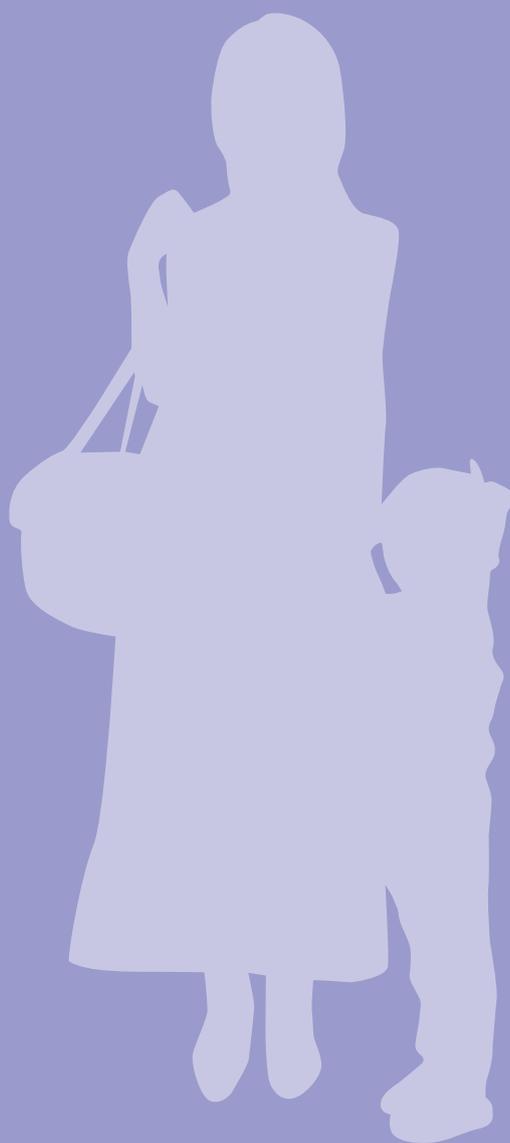


# Accessing Early Years in London: Refugee Women's Experience

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Refugee Women's Experience



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## FOREWORD

When the customs officer asked me: “Do you have any valuables with you?”, I pointed to my two young children and said: “Only these...”

Yes, children are precious, be it our own or others... and raising them is a wonderful but also a very difficult task, a task with great responsibility.

Bringing up children is not easy as it is, but having to do this in a foreign country is even harder – in a country which is not your own, where you do not know the system, where the society treats you with suspicion, almost contempt, and the system does not recognise you for who you are, your beliefs and values are worthless in their eyes. Most importantly, in a country where high quality and affordable childcare provision is limited and you are away from your traditional support systems such as your mother, sisters, friends and neighbours.

The well-being and care of refugee children has always been on RWA’s agenda. The Conference “Putting Refugee Women’s Needs on the Local Agenda” in 1999 highlighted the fact that lack of access to childcare facilities was one of the main factors to impede refugee women’s contributions to the society and to their communities and, most importantly, to their self development.

We are now proud to present “Accessing Early Years in London: Refugee Women’s Experience”, a piece of research, planned and carried out with affection and care. It investigates and presents the experiences of refugee women from various communities in accessing early years services across London.

The findings are very striking and reinforce our determination to enhance our work with policy makers, employers, children’s charities as well as refugee and other community organisations to address the multitude of issues surrounding the care and welfare of refugee children.

We are unreservedly committed to continue raising awareness and campaigning about refugee women’s and families’ needs for good quality and affordable childcare provision in their local communities.

We strongly believe that supporting women in practical ways will not only reassure them and put their minds at ease about the well-being of their children, it will also release their great potential to recreate and reclaim their lives in the most beautiful and productive way.

We owe it to ourselves as refugee women.

We owe it to our children.

**Akgul Baylav, Co-Chair, RWA**

## ABOUT REFUGEE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION



Refugee Women's Association (RWA) is a London-wide registered charity working to provide advice, guidance and practical support on education, training and employment to refugee and asylum seeking women. RWA is an organisation that is managed and run by dedicated women, the majority of whom come from refugee backgrounds themselves.

RWA has been at the forefront of the lobby on issues regarding childcare for refugees for many years. The organisation has always highlighted that lack of childcare is one of the main obstacles for refugee women's progression into education, training and employment.

RWA is based in the London Borough of Hackney. Over the years, close links have been formed with other organisations in the borough and many activities have been carried out in partnership with or with the support of the Hackney local authority.

In 1998, RWA carried out a skills audit of refugee women in Hackney to identify skills shortages and gaps in the labour market. The outcome of the audit identified childcare as one of the main barriers to accessing training and employment opportunities for refugee women. This led RWA to initiate a customised childcare training programme in partnership with Hackney Community College. The training has been running since 1999 through the financial assistance of the European Social Fund (ESF), for the benefit of many refugee women in the area.

In addition, RWA organised a conference on childcare in December 1999 ("Putting Refugee Women's Needs on the Local Agenda"). The conference brought together key stakeholders from the local area, including the local authority, employers, the local Early Years Development Childcare Partnership (EYDCP), the Daycare Trust, refugee and other community organisations, nurseries, the local media and other interested individuals and groups.

The conference's key recommendation included the following:

- There must be better outreach by providers to provide equal access to information about childcare options to the disadvantaged;
- Lack of access to childcare encourages many refugee women to set up their own businesses but funding should be made available for those who want to set up childcare services;

- The New Deal programme should address childcare training along with employment in childcare;
- Hackney would benefit from a dedicated childcare centre for refugee women where they can attend training whilst their children are in care.

In 2002, through the support of the Mayor of London and the Greater London Authority (GLA), RWA carried out a skills audit of refugee women from the nursing, teaching and medical professions in London. The findings were published by the GLA under the title "Missed Opportunities" in December 2002.

This research found that almost a fifth of the women who participated in the survey saw lack of childcare as a barrier to practising their profession in this country.

Since its origins in 1993, RWA has worked in close partnership with various public, voluntary and community organisations to create awareness of the needs and aspirations of refugee women, their potential to contribute to the British economy and

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

society, and the barriers that hinder their full integration and development.

The work of RWA is funded by the European Social Fund, Equal, the Association of London Government, the Learning and Skills Council, and supported by Jobcentre Plus. Through the generous support of these funding bodies, RWA endeavours to impact on policy and practice in ways that benefit the lives of refugee women in London.

RWA would like to thank all the refugee women who took part in this research. We would also like to thank the individuals and organisations who shared their knowledge and experience with us. Special thanks are due to:

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Special thanks are due to Ayse Bircan and Roya Ebrahimi, not only for the help they gave to the present project, but also for their hard work and commitment to improving childcare options for refugee women in London over the years.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2005, as part of the Refugee Women's Empowerment Project funded by Equal and the European Social Fund, RWA initiated a research project to investigate the experiences of refugee women in accessing Early Years provisions for their children in London.

Refugee women have fled their homeland and come to live in a country where they do not have any family or established support systems. In addition, the host society's social and cultural values are different from their own. This means that on arrival, many refugee women often have little or no understanding of how the British system works and no one to turn to for support.

While living in the UK, refugee women face double discrimination on the labour market: as women and as refugees. They tend to be over-represented in part-time, temporary jobs and poorly paid jobs.

Previous research has highlighted that lack of childcare is one of the most persistent barriers to employment for refugee women, but there has been little research into refugee women's experiences when trying to access childcare in

London. While various reports have touched on the issue, or looked at one community or one borough only, the present research is the first to focus specifically on the experiences of refugee women from various communities in accessing Early Years services in Greater London.

The research surveyed 147 refugee mothers who have come to the UK as refugees from 27 different countries worldwide, and now live in 19 different boroughs of Greater London.

17 organisations – Refugee Community Organisations and other organisations working with refugees – were also surveyed as part of the research process, and their views and recommendations on improving access to Early Years services for refugee women were sought.

Almost one fifth (18%) of the refugee women involved in the survey had no access to any sort of childcare provision. Of those that did use some form of childcare, almost a quarter (23%) indicated using childcare "other" than that offered by official providers, such as relying on friends and family.

The research identified the lack of information about

Early Years provisions as one of the major barriers for refugee women in accessing services on an equal basis. Only a very small number of the refugee women who were surveyed had gained information about childcare services through structured efforts of the providers. The majority of the women found out about the availability of services through personal contacts, mostly from friends. There is little information about Early Years services in the places that refugee women are most likely to visit.

The cost of childcare is also an obstacle for the majority of refugee women. Many tried to find jobs that would allow them to leave their children with friends rather than in care to avoid the cost, but this forced them into working evening shifts and weekends, and prevented them from moving into jobs with better prospects.

The high cost of childcare can be a disincentive from going to work. The vast majority (82%) of the women involved in the research were either volunteering or in education or training, although only 13% were in paid employment.

The move into paid employment is made very difficult for refugee women due to lack of childcare and lack of financial support.

Temporary housing was another key obstacle for refugee women when trying to access services. As many as 42% of respondents lived in temporary accommodation at the time of research, and this has implications not only for their ability to access local services but also for their mental health and that of their families. Many women indicated having suffered stress-related mental health issues as a result of the uncertainty of their housing situation, and many also stated that their children had been badly affected.

Refugee women's first language is not English, and indeed almost half of the respondents (42%) indicated they speak "basic" or "not much" English. Yet as many as 72% of the refugee women confirmed that when visiting the Early Years services for the first time, they were given information only in English without any consideration for their need for additional language support. They were not offered the use of an interpreter or given any information translated into their own language.

