic Rep. of Iran	Sri Lanka	Sri Lanka	Islamic Rep. of Iran	Poland	Poland	Turkey	Romania
2	Pakistan	Pakistan	Islamic Rep. of Iran	Poland	Islamic Rep. of Iran	Islamic Rep. of Iran	Poland	Turkey	Turkey	Poland	Turkey
3	India	Turkey	Ghana	Sri Lanka	Poland	Poland	Turkey	Islamic Rep. of Iran	Yugoslavia, F.R.	Yugoslavia, F.R.	Yugoslavia, F.R.
4	Czech Rep.	Viet Nam	Turkey	Viet Nam	Turkey	Turkey	Lebanon	Hungary	Islamic Rep. of Iran	Sri Lanka	Lebanon
5	Afghanistan	Czech Rep.	Czech Rep.	Turkey	Ghana	Ghana	Ghana	Yugoslavia, F.R.	Lebanon	Romania	Afghanistan
6	Poland	Afghanistan	Viet Nam	Cambodia	Czech Rep.	Lebanon	Sri Lanka	Sri Lanka	Romania	Islamic Rep. of Iran	Islamic Rep. of Iran
7	Viet Nam	Cambodia	Cambodia	Czech Rep.	Lebanon	India	India	Ghana	Dem. Rep. of the Congo	Lebanon	Poland
8	Ethiopia	Romania	Pakistan	Ghana	Viet Nam	Pakistan	Romania	Dem. Rep. of the Congo	Sri Lanka	Dem. Rep. of the Congo	Sri Lanka
9	Hungary	Sri Lanka	Romania	Dem. Rep. of the Congo	Ethiopia	Czech Rep.	Pakistan	Romania	Hungary	Somalia	Viet Nam
10	Ghana	Ghana	India	Romania	Cambodia	Ethiopia	Dem. Rep. of the Congo	Chile	Palestinians	Ghana	Bulgaria

Source: calculated from UNHCR (2001a, 2001b, 2002e)

<i>Rank</i>	<i>1991</i>	<i>1992</i>	<i>1993</i>	<i>1994</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>1996</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2001</i>
1	Yugoslavia, F.R.	Turkey	Yugoslavia, F.R.	Yugoslavia, F.R.	Yugoslavia, F.R.	Iraq	Iraq				
2	Romania	Romania	Romania	Turkey	Turkey	Yugoslavia, F.R.	Iraq	Iraq	Iraq	Yugoslavia, F.R.	Afghanistan
3	Turkey	Turkey	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Romania	Iraq	Iraq	Turkey	Turkey	Turkey	Afghanistan	Turkey
4	Albania	Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Romania	Afghanistan	Afghanistan	Afghanistan	Afghanistan	Turkey	Yugoslavia, F.R.
5	Bulgaria	Dem. Rep. of the Congo	Turkey	Islamic Rep. of Iran	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Sri Lanka	Sri Lanka	Somalia	Somalia	Islamic Rep. of Iran	Russian Federation
6	Dem. Rep. of the Congo	Sri Lanka	Algeria	Somalia	Sri Lanka	Islamic Rep. of Iran	Romania	Sri Lanka	Islamic Rep. of Iran	Russian Federation	Islamic Rep. of Iran
7	Sri Lanka	Viet Nam	Viet Nam	Sri Lanka	Somalia	Romania	Islamic Rep. of Iran	Romania	China	China	Sri Lanka
8	Islamic Rep. of Iran	Somalia	Dem. Rep. of the Congo	Iraq	Afghanistan	Dem. Rep. of the Congo	Dem. Rep. of the Congo	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Russian Federation	Sri Lanka	Somalia
9	Pakistan	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Somalia	Afghanistan	Islamic Rep. of Iran	Pakistan	Somalia	Islamic Rep. of Iran	Sri Lanka	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Algeria
10	Nigeria	Nigeria	Sri Lanka	Dem. Rep. of the Congo	Pakistan	India	Pakistan	Algeria	Romania	Somalia	Bosnia and Herzegovina

Appendix 3: summary of interview schedule

General considerations regarding the destination country

Main reasons for arrival in the UK as a destination country

Priorities in considering potential destination countries? Which countries and why?

Previous travel history

Before arriving in the UK previous visits to UK and Europe? When?

Influence upon decision of coming to the UK to seek asylum?

Departure from the country of origin

Priorities upon leaving country of origin?

Consideration of potential destinations?

Extent of journey planning pre-departure

Journey upon leaving country of origin

Social networks

Friends & family members in the West

Which countries & ability to contact?

Did they influence your arrival in the UK?

Agents & the journey to the UK

Use of an agent?

Why? Which stages of the journey?

Ease or difficulties of accessing agents?

Feelings about using agents

Cost issues – destination, mode of travel?

Stage realise the UK as a destination?

Influence of agents on destinations (advice, ability to offer a range of destinations)?

The journey

Expectations & reality of journey

Length of journey – distance & time

Countries travelled *en route* to UK

Realisation of UK as a destination

Consideration of applying for asylum *en route*?

Legal travel & UNHCR

Able to obtain national passport?

Able to obtain visa? Ease / why not?

Contact with Embassies?

Contact with UNHCR? Why / why not?

Colonial influences

Migration follow colonial linkages?

Why? Why not?

Immigrant community present in UK?

Common language? Previous study?

Feel UK any responsibility to accept refugees due to colonial past? Why?

Expectations of the UK as a destination country

Expectations pre-arrival

Advice received about UK pre-arrival

Treatment asylum seeker / refugee

Expectations v Reality

Reality of employment

Impressions of British people

Sources of images of UK?

Satisfied with UK as a destination?

Why, within the UK, did you come to the West Midlands?

Awareness of Birmingham pre-arrival?

Planned Birmingham as destination?

Reasons for arriving in Birmingham?

Intentions for staying or leaving – why?

Long term plans – return to country of origin, a new destination country?