The majority of respondents also said that their children spoke little or no English when they first started attending the services (67%). This, coupled with a lack of cultural sensitivity in service provision constitutes another barrier for refugee women and their children. Many of the women surveyed expressed a natural desire for their own cultural and religious beliefs to be upheld in the care of their children, yet they found little respect for such requests from providers. A few women said their children were not given appropriate food in nurseries, and that their children have had to go hungry when they refused to eat food that was not acceptable to them for religious or cultural reasons.

Refugee children are first and foremost children. Therefore their needs for quality care should be met irrespective of immigration status. For successful integration and good race relations that will benefit the country as a whole, the government must actively care for the needs of refugee children and ensure they are not being left out. Many of the women who took part in the research expressed concern that their children's exclusion from Early Years provisions would have a longer-term negative impact on their

development. The research confirmed that the current childcare system in the UK mostly represents Western cultural, religious and social values. Refugee women cannot always identify with these values and feel excluded from the provision. In multi-ethnic Britain, the values of other communities should also be reflected in the care and education of the next generation.

On the whole, the research found that there is very little understanding of the issues affecting refugees by Early Years providers and their staff. These should be included in the curricula of childcare training programmes.

Every effort should be made to recruit refugee women who are willing and happy to work in Early Years. This would benefit not only refugee women but also their children and diverse communities. The recruitment practices of Early Years providers must be examined to ensure they are sensitive to wider cultural issues.

A full list of recommendations can be found at the end of the report.



## GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS USED

### Asylum Seeker (AS)

A person who has made an asylum application to the Home Office and is awaiting a decision.

### Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR)

The status given to a person who has been granted leave to remain in the UK prior to April 2003. ELR is granted at the Home Secretary's discretion. It can be given for different reasons but it is mostly given on compassionate and humanitarian grounds. Exceptional Leave to Remain has now been replaced by the new status of "Humanitarian Protection".

### Humanitarian Protection

Humanitarian Protection is given to asylum seekers if the Home Office accepts that the person faces a serious threat in the country from which they fled. It is mostly given for a temporary period, after which individuals can apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain.

### Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR)

This is also known as permanent residency. A person with ILR has no time limits placed on their stay in the UK.

### Early Years

The term Early Years in this report is used to refer to childcare services for children under the age of five. At times these are

also described as "Under five services"; in fact both terms are used interchangeably. The types of services included in Early Years provision are described in section 2.1.

### Refugee

The 1951 United Nations "Geneva" Convention defines a refugee as any person who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his or her nationality and is unable or owing to such fear is unwilling to avail him or herself of the protection of that country; or who not having a nationality and being outside the country of his or her former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it" (Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Geneva Convention).

The term "refugee" in this report is used in its broadest sense to describe anyone who left their country of origin due to fear of persecution. Therefore, its use in this report is not necessarily identical with that of the Refugee Status awarded by the Home Office.

### Refugee Status

A person whose application for asylum has been granted by the Home Office and who therefore has full refugee status under the 1951 Geneva Convention.

"If I had proper childcare support, I would be able to work. It is difficult to get out of social security because I can't afford to pay much for childcare."

A mother from Iran

### 1.1. Introduction

Lack of childcare is one of the most persistent barriers to employment for refugee women. Refugee women have fled their homeland and come to live in a country where they do not have any close links or family to rely on. In addition to this, the host society's cultural and family values are different from their own. All this means refugee women often have little or no understanding of how the British system works and no one to turn to for support.

Many refugee women have also lost their husbands, partners or other family members, either in situations of conflict at home or during flight. This leaves them as the sole carers of their children in a new and strange country.

In the UK, refugee women face double discrimination on the labour market: as women and as refugees. They tend to be over-represented in part-time, temporary and poorly paid jobs. Previous research has highlighted that lack of childcare is one of the most persistent barriers for refugee women when trying to move into education, training or employment.

While these facts are well known to refugee women and those who work with them, there has been little research into refugee women's experiences of trying to access childcare services.

As part of the Refugee Women's Empowerment Project, a partnership project led by Refugee Women's Association and funded by EQUAL and the European Social Fund, RWA was

interested in examining refugee women's access to childcare services and disseminating the findings widely so as to fill this knowledge gap and enable policy makers, funders, Early Years providers and those who are campaigning for accessible childcare to gain a better understanding of refugee women's experiences.

Three reports to date, covering various issues related to childcare for refugees and/or ethnic minorities, were examined at the onset of the research and these proved very helpful. They are:

- Working with Refugee Children, by Jill Rutter, which broadly covers Early Years provision (Rutter 2003);
- A research into how effectively Somali Communities in Enfield access Early Years education by Janie Robertson (2002); and
- A 2003 Daycare Trust report on ethnic minorities' experiences in accessing Early Years provisions.

While these three studies covered an important range of issues, RWA aimed to analyse the experiences of refugee women from different communities in accessing Early Years provisions throughout Greater London. The present research therefore surveyed 147 refugee mothers who have come to the UK as refugees from 27 different countries worldwide, and now live in 19 different boroughs of Greater London.

17 organisations – Refugee Community Organisations and other organisations working with refugees – were also surveyed as part of the research, and their views and recommendations on improving access to Early Years services for refugee women were sought.

RWA hopes to use this report to influence the policy and practice of care for Early Years, so that the needs of refugee women and their children will be taken into account at all stages: when childcare strategies are developed, when resources are allocated and services are delivered, and when the impact of services is being monitored.



## 1.2. Aims and Objectives

The aims of the research were identified as:

- to identify to what extent refugee women in Greater London access Early Years provisions for their children;
- to learn more about the qualitative experiences of refugee women in using Early Years provisions;
- to gather the views of refugee community organisations and other organisations working with refugees on refugee women's access to Early Years services;
- to use the survey as a medium to influence employers and policy makers.

The focus of the research was limited to refugee women; therefore it did not include women from other migrant communities in London. It was not the intention of the present research to target any particular refugee communities other than refugee mothers with children under five.

The research examined refugee women's access to Early Years provisions including day nurseries, childminders, playgroups and crèches.

Within this particular remit of the research, a few specific key objectives were identified:

- to obtain evidence of significant numbers of refugee women in London being left out of Early Years provisions and to document their experiences;
- to identify the barriers they face in accessing provisions;
- to confirm that lack of childcare is a barrier for refugee women when trying to move into paid employment (as found in previous research);
- to identify what services are available from Early Years providers and to what extent they make efforts to outreach to refugee communities and offer equal access to refugee children;
- to gather the opinions of refugee community organisations and other organisations working in the field and their recommendations on what can be done to improve access to Early Years services for refugee women;
- to give refugee women a chance to express their views on Early Years provisions as well as their hopes for their children;

- to make recommendations for what can be done by the government, funding bodies, providers, refugee organisations and others to ensure refugee women gain equal access to Early Years services;
- to promote the training and employment of refugee women in childcare services; and
- to produce a document that can be used by RWA and other organisations (private, statutory, voluntary and refugee communities) to raise awareness of the experience of refugee women and to promote better Early Services for all.

### 1.3. Research Methodology

The project involved a combination of desk-based research as well as qualitative and quantitative research methods. Data was obtained through:

- in-depth questionnaires with individual refugee women, completed mostly through face-to-face interviews;
- interviews with representatives of refugee community organisations and other organisations working with refugees or providing services to them;
- secondary sources (see Appendix 1).

For the interviews, two types of structured questionnaires were designed, covering a broad range of issues. One was aimed at individual refugee women with children, and the second questionnaire was targeted at organisations.

#### Interviews with Individual Refugee Women

147 women took part in the research and provided information via in-depth questionnaires. The questionnaire for individuals was of a multiple-choice nature where respondents select the answer that best reflects their circumstances. The questionnaire was divided into several parts, covering their personal details and general demographic profile, any activities they were involved in at the time of research (such as training, volunteering or employment), their experiences of accessing childcare provisions, and their views on childcare services. The last section of the questionnaire went beyond the structured questionnaire and gave respondents the opportunity to freely express any opinions, as well as give comments and recommendations.

The research was carried out by a refugee mother who herself had first hand experience of Early Years services in London. The researcher's background meant she was easily able to gain the trust of the women who took part in the research. It was also hoped that participants would feel the researcher shared their experiences and so was better able to understand the hopes

and anxieties of living with young children as refugees.

For the main part the author carried out the questionnaires herself on a face-to-face base, although 15 interviews were done over the telephone. A few interviews with individuals were also carried out by representatives of community organisations on behalf of the author. This happened when there was an existing relationship of trust.

Interviews were conducted with refugee women on the basis that they would be confidential.

The research targeted refugee women in group situations. Most of the participants were recruited from English classes, open days and social events.



“There should be more Early Years services for refugees, and there should be access to interpreters”.

A mother from Turkey

“It would be good to have a childminder from my country that understands my language and my culture!”

A mother from Iran

#### Interviews with Organisations

17 interviews were also held with organisations that provide services for refugee women.

The questionnaire for organisations was shorter than the one for individuals and more open ended. Organisations were given the chance to comment on refugee women’s access to Early Years provisions from their experience. The questions focused on getting organisations’ views on the accessibility, affordability and appropriateness (whether services were sensitive to cultural differences and the specific needs of refugees) of childcare services. Organisations were also asked for examples of good practice they might have encountered that could be shared. Lastly, organisations were asked what they felt were the key barriers for refugee women in accessing services, and how they thought these could be overcome.

The interviews with organisations were all held by the author herself.

#### A note on research methodological constraints

It was hoped that the process of research would be an empowering one for refugee women in that it would give them an opportunity to express their opinions and reflect on their experiences. All respondents were told that they could choose not to answer any questions they felt uncomfortable with, and indeed some respondents did not fully complete the questionnaire and left certain questions unanswered, in particular as relating to their personal profile. As a result, the figures and charts in this report may not always show consistency in numbers.

It must also be noted that the concept of Early Years and the topics in the questionnaire were at times difficult to understand for some of the respondents, especially for those with limited English and for those without equivalent services in their country of origin.

### 2.1. Early Years services in the UK

Early Years provision is a pre-school service that offers education and care for children up to the age of five. The provision combines learning and play during a child's early years and is delivered through a combination of services:

#### Types of Early Years provisions

##### Playgroups

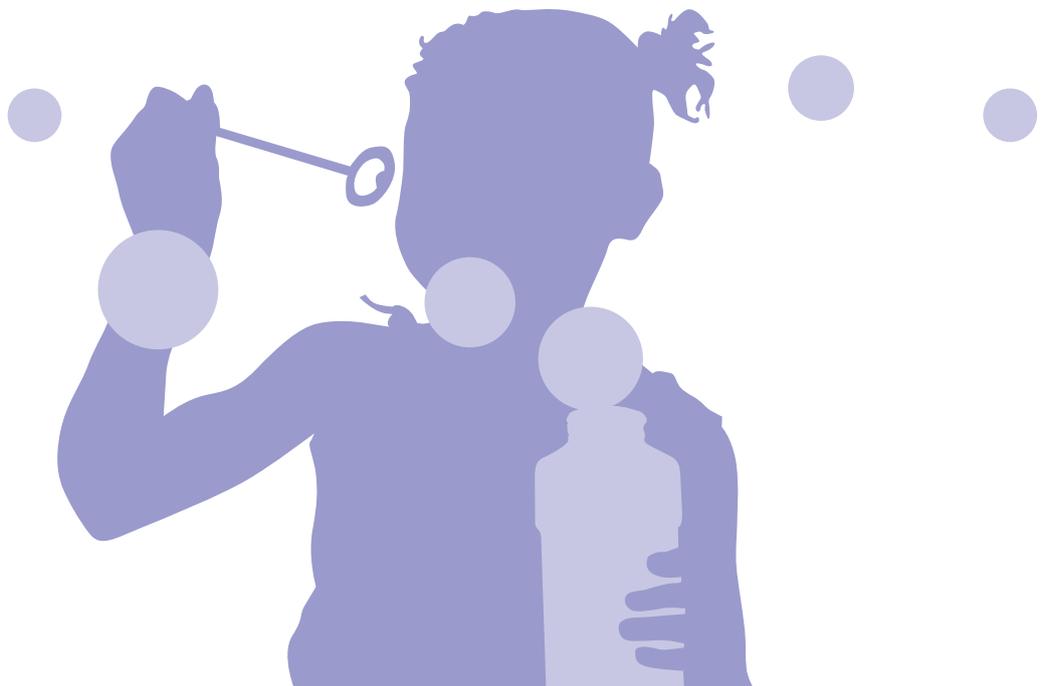
Playgroups usually provide services for children between the ages of three and five, and tend to offer half-day sessions. Some playgroups are non-profit making provisions and they are sometimes managed and run by volunteers, some of whom may be the parents of children attending the group. The typical hours for playgroups are two or two and a half hours per day. Fees are charged which vary from one playgroup to another.

##### Nurseries

Day nurseries are usually run by a combination of providers, including local authorities, voluntary and community sector providers, employers and those run by individuals as private provisions. Day nurseries provide services to children aged several months to five years. Nurseries charge fees which vary from provider to provider depending on the type of nursery. They are registered and inspected by the government regulatory body OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education). Nurseries have staff qualified in Early Years education, and some may also be qualified teachers.

##### Childminders

Childminders are self-employed people who are trained to look after children in their own home. In order to do that, childminders have to be registered with the government regulatory body, OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education). Depending on their accommodation circumstances, childminders can look after up to six children under the age of eight (provided not more than three are under the age of five and only one is under the age of one). Their charges vary.





“We need more bilingual staff in playgroups & nurseries”.

A mother from Turkey

### Crèches

Crèches are designated places where children up to school age are looked after by qualified childcare staff. This could be part time, full time or ad-hoc for a few hours. Crèches are mainly run in places where parents are participating in certain activities, such as meetings, training or education courses, leisure activities, shopping, doctor appointments and the like. Unlike other Early Years services such as nurseries, they can be run from a range of venues.

### Informal Childminders

A growing number of people also act as informal childminders and they are usually friends or relatives of the child’s parents. Informal childminders are not usually registered with government bodies and they often provide their services for free, or charge only minimal fees to cover their costs. Some parents prefer these informal carers because they know them personally and have more trust in them.

### Sure Start

Sure Start is a cross government initiative aimed to support children under four and their families living in areas of urban deprivation. The objective behind Sure Start is to ensure all children have the chance to play and to learn before they start school by providing opportunities and facilities that are available locally.

Sure Start is also intended to improve the educational and emotional development of young children while supporting parents in their aspirations towards employment.

### Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCP)

This is a childcare strategy initiated by the Labour government. EYDCP is a partnership initiative between local authorities and parents as well as public, voluntary and private sector providers.

The objective of the Partnerships is to draw up and agree an Early Years Development and Childcare Plan to meet the needs of parents and carers and so to provide a quality service to children and young people between the ages of 0 – 14 yrs.

The Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCP) are to complement the Sure Start provisions for

deprived neighbourhoods which are run through local Sure Start programmes.

### Nursery Education Grant (NEG) and Child Tax Credit

These two initiatives were introduced to help parents with the cost of childcare. The Nursery Education Grant is available to three to four year olds. For the child to be eligible, the child must attend a registered establishment that is part of the local EYDCP.

To qualify the child must receive at least 33 weeks of Early Years education over three terms.

## 2.2. The National and London Childcare Strategies

### The National Childcare Strategy

The National Childcare Strategy was launched in 1998. The purpose behind the strategy was to improve services for children and families and to develop a wide range of actions, one of which was to expand the Early Years provision in England and Wales.

The government's childcare strategy is claimed to have achieved a major expansion in childcare provision, with a greater number of childcare services provided by a wider range of providers such as day nurseries, playgroups and childminders. Since 1997, more than 553,000 new childcare places have been created across the country, benefiting 1,007,000 children.

This increase in childcare provision has been substantially complemented by a major expansion in free Early Years education for all four year olds and increasingly for three year olds as well. Four year olds are now guaranteed a free Early Years education place if their parents want one and the aim of the strategy is to provide all three year olds with access to a free place by 2004 (National Childcare Strategy Fact Sheet).

However, there are also reports that the strategy is insufficient and inaccessible. For example, a report by the House of Commons' Work and Pensions Committee found the strategy was "not sufficient" to enable parents to work (House of Commons' Work and Pensions Committee 2003). The report also claimed the government would not meet its 2010 targets on child poverty and lone parent employment if it did not further expand childcare. The report made the following recommendations:

- More investments in childcare
- Rollout children centres to 30% of most deprived wards
- Expansion of out-of-school childcare
- Provision of help to informal childcare providers to register as childminders
- Tester weeks for all low-income families to reassure them about childcare quality and also to tackle the information gap which makes it difficult for people to find out about childcare in their local areas

The report further urged the government to switch resources from other budgets because of the

importance of childcare and nursery education to children's life chances.

What is more, despite improvements made under Labour, childcare provision in Britain remains one of the most expensive in Europe, and various reports have argued that the government should invest more in childcare. Consequently, the government has promised to make childcare central to its election manifesto for the 2005 General Election.

In his pre-budget plan on 2nd December 2004, the Chancellor announced £600 million to be invested in childcare and helping families by 2007-08. The plan promised to extend the current provision of five two and a half hour sessions for 33 weeks a year for children under five, and similarly to expand free nursery education for three to four year olds.

Parents on low or medium incomes are also to get more help to pay for childcare and the childcare part of the working tax credit is to increase. However, there will not be free universal childcare for children between the age of one and two.

The government pledged through this ten-year plan to increase the number of Children's Centres from

“I would like to work and I want to support my family but at the moment I don't have any support for the children to be looked after.”

A mother from Albania

the current figure of 71 to 2500 by 2008, and to further this expansion to 3500 centres by 2010. The centres will provide information and support on childcare and other services for local parents.

The government's ten-year Birth to Six strategy promises to extend paid maternity leave from six months to nine months from April 2007, with plans to extend this to one year's paid leave.

For the first time, there will be steps made towards giving mothers the option of transferring some leave to fathers, starting with a consultation in 2005. This change follows the example of Scandinavian countries.

### The London Childcare Strategy

The London Childcare Strategy aims to increase the availability of quality childcare for parents living and working in London. Among other things, the London Childcare Strategy also aims to improve information by mapping the range of childcare provision and its cost and monitoring the availability and sustainability of childcare, specifically for black and minority ethnic families. Co-ordination of the strategic responsibility was delegated to the Mayor's Economic Development Agency, known as the London Development Agency (LDA).

Both the National and the London childcare strategies are dedicated to the principle that all children deserve the best possible start in life.



### 2.3. London's broader profile and demography

London is the largest economy in the United Kingdom. It draws 750,000 people to its city everyday. It is also one of the world's biggest investment banking centres and one of the largest and richest financial centres in Europe, leading the world in international bond trading,

Throughout London's history immigrants and refugees have come to the city and changed its landscape. These migrants have come from all parts of the world either to flee persecution or to better their economic situation. For example, large groups of Dutch Jewish communities migrated to London from Holland over a century ago and settled in the East End of the city. When they first arrived, the Jews suffered the same hostility and suspicion that refugees are facing today. The immigrants and refugees of that time concentrated on earning a living through self-employment as many do today. They suffered similar difficulties in accessing housing, employment and health care and so on. Despite their prevailing poverty, immigrants were often resented and, like today, made the scapegoats of social and economic tension. Its history of immigration has shaped London's present and given it a unique character. It is now a truly multicultural city and a home to many diverse communities, which bring cultural and linguistic wealth to the city.

According to the 2001 Census, London is home to a population of over 7.17 million people. Almost half (45%) of the UK's ethnic minority communities are concentrated in London, where they make up 29% of the city's residents (National Statistics Website: London Census 2001). It is estimated that 78% of African Caribbeans, 61% of Black Africans and 54% of Bangladeshis living in the UK are concentrated in London.

As far as ethnic minorities in London's boroughs are concerned, the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) Equality Impact Assessment found that 16 London boroughs have especially large concentrations of ethnic minorities. The London borough of Newham has the highest ethnic 'minority' population in London (61% of residents are non-white); followed by Brent (55% non-white) and Tower Hamlets (49%) where almost half of the population is from an ethnic 'minority'.

There is very little statistical data about the numbers of refugees and asylum seekers living in the UK. However, the Greater London Authority in 2001

estimated that around one in twenty Londoners had been refugees or asylum seekers in the previous fifteen years. Also, 85% of refugees remaining in the United Kingdom are likely to have lived in London at some point. London's refugee population is likely to show quite a different composition and much greater diversity than the refugee populations of other parts of the UK. Women are estimated to make up a quarter to one third of the UK's refugee population (Greater London Authority 2001).

According to the National Statistics Office, there are 3.1 million children under the age of five living in UK. Of these, 717,209 are living in London.

London has childcare places for only one third of the working mothers who need access to them. As a result, fewer mothers in London work than in other parts of the country. The cost of childcare in London is also far higher than in any part of the country. According to the Daycare Trust (a national childcare charity campaigning for affordable and quality



childcare for all), nursery fees in London are also the highest in the country. For instance, a full-time nursery place for a child under the age of two in Inner London would cost £197 a week; in Outer London the cost would be £170.

It was estimated in 2004 that the number of childcare places in the UK – including crèches, childminders, preschools, after school clubs and other providers – for children under eight stood at around 1.5 million. This equates to only 32 places per hundred children under the age of eight.

For London, this scale of provision drops to twenty-six places per every hundred children. This fact coupled with the high cost of childcare in London means access to the services is well out of reach for the majority of Londoners.



A mother from Turkey

#### 2.4. Childcare and Race and Gender Discrimination

In London, women comprise at least 70% of the workforce in the caring and teaching professions and administrative and secretarial fields, yet their representation at managerial or senior level remains low and has barely improved since the early 1990s (Greater London Authority 2005).

There is evidence that more women and children are trapped in poverty than men are. Single mothers, the unemployed, women on low incomes and refugee women are the most affected. The cost of childcare, discrimination on the labour market and the lack of support for self-employment all mean refugee women are at greater risk of staying in the poverty trap than any other members of ethnic minority communities.

Lack of childcare has often been found to be a barrier to employment for women, especially for those from deprived backgrounds. The London Households Survey and the Mayor's Report on 'London Divided', for instance, have both shown that lack of affordable childcare is the major reason for women to be excluded from the labour market. Women in London are now less likely to be employed, compared with other women in England.

The majority of London's ethnic minority groups experience unemployment at twice the national average level. Although the unemployment rate overall has fallen since the 1990s, the gap in unemployment between ethnic minorities and white workers has increased. The rate of unemployment for lone parents in inner London is the highest in the country (Greater London Authority 2004).

## 2.5 The Legislative Context

Since the passing of the Race Relation Amendment Act (RRAA) of 2000, local authorities and other public sector providers have a general duty to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and promote good race relations.

As a result of inadequate and unaffordable childcare options, women tend to look for jobs that enable them to work around their childcare responsibilities. This often means part-time, low paid jobs in the service sector, with little prospect of advancement. Refugee women are particularly affected by this trend.

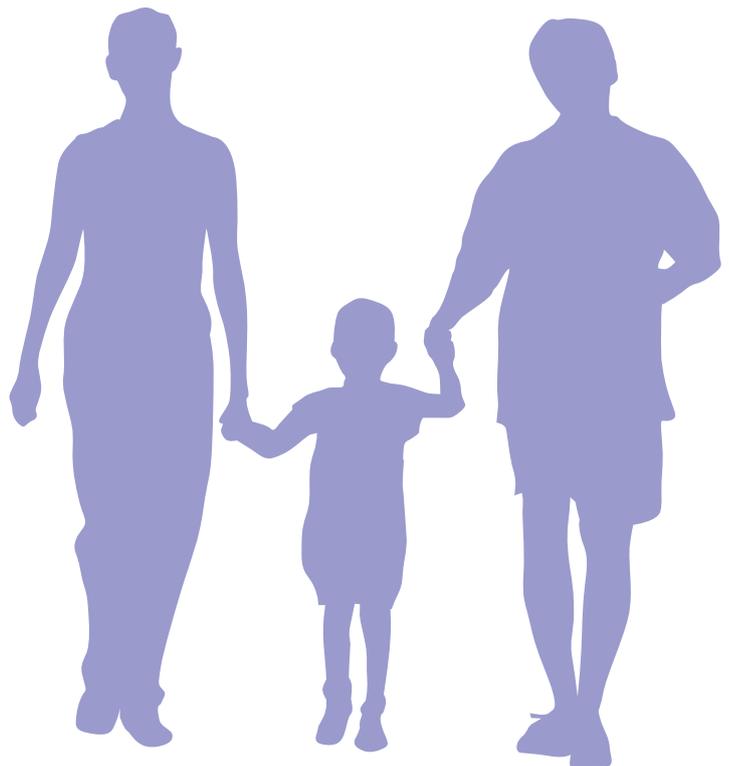
The gender bias of UK society is also reflected in the fact that childcare is still perceived to be women's responsibility, irrespective of whether they are single mothers, married or living with their partner. Even when women are the breadwinners, they are still expected to shoulder most of the responsibility for childcare.

Under the Specific Duties, public authorities must publish their race equality strategy known as Race Equality Schemes (RES) and the RES must show what they do to eliminate racial discrimination and promote equality of opportunity. More specifically, under the Specific Duties public authorities must demonstrate how they assess, consult

and inform the public; train staff; deliver targets; monitor outcomes and assess impact.

As far as recruitment practices are concerned, public authorities must demonstrate that they are selecting a workforce that is fully representative of the local community they serve. Local authorities must take a proactive role and use positive action to increase the diversity of their staff. This could include the provision of training to those who are excluded from the labour market in order to enhance their employability.

In addition to this, sections 37 and 38 of the Race Relations Act of 1976 permit employers and training bodies to take positive action to recruit members of particular groups if these are under-represented. Section 35 of the Act allows for action to be taken to enable access to facilities or services to meet special education, training or welfare needs.



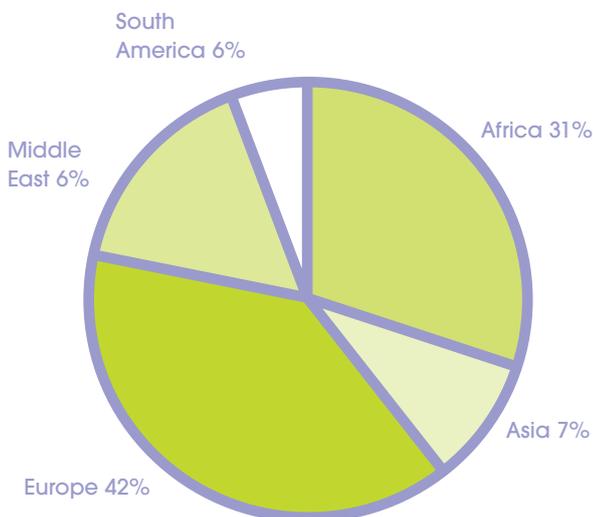
3.1. General demographic and personal profiles of the respondents

As explained in Section 1.3., a questionnaire was drawn up in order to carry out the survey of refugee mothers in London. This section aims to describe the results of the questionnaire and highlight the common themes and experiences experienced by refugee women with children under five in Greater London.

**Country of Origin**

Respondents came from 27 different countries worldwide. The majority of respondents (42%) came from European countries. This can partly be explained by the fact that the boroughs of Hackney, Islington and Newham were very well represented in the research, and these boroughs have large Turkish and Eastern European communities, respectively. The second largest group of respondents came from Africa (31%) This was followed by participants from Middle Eastern countries (14%). Respondents from Asia and South America made up seven percent and six percent of the total sample, respectively.

Figure 1: Respondents by country of origin



**Europe**

Respondents came from 7 different European countries, which included Albania, Kosovo, Russia, Turkey, Portugal, Yugoslavia and Ukraine. Of European respondents, the majority came from Turkey (37%), followed by Kosovo (29%) and Albania (22%).

**Africa**

The second largest group of respondents came from African countries (31% of total respondents). Nine African countries were represented among these. The majority of African participants (40%) were originally from Somalia, 17% came from the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly known as Zaire), 15% came from Uganda and 11% from Eritrea. Ethiopians totalled seven percent of African respondents and Kenyans four percent. The remaining six percent came from Algeria, Togo and Zimbabwe.

**Middle East**

Respondents came from four different countries in the Middle East. The majority of Middle Eastern women (65%) came from Iran, 20% came from Iraq, 10% were from Lebanon and five percent were from Palestine.

**Asia**

Three Asian countries were represented in the research. Of the refugee women of Asian origin who took part, the majority were from Vietnam (67%). (25%) came from Sri Lanka, and eight percent came from Cambodia.

**South America**

Six percent of total respondents came from South America. Of these, the largest number had come from Colombia (57%). This was followed by Bolivia (29%) and Ecuador (14%).

**Religion**

The majority of mothers involved in the research identified themselves as Muslims (68%), followed by Christians (25%). Three percent were Buddhists, and the remaining four percent described themselves as either having no religion or atheist.

**Age**

The majority of respondents were aged 18 to 39 (87%). Of these, 23% were aged 18-29, and 64% were aged 30-39. 13% of respondents were aged 40-49. The numbers show that the women involved are all of working age; all of them could be economically active for years if given the chance.

### Number of children under five

The majority of respondents (55%) had one child under the age of five at the time of research. 33% had two children under five, and as many as one in ten women (ten percent) had three children under the age of five. A small number of women (two percent) even had four children who were under the age of five at the time of the research.

### Immigration status

The majority of respondents (83%) had gained Refugee Status in the UK. Of those, 46% had taken on British Citizenship. 37% of respondents had been granted Indefinite Leave to Remain, and seven percent were given Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR). Five per cent of respondents were asylum seekers awaiting a decision on their application, and three per cent were at the appeals stage after their initial application had been refused. Two per cent of participants chose to categorise their immigration status as "other" to any of the above categories.

The figure opposite illustrates that including women with ELR status, 90% of participants in the survey have gained the legal right to stay in Britain. This contradicts the hostile picture of 'illegal immigrants' that is created by the tabloid press.

Figure 2: Immigration profile



### Residency by borough

The majority of respondents in the research were resident in the London borough of Haringey (15%), followed by Newham (13%), Islington (13%), Hackney (12%) and Enfield (11%). The other boroughs are listed in the figure below.

Figure 3: Residency by borough

<b>Brent</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>Camden</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>Enfield</b>	<b>11%</b>
<b>Ealing</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>Greenwich</b>	<b>3%</b>
<b>Hackney</b>	<b>18%</b>
<b>Hammersmith</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>Harlsden</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>Hounslow</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>Haringey</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Islington</b>	<b>12%</b>
<b>Lambeth</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>Merion</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>Newham</b>	<b>11%</b>
<b>Redbridge</b>	<b>3%</b>
<b>Richmond</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>Southwark</b>	<b>3%</b>
<b>Walthamforest</b>	<b>3%</b>
<b>Westminster</b>	<b>1%</b>

### Accommodation profile

As many as 42% of respondents were staying in temporary accommodation while 58% were living in permanent accommodation.

### Educational background

Almost all respondents indicated that they had a minimum background of Elementary school education. 33% of the women who took part in the research had also completed Secondary or High School level education. As many as 18% of respondents had a University Degree and six percent had more than one degree. Only one percent of respondents indicated having had no formal education in their country of origin.

### Language skills

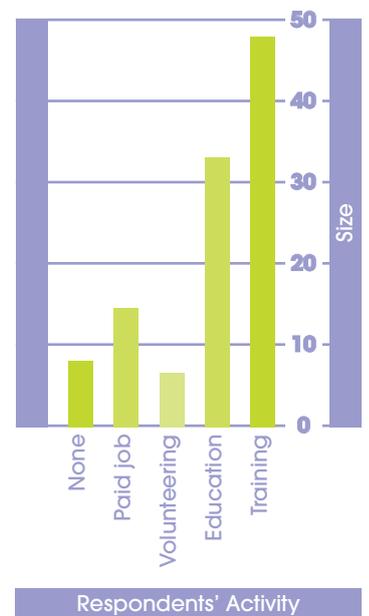
The majority of respondents spoke basic or "not much" English (42%). 38% said they have a moderate command of the English language (38%). As many of 20% however speak fluent English. Without any exception, respondents spoke one or more language(s) in addition to English.

### Training & employment profile

The majority of respondents were involved in some form of structured activity. This is partly explained by the

fact that most respondents were approached via organisations where they were undertaking training or attending events of some sort (open days etc.). The majority were in training at the time of the research (43%). The types of training ranged from language courses to vocational training courses. Some women were in part-time education (31%). Only 13% of the women were in employment, and in most instances this was in low paid jobs in the services or catering industries (the women worked mainly as cleaners, security staff or in catering). Only a small number (eight percent) were not involved in any form of structured activity.

Figure 4: Respondents' activity



### 3.2. Refugee Women's Experiences of Early Years Provisions

Part 2 of the questionnaire covered the experiences of individuals in accessing childcare provisions for children under five. In this section, individuals were asked whether or not they have attended any Early Years provisions, and, if so, how many hours their children attended any of the services. Respondents were also asked how they had come to hear about the availability of the provision. In the third part of the questionnaire, the mothers' views on childcare provisions was explored in more depth. This included finding out how well they felt the provider communicated information to them on their first arrival, and whether as a parent they had felt welcomed or not. They were also asked about their first impressions of the physical environment of the place and the friendliness and diversity of the staff. Based on their experience, respondents were also asked to rate other aspects of the quality of the service they received.

#### Access to Early Years provisions

Almost one fifth (18%) of the refugee women involved in the survey had no access to any sort of childcare provision. Of those who did use childcare, about a quarter (23%) indicated using childcare "other" than that offered by official providers, such as relying on friends and family.

29% of women who used Early Years had their children in day nurseries. Seven percent said their children attended crèches, and six percent use childminders. Another seven percent said they have a childminder and also attend playgroups, and another six percent indicated using a combination of play group and crèches.

Interestingly, 16% of those who said they have access to Early Years also said that their children effectively "stay at home" for a variety of reasons.

Some of these women didn't feel the need to put their children in care as they were at home themselves, despite having access to services, but this figure also included women who chose not to put their children in care because they didn't like the service for one reason or another.

#### Information on Early Years

Only very few refugee women (seven percent) said they gained information about childcare services through structured efforts of the providers such as leaflets or posters. The majority of the women found out about the availability of services through personal contacts, mostly from friends.

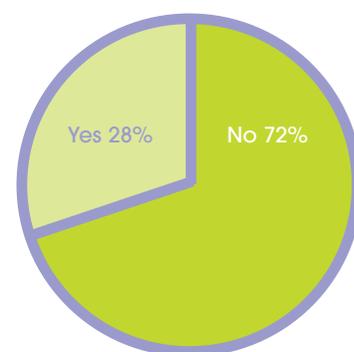
GPs, dentists, libraries, post offices, hospitals and local supermarkets are all places that are accessed by a range of communities including refugee

women; yet according to the women who took part in the research, the amount of information that they accessed through these places is limited.

#### Availability of bi-lingual/ language support

The vast majority of respondents (72%) were not asked if they required bilingual support when they accessed Early Years provisions. This clearly demonstrates the lack of provision for bilingual support for families whose first language is not English. Either service providers are assuming everyone understands the language and the system or they lack the resources to address this very real need.

Figure 5: Bilingual support



### **Friendliness of providers**

The majority of respondents (70%) felt welcome when they first accessed Early Years services, although a third of respondents indicated they did not feel welcome.

### **First visit to provision**

A third (30%) of the women using childcare provisions said they were not shown around the premises when they first accessed their local Early Years services.

### **Distance to provision**

Half of those who use childcare indicated that their local Early Years provision is "very near" where they live (50%). 27% felt the distance they have to travel was "not bad", but as many as 23% said they have to travel by public transport (mostly bus) to access their local provisions. For these women, the cost of transport created an additional barrier to accessing the provisions.

### **Child's English on starting to attend childcare provision**

Only 19% of the children surveyed through the research spoke English when they started nursery. 41% of the women said their child (or children) spoke "little English", and 40% said their child spoke no English at all when first starting to access organised childcare. This means that a total of 81% of the children had little or no English language proficiency when first starting Early Years services.

### **Children's settling in**

As many as 37% of participants said their children did not settle in quickly when attending childcare. This might be attributable to many of the children not being able to speak English at the start.

### **Overall experience of accessibility of services**

The majority (54%) of the refugee women who took part in the research rated their overall experience of the accessibility of Early Years provisions as "poor". 27% thought their overall access was satisfactory, and only 14% felt their access was very good.

### **Overall experience of quality of services**

As many as 42% thought the quality of services overall was very good. Nonetheless, a quarter (24%) of respondents felt the quality of services was poor, and 34% thought it was only "satisfactory".

### 3.3. Issues arising from interviews with refugee women and organisations

This section summarises some of the key issues and concerns raised by refugee mothers and the organisations involved in the research during the interviews. The organisations that took part by sharing their views and experiences included local authorities, local Sure Start services, Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) and other organisations working with refugees and organisations that provide services to children and young people such as preschool learning inclusion projects, homeless services and education services. Vocational training providers, ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) providers and colleges were also included.

#### Immigration status

"I am not quite sure what my rights are in terms of childcare as an asylum seeker because I am at the moment more worried about my immigration case."

A mother from Iran

Those women who were still awaiting decisions on their asylum applications said that childcare is not a priority for them because of the uncertainty of their immigration status.

They were primarily concerned with gaining the right to stay in the country. Even when mothers would have liked to be able to get their children into childcare so as to be able to attend training or other services for themselves, they were prevented from doing so by the time consuming nature of the asylum application process. Janie Robertson makes a similar point in her research on Somali refugees accessing Early Years services in the London borough of Enfield:

"(The) families interviewed wanted their children to access provision, but were often prevented from doing so by other priorities, such as immigration matters"

(Robertson: 2002).

The UK government considers that measures to support the integration of refugees should benefit only those who have gained the right to stay. But if we consider the length of time it takes the Home Office to make decisions on asylum claims, including the often successful appeals process, this is very problematic. Refugees should benefit from programmes to support the integration process from the moment of arrival in this country. This would benefit not only asylum seekers, but also race relations and society as a whole. If a mother cannot get any support with childcare until

her asylum claim is decided, this is likely to have detrimental effects on her and her child, who will not learn English or benefit from the advantages of Early Years education until possibly years later.

"In Camden there are a lot of crèches and playgroups but most refugees, especially those living in hostels and temporary accommodation, don't know where their local childcare service is. Sure Start is doing a family support project to try and reach out to disadvantaged people but I don't think it's enough."

A mother from Ethiopia

### Accommodation profile/ Living in temporary accommodation

“In Camden there are a lot of crèches and playgroups but most refugees, especially those living in hostels and temporary accommodation, don’t know where their local childcare services are. Sure Start is doing a family support project to try and reach out to disadvantaged people but I don’t think it’s enough.”

A mother from Ethiopia

The research found that living in temporary housing affected refugee parents negatively in their ability to access Early Years services on an equal basis. Even when parents did manage to access the local provisions near their temporary residence, they found it very upsetting to then have to move somewhere else and start from scratch. Participants said it took them a lot of time to settle into their place of temporary residence, and the worry of having to start again was considerable.

Again, Janie Robertson makes very similar observations in her research on the Somali community accessing Early Years provisions in Enfield:

“In their previous living (participants) had often settled into networks and then had to start again upon moving”

(Robertson: 2002).

The research also found that refugee women living in temporary accommodation found it particularly hard to access information on local under five services.

Women also pointed out that living in temporary accommodation had a very negative impact on the mental health of their families. One woman, for instance, stated that:

“There should be more local nurseries and homeless families with children under the age of five should be given priority. We have two children under five and we applied for a local nursery but we were told that we didn’t have a choice and now we take one child to a nursery that is two hours away (return journey), and the other one stays at home. This is because we are staying at a temporary address. We have lived in Britain for five years and moved to seven accommodations. Because of staying in a temporary accommodation we feel as if other people are controlling our life. All of us are stressed; my husband and my two small children are all stressed. The children have been admitted to hospital twice because of this.”

A mother from Kosovo

### Lack of access to information

"I wish I had childcare so I could study or work part-time. There is no help for women. I have no support. I wish the government could do something to help."

A mother from Iraq

Many of the organisations that took part in the research said that the refugee women they work with often feel hopeless and isolated, not knowing where to access information about childcare and financial support. Many of the women involved in the survey also said they feel isolated, and the lack of information and support was a common concern to most of them.

Both organisations and individuals found that there is insufficient outreach into refugee communities and through places that are regularly used by refugee women, such as GP surgeries, community centres, shops, libraries and colleges.

The majority of mothers had learnt about Early Years provisions through friends and other informal means rather than through any structured effort made by the service providers. This often meant that it took the women years – or as long as it took them to build friendships and networks in

the new country – to find out about available services. Many of the participants whose children were over five said their children stayed at home until the age of four or five and never used any Early Years provisions, because they did not know what was on offer.

### Children's growth and development

Many refugee women expressed concern that their children's exclusion from Early Years education would affect them negatively in the longer term. Many of the organisations involved also felt that it is important to tackle the exclusion of disadvantaged children because they are the adults of tomorrow.

"Children who missed out as a child will also miss out as an adult. This can lead to underachievement, crime and unsociable behaviour. The government and society have to address that. Empowering women and parents is very important if we are to tackle social exclusion."

A mother from Eritria

### The cost of childcare

"I went to Sure Start, and they asked me to pay £150 per week per child. Where can I find the money?"

A Congolese mother of two children under five

The high cost of childcare is a great source of concern for the majority of refugee women. Only 13% of the women who took part in the research were in employment, and in most instances this was in low paid jobs in the services or catering industries (the women worked mainly as cleaners, security staff or in catering). These women found it most difficult to cope with the cost of childcare as they work long hours for minimal pay.

"If I had proper childcare support, I would be able to work. It is difficult to get out of social security because I can't afford to pay much for childcare. I need a childcare service that is cheaper and also safe."

A mother from Iran



"I think there should be more childcare support for parents undertaking training or studies"

A mother from Iran

Many women try to find work that they can fit around their childcare responsibilities, such as evenings and weekends when they can ask friends or relatives to help out with looking after the children. The problem with this is it clearly traps them further into low paid jobs with little prospects:

"I have been working as a cleaner for many years. I work either early morning or late afternoon so that I can look after my children during the day, but I don't like the job. But I had little choice about the type of job I could find."

A mother from Columbia

For the majority of women, those that did not work, the problem of childcare was very often a major cause for their difficulties in accessing paid employment:

"I would like to work and I want to support my family but at the moment I don't have any support for the children to be looked after."

A mother from Albania

### Difficulties in accessing training

Another common concern for the individuals and the organisations that took part in the survey was the lack of access to training provisions for refugee women as a result of their lack of childcare. Many refugee women are unable to attend training or education because of a lack of childcare and because they lack access to information about what the training and education providers can do to support people with childcare needs.

"Women with small children can't do anything if they don't have childcare. We can't work or study. There should be more childcare!"

A mother from Congo

There was a clear consensus among participating individuals and organisations that there should be more ESOL classes that provide free crèches. In-house crèches were by far the preferred option, because they are cheaper, more accessible and more cost effective. Women also feel more relaxed and so are better able to concentrate and learn when they know their children are on site.

### Lack of flexibility of hours by providers

Many women stated that they would need more flexible hours if they are to combine their childcare responsibilities with training and / or employment opportunities. Many also said they would like more hours, but cannot afford them.

"Women with small children can't do anything if they don't have childcare. We can't work or study. There should be more childcare!"

A Vietnamese mother in employment

"My child attends nursery for 12 hours a week, but I need more."

A mother from Congo

### Lack of information in community languages and lack of interpreters

"Everybody only speaks English. The information was only in English!"

A mother from Somalia

The lack of access to translated information or interpreting services was one of the major concerns of refugee women trying to access childcare provisions. All parents experience difficulties when first having to leave their small child in care, but for refugee women this is seriously compounded by the lack of extra language support. As the numbers in sections 3.1. and 3.2. above indicated, 42% of participants spoke little or basic English, yet as many as 72% said they were never offered the use of an interpreter or given extra language support.

"If a child does not speak any English and/or the parent does not understand much English and there are no interpreters available, then this can sometimes be very difficult for the Early Years staff and also for the parents."

Early Years Worker

This lack of language support and lack of awareness that refugee mothers might not be familiar with the childcare system also meant that women often felt unwelcome on their first visit to their local Early Years provider. They did not feel the service was for them.

"When I first visited the service, I did not feel welcome. Nobody explained anything for me."

A mother from Somalia

### Children's lack of English

"I think under 5 services in London are not very good for refugee children because they don't speak English. Children need their own language and culture. The childcare in London should look after refugee children."

A mother from Somalia

Similarly, the fact that their children did not speak English was another major cause for concern for refugee women. A total of 81% of mothers who used Early Years services said their children had little or no English language proficiency when first starting Early Years services, and this may have had an impact on the children's ability to settle into the environment.

"At home I speak French with my son but in the nursery they only speak English. I think he got confused!"

A mother from Congo

It is also very likely that lack of language support services for themselves and their children is part of the reasons why 18% of the refugee women who took part in the survey did not have access to Early Years services at all.

### Sensitivity of services to cultural and religious differences

"We need childcare provided by people who share the same culture as us so our children can conserve our values."

A mother from Congo

"It would be good to have a childminder from my country that understands my language and my culture!"

A mother from Iran

“Everybody only speaks English. The information was only in English!”

A mother from Somalia

A common concern of the women was that the childcare provisions in London did not share their cultural (and, if applicable, religious) values. Many would have been happier to leave their small children with someone that they felt shared their culture, and this probably explains at least in part why a lot of the women used friends and relatives to look after their children.

Refugee women’s religious beliefs also have serious implications for their ability to access childcare provisions when the services fail to provide food that is in accordance with these beliefs. Although one woman said that she was very pleased with her local nursery, partly because they had been so good at providing her child’s special dietary needs for Halal food, many other women found that their children had been given food that was not appropriate for them to eat. As a result, some of the children chose not to eat or ate very little when in day care because they had been told by their parents to avoid certain foods.

Many women also expressed unhappiness about the negative attitude of some staff towards their special dietary demands. They felt that they were not treated with recognition and respect.

“My child did not eat the food because it was different.”

A mother from Somalia

Many of the organisations that were interviewed suggested multi-agency platforms as a way to encourage dialogue between different sections of the community and better practice. They also thought that platforms should be made available for refugees to share their views and experiences with Early Years providers as a way to promote services that are more appropriate and sensitive to the cultural and religious needs of refugees.

#### **Feeling discriminated against**

“The staff were rude and unfriendly. They spoke to me angrily.”

A mother from Somalia

A few women said they were unhappy about the way they had been treated by childcare staff. They felt discriminated against because of their poor English or because of the requests they had made for their child’s cultural and religious needs to be met.

#### **Lack of awareness of refugee issues by Early Years workers**

Generally there was a sense that Early Years workers lacked awareness of refugee issues and the specific needs of refugee women and their children. Many of the women interviewed felt unwelcome when first visiting their local provision and did not have a sense that there was any understanding for their situation or support coming from the staff. The majority of organisations involved in the survey also raised this issue, and suggested that refugee issues should be included into the curricula of childcare training courses as a way to overcome it. Various proposals for partnership work including refugee community organisations and Early Years providers as well as multi-agency platforms were also made, as a way to promote better dialogue and understanding (see the recommendations in sections 3.4. and 4.2. below).

### Lack of diversity among childcare staff

Both the individual refugee women and the organisations who took part in the research felt that Early Years provision in London would greatly benefit from the recruitment of childcare workers to reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity of local communities.

"I think it would be good to employ people from different countries who speak good English but also another language."

A mother from Ukraine

Many refugee women are eager to enter the labour market and would be willing to work in childcare, yet even those who have undertaken training in this area do not often make it into paid employment.

"We run English classes for refugees and have an in-house crèche. We were keen to employ staff that reflects the diversity of our clients. But it has not been easy to always find the right staff."

A woman's organisation

When training is being provided, participants should be supported beyond the training and into employment. Every effort should be made by providers to reach out to refugee communities in their recruiting. Refugee women's

language skills in their home languages would make them a tremendous asset to Early Years provisions and to their wider communities.

"My husband is disabled, and so is one of my children. I can't go anywhere because I can't leave a disabled child with a disabled father. But I would like to study childcare and become a childminder!"

A mother from Somalia

"I am studying childcare. I have good experience already because I have looked after children all my life. It's my favourite job!"

A mother from Somalia

### 3.4. Ideas for improvement put forth by organisations

Organisations were asked to make suggestions based on their experiences of working with refugee women on how to make childcare provisions more accessible, more affordable and more appropriate (more sensitive to cultural and religious needs) for refugee women. They were also asked to name examples of good practice that they had encountered in their work. The following section lists the major suggestions that were made and shared by the majority of participating organisations:

**Table 1**

Ideas to make Early Years provisions more accessible for refugee women

Introduction days and coffee mornings for parents who speak languages other than English, as well as open days and evenings to welcome and discuss children's needs.

Provision of translated registration forms (languages to reflect the local demography) and readily available interpreting services.

Workshops for refugees on childcare services in their own language.

Direct contact between providers and families.

Provision of sufficient information (again translated into community languages) to parents on pre-school services. Adverts, leaflets and posters should be put up in schools, community centres, supermarkets and other public services that refugee women are likely to attend.

Increased numbers of available places in pre-school clubs and crèches.

Recruitment of childcare workers to reflect the ethnic diversity of local refugee communities.

Provide home visits to refugee families by bilingual outreach workers.

Sure Start should also evaluate their service to find out why some refugee children start school without having had the chance to attend Early Years provisions.

**Table 2**

Ideas to make Early Years provisions more affordable for refugee women

Provision of subsidised and funded childcare for refugee communities and for women who earn low salaries.

Partnerships between providers, community groups and voluntary organisations. These will benefit refugee women through the commitment of community organisations to their own communities and such services would also offer good value for money.

Use community nurseries, and provide funding to community nurseries.

Expand drop-in centres and make drop-ins affordable (e.g. through subsidies by government schemes).

Provide mobile libraries that offer toys and learning materials to those who cannot access services or afford to purchase toys and books for their children.

Free childcare provision for educational or training programmes attended by refugee women.

**Table 3**

Ideas to make Early Years provisions more culturally sensitive

Provide training for childcare workers about refugees' cultural and religious background so that staff can develop awareness.

Seek support from community organisations so that they can share their expertise for training purposes.

Survey pre-schools to audit the numbers of bi-lingual staff.

More women from refugee and minority ethnic communities should be trained as childcare workers so that they can serve their community.

Form partnerships between individual refugee women and community groups who provide childcare (e.g. for training). Women could offer their services and in turn be offered a space in the crèche to attend training or employment related activities.

Refugee women's groups need to network and share information on childcare issues.

**Table 4**

Examples of good practice

Play sessions and home visits specifically for refugee families.

ESOL or vocational training provisions with in-house crèches.

Direct communication between providers and refugee community representatives on how to access services and how to get support.

Some Early Years services provide coffee mornings for parents and their children and also supply bilingual support for various communities.

### 4.1. Conclusions

The findings of the present research covered various aspects of refugee women's lives in London: their housing situation, language skills, access to training and employment, and social life. All of these have implications for refugee women's ability to access Early Years provisions, and, in turn, should impact on the government's strategy for such services. The research recommendations below highlight actions that need to be taken to remove the barriers that keep refugee women from accessing childcare services on an equal basis.

Refugee women have come to the UK from countries in conflict and many have suffered traumatic experiences in the process. Some have lost their husbands or other members of their family. In any case they must start a new life in a foreign country and culture. Close-knit extended families are common in most of the countries from where refugee women have come, but in the UK they find themselves without any family, friends or support systems. They must rely on established communities in the UK and in the absence of English language skills, it is understandable that they do not venture much beyond such communities.

For successful integration and good race relations that will benefit the country as a whole, the government must provide language courses and employment opportunities, but any such provisions are worthless for refugee women who have children if they do not come with accessible and affordable childcare.

The research found that for refugee women with children, one of the main barriers to accessing Early Years services lies in a lack of accessible information about the services on offer. Predictably, refugee women do not come to this country equipped with knowledge about how the system operates. They come from foreign countries and cultures where childcare is likely to be organised very differently, mostly through extended family networks. In the absence of knowledge and information, refugee women are left unable to approach the system. Even when they do, they are not sure what their rights are, for instance if they want to make a complaint about the service.

Another important barrier to accessing Early Years services that the research identified lies in the precarious nature of many refugee women's housing situation. Many refugee women live in temporary accommodation with no knowledge of how long they will have to stay there. Because there are no support mechanisms to enable them to access the local Early Years provisions until they move to permanent housing, they and their children tend to loose out. Many of the refugee women surveyed for this research have indicated that temporary housing has badly affected their mental health as well as that of their children.

The cost of childcare is another major barrier for refugee women. Because they suffer discrimination on the labour market due to their immigration status and level of English, many refugee women are either unemployed or work in low paid jobs, sometimes working night shifts. This means they are not able to afford the cost of childcare, but responsibility for their children prevents them from accessing the training or the



better jobs that would improve their earnings. In this sense there is no financial incentive for refugee women to go to work. The system seems self-defying in that it punishes those mothers who go out to work and earn a living (not to mention self-esteem and pride) by forcing them to hand over their entire wages to childcare providers.

Many mothers find it difficult to leave their small children with childcare staff who are effectively strangers. For refugee women, this difficulty is compounded by fact that the childcare providers do not share their background and culture.

Religion can be another barrier for refugee women with small children. Many of the women who took part in the research are Muslim, and they have found that nurseries do not always respect their wishes for e.g. special food. Refugee women have also found that providers do not consider it a parent's right to ask for religious and cultural consideration in the care of their children, but rather seem to consider any special requests a burden or an extravagance.

The research further highlighted that local authorities and other Early Years providers have little or no understanding of refugees issues and the specific children care needs of refugee women. It is important that the curricula for childcare education include awareness of refugee issues – including awareness of the specific issues facing refugee women and their children.

Despite the prominence of the equality rhetoric in the public sector, the present research has found that the childcare workforce in London does not adequately reflect the demography of local communities.

Many of the refugee women who took part in this research expressed an interest in working as childminders or as workers for other childcare providers. This would benefit whole communities but there are no proper mechanisms of financial and material support to achieve this.

From the research findings it seems that there is lack of strategic co-ordination between Early Years providers, policy makers, funders and local refugee communities. The building of partnerships between the various sections of the community would

make childcare services more accessible, more culturally sensitive, and therefore more equal in their provisions as a whole.

If childcare providers are going to be committed to equal opportunities, they need to be able to adequately identify the ethnic, cultural and religious make-up of their local population. However, the categorisations that are used for ethnic monitoring in England and Wales are not well received by refugee communities. The women who took part in this research have found such ethnic categorisation to be confusing rather than helpful. Faced with this, many prefer to identify themselves as "other", which is not helpful for ethnic monitoring.



## 4.2. Recommendations

The government, employers and equality bodies like the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) and the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) must have a joint strategy and action plan to challenge race and gender discrimination so as to address the double discrimination of refugee women. Empowering refugee women must include improving their access to quality childcare and their access to training and employment opportunities.

Local Authorities must make every effort to implement the Race Relations Amendment Act (RRAA) 2000 so as to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination and promote equality of opportunity in Early Years provisions.

The National Childcare Strategy must address the needs of refugee women and their children. Similarly, the childcare strategies for London by the London Development Agency and the Greater London Authority must address the needs and special circumstances of refugee women and their children.

Providers must make more information on childcare services available, and this must be made accessible through interpretation into community languages.

Providers should also offer regular open days (with access to interpreters) for refugee parents.

Providers must make an effort to reach out to refugee communities in providing information about their services. Flyers, leaflets and posters should be displayed in places that are commonly used by refugee women, such as local supermarkets, GP surgeries, community centres, and refugee community organisations.

Local Early Years providers should monitor who is using their service and who is missing out, and look at the reasons for this.

Refugee children are first and foremost children. Therefore, their needs should be met irrespective of immigration status. Childcare places must be made available irrespective of a child's housing situation.

As important as it is to meet children's needs for quality care and education, it is also important to address the needs of refugee women who are often the primary carers of their children. Some form of respite service must be provided for refugee mothers who have no extended family to rely on in the UK and who are the sole carers of their children.

Local Authorities must allocate resources to support local

community-based childcare initiatives that take in to account the needs of refugee mothers.

There are examples of dropouts from Early Years provisions as some refugee parents withdrew their children. This is usually when they are not happy with the service they receive. Service providers should identify the causes for drop-outs and take remedial actions.

Early Years partnerships should involve refugees and take into account the childcare needs of the local refugee community. Similarly refugee community organisations must be encouraged to influence the policy and provisions of local services. This will remedy the lack of awareness of refugee issues by providers as well as the lack of knowledge about Early Years services prevalent among refugee parents.

Early Years providers must make refugee issues part of their inclusion strategy not an ad-hoc extra; for instance they must have a workforce that represents the refugee communities. They must address the lack of visible racial and ethnic mix among their staff, to reflect the local demography.

A combined and integrated Early Years centre should be made available locally where people can easily access education, healthcare and social services under one umbrella.

The employment strategies of Local Authorities must make every effort to recruit and train refugee women who are keen in childcare jobs.

Job advertisements for childcare jobs should be advertised widely in local community centres that are likely to be used by refugee women, as well as in the newsletters of refugee groups.

The selection practices and interview techniques for recruiting childcare staff must be sensitive to cultural and linguistic differences so as not to discriminate unduly against applicants from a refugee background.

The current childcare system in the UK mostly represents Western cultural, religious and social values.

In multi-ethnic Britain and given the diversity of London, the values of other communities should also be reflected in the care and education of the next generation. The childcare system needs to be instrumental in creating good race relations and harmony between various ways of life rather than excluding

some and contributing to tensions between different communities and value systems.

The current Sure Start boundaries need to be re-examined because there are examples of demarcated boundaries providing services to the well-off whilst excluding those with the most need. Sure Start should monitor why many refugee parents are not accessing the service.

Childcare must not financially burden those who are willing and happy to work. Any government programme that attempts to tackle unemployment must integrate childcare provision into any schemes and initiatives targeting the unemployed.

The national and London employment strategies must promote the idea that childcare responsibility should be shared fairly between men and women.

Leave to care for a dependent must be made accessible to men and women on equal terms. Women should be able to share some of their maternity leave with fathers.

Employers must create a degree of flexibility in jobs. However there is also a need for childcare provision that covers longer hours and

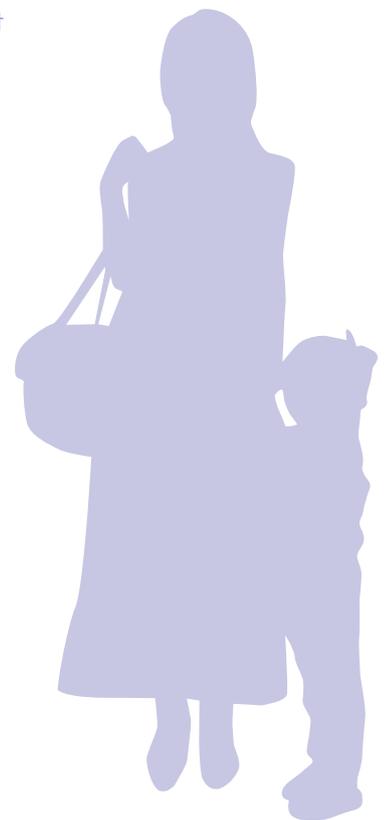
weekends so that those who cannot find 9am – 5pm (Monday to Friday) jobs would have the necessary childcare.

Funding bodies for training and employment schemes must provide adequate resources for providers to be able to include childcare provisions.

Colleges and other training providers should have in-house crèche facilities as part of their mainstream service.

There is a need for more accredited quality training for childcare workers. Those who are trained must also be supported to access employment. Thus funding bodies should provide resources for supporting trainees into employment beyond the immediate remit of the training course.

The existing model and curricula for childcare training must take into account the changing demography of Britain and the ethnic diversity of its population. It should also include awareness of refugee issues and the needs of refugee mothers and their children.



## APPENDIX

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Migration histories: [www.movinghere.org.uk/galleries/](http://www.movinghere.org.uk/galleries/)

National Childcare Strategy Fact Sheet: [www.number-10.gov.uk/output/page1430.asp](http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/page1430.asp)

National Statistic Website: [www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk)

## A.2. Questionnaire for Individuals

Number \_\_\_\_\_

Experience of Refugee Women accessing under 5 childcare services in London

### Part 1: Personal details

#### I Address

1. Are you staying at your own address?  
A. Yes?  
B. No ?
2. Is it?  
A. Temporary?  
B. Permanent?
3. How long have you been there?  
A. 1-6 months?  
B. 7-12 months?  
C. More than a year?
4. Which Borough of London is it in?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Have you lived anywhere else in London?  
A. Yes?  
B. No? If yes tell us where you lived  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Where is your Country of origin?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Current immigration status  
A. Asylum Seeker?  
B. Application refused?  
C. Exceptional Leave to Remain?  
D. Indefinite Leave to Remain?  
E. British Citizen?  
G. Other?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- H. If Asylum Seeker, how long ago did you apply for asylum?  
A. 1-6 months?  
B. 7-12 months?  
C. 1-2 years?  
D. 3-5 years?  
E. More? Tell us \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. Age  
What age group are you?  
A. 18-29?  
B. 30-39?  
C. 40-49?  
D. 50-60?  
E. Under 18?  
F. Above 60?

9. Language:  
A. What is your first language?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- B. What other languages do you speak? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. Religion  
A. What is your religion?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. Education Background  
Do you Speak, Read and Write English?  
A. Very fluent?  
B. Moderate?  
C. Basic?  
D. Not at all?

12. What is your level of education?  
A. Elementary school?  
B. Secondary/high School?  
C. University with degree?  
D. More than one degree?

### Part 2: Access to under 5 Childcare

13. Do you have?  
A. Child?  
B. Children?
14. How many under five children did/do you have?  
A. 1? B. 2? C. 3? D. 4?
15. What ages are they?  
A. 0-1? B. 2-3? C. 4-5?  
D. 5+?
16. Does your child go to any of the following?  
A. Play group?  
B. Crèche?  
C. Childminder?  
D. Nursery?  
E. Other?  
\_\_\_\_\_
17. How many days a week does your child attend the service?  
A. 1 day a week?  
B. 2 days?  
C. 3 days?  
D. Other?  
E. Tell us how many hours your child attends  
\_\_\_\_\_
18. Are you happy with that?  
A. Yes?  
B. No? If no why? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
19. How far away is the under five service that your child is attending?  
A. Very near?  
B. Not bad?  
C. Bus distance?
20. If your child is under five and not attending any of the above, is he/she on a waiting list?  
A. Yes?  
B. No?
21. If waiting, how long have you been waiting?  
A. 1-6mths?  
B. 7-12mths?  
C. More?
22. If you are staying at a temporary address, has that contributed to long waiting times?  
A. Yes? B. No?
23. If you had stayed at your previous address, did you have access to childcare?  
A. Yes? B. No?
24. If yes, how would you rate your experience there?  
A. Poor?  
B. Satisfactory?  
C. Very good?
25. How did you first know about the service your child is attending?  
A. Friends?  
B. Leaflet?  
C. GP?  
D. School?  
E. Other? tell us \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
26. What would you rate your experience of accessing under five services?  
A. 1-3?  
B. 4-6?  
C. 7-10?  
(The lowest score is poor)

**Part 3: Quality of under 5  
Childcare**

27. When you first went to the under five service, how was information given to you?  
A. In English?  
B. In own language?  
C. Through interpreter?  
D. Not told anything?  
E. Other please tell us \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
28. At your first arrival, did you feel welcomed?  
A. Yes? why \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
B. No? why \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
29. Did anyone show you around the place?  
A. Yes?  
B. No?
30. What was your first observation? (Can tick more than one box)  
A. Happy children?  
B. Tidy and organised?  
C. Plenty of learning material?  
D. Friendly staff?  
E. Posters in many languages?  
F. Bi-lingual staff?
31. After your first visit, were you happy for your child to attend the service?  
A. Yes?  
B. No?  
C. Had no choice?  
If C tell us why \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
32. Did your child speak English before attending under five services?  
A. Yes?  
B. A little?  
C. None?

33. Were you asked if you or your child needed bilingual support?  
A. Yes?  
B. No?
34. Were you asked if your child has any special needs?  
A. Yes?  
B. No?
35. If you answered yes, tell us more \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
36. Did the service cater for special needs?  
A. Yes?  
B. No?
37. After your child started, did he/she settle in quickly?  
A. Yes?  
B. No? if no tell us why \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
38. What would you rate the quality?  
A. 1-3?  
B. 4-6?  
C. 7-10?  
(The lowest score is poor)
39. If you answered A, tell us why \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Part 4: Barriers to  
opportunities**

40. Are you currently attending?  
A. Training?  
B. Education?  
C. Volunteering?  
D. Paid job?
41. Tell us what it is \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
42. Where it is \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
43. If you are attending any of the above, who is looking after your child?  
A. Play group?  
B. Crèche?  
C. Childminder?  
D. School nursery?  
E. Friend/ family?  
F. Other? \_\_\_\_\_
44. Who pays for it? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
45. If you are not doing anything, is lack of childcare one of the reason?  
A. Yes?  
B. No?  
C. Other tell us \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
46. Are you aware of any childcare assistance available for your under five child?  
A. Yes?  
B. No?  
C. Other? If yes tell us how you knew \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Part 5: Comments, Suggestions  
and Recommendations**

47. Please fill free to say anything about your under five childcare experience that is not covered on any of the sections above.  
A. Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- B. Please tell us any suggestions and recommendations you think will help to improve under five-services for refugees. Recommendations \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

On behalf of RWA, thank you for co-operating to take part in this survey!

A.3. Questionnaire for Organisations

1. Does your organisation provide services to refugee women?  
Yes? No?

2. How long have you been providing this service to refugees?  
1-3 yrs? 4-6 yrs? 6-10 yrs?  
Other? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. What are the specific difficulties refugee women with children under five experiences?  
Please tell us \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. What do you suggest can be done to improve these barriers?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. If you know of any good practice on this area please tell us \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. What ideas do you to have to make preschool provisions more?

Accessible \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Affordable \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Appropriate \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. Please tell us any other comments not stated above that would be relevant to this survey \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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