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**ASYLUM SEEKERS' FAMILY WELL BEING AS A CHALLENGE FOR
IMMIGRATION POLICIES
(A case study of Kosovan families in the East End of London, 2003-2004)**

INTRODUCTION

Families of asylum seekers come from extraordinary situations, wars or persecutions in which they lost not only their home and livelihood but often relatives and friends. These traumatic experiences affected both their physical and psychological health. Arriving in a safe country they have to adapt to foreign ways not knowing if they will eventually be allowed to stay. Families need stability, and the uncertainty is not good for the families' well being. However naturally each hosting country has an immigration policy which puts the interests of the host society before the interests of the newcomers.

In the light of the Kosovan/Albanian asylum-seekers' family experiences, we will look at immigration policies in the UK (particularly since 1999) from the political, social and humanitarian perspective with particular reference to the Amnesty of October 2003. Regarding the immigration policies, it is necessary to take into account the huge number of people applying for asylum in the EU and in the UK. These facts are a very serious challenge for the government.

In an attempt to answer the questions:

- how the UK's immigration policy is dealing with the challenges emerging in connection with the situation of asylum seekers' families;
- what the challenges are facing immigration policies in regard to the well being of asylum seekers' families;
- how the needs of asylum seekers' families can be met;

we will consider three dimensions of well being in a family, especially the well being of children: firstly the welfare dimension (housing, benefits, health, employment,); secondly the educational dimension (schooling) and thirdly the family stability dimension (clear future, integration with the society) and see how the immigration policies towards asylum-seekers' families meet the standards set by the relevant articles of the UN Convention regarding the Rights of the Child as stated in article 27.1: 'States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.'

I. A CASE STUDY OF KOSOVAN FAMILIES IN THE EAST END OF LONDON

1.1. Kosovan refugees in the UK

The Kosovan families in our survey came to the UK as a result of the conflict in Kosovo. There had been a great exodus of Kosovan-Albanians from the province of Kosovo prior to and

during the Kosovan conflict and NATO bombing campaign of March – June 1999. Approximately eighty percent of the entire population of Kosovo, of whom ninety percent were Kosovan Albanians were actually displaced. The United Kingdom had recognised and accepted Albanian Kosovans as refugees, since 1996, on account of their ethnicity and the fact they had a history of persecution so from the start of NATO's bombing the Home Office had been processing all Kosovans without a great deal of consideration of the individual cases. However, from June 1999 the Kosovans were no longer granted refugee status but rather granted automatically 12 months exceptional leave to remain (ELR). That was to change in December 1999 when the Home secretary declared that Kosovans would no longer automatically be granted ELR as the Province of Kosovo was declared secure and the Kosovan Albanians were no longer in danger of persecution and therefore should return to Kosovo. The situation was complicated because the Home Office was experiencing administration difficulties so they were not immediately returned and thousands of Kosovan Albanian families found themselves left awaiting the decision of the Home Office regarding their status. In an attempt to relieve pressure on an overwhelmed Immigration Directorate the Home Office announced, on the 24th October 2003, an Asylum Amnesty for approximately 50,000 asylum-seekers, many of them families from Kosovo, allowing them to stay in the UK.

In our survey approximately three quarters of the families interviewed, had entered the UK by chance and the majority had arrived illegally. Almost four fifths of the group had registered for asylum within two days of their arrival.

By early November 2004, twenty-eight of the fifty families had some form of status: five had been granted refugee status plus one husband (his family had applied separately and were among those numbered who had been granted the Amnesty; nineteen in all had been granted the Amnesty, that is they are allowed to stay in the UK indefinitely, outside the normal rules of immigration; two had been granted Exceptional Leave to Remain, temporary residence in the UK; one had been granted Discretionary Leave and one had been granted Humanitarian Protection until 2006. One had been refused the Amnesty and was appealing against the decision; while eleven were still awaiting the decision of the Home Office. The remaining ten families were no longer in any contact and had either been relocated or deported. By June 2005 another three families had been granted the Amnesty and eight families were still awaiting the decision of the Home Office.

Having considered the facts it is quite clear that a great number of immigrants wanted to settle down in the UK and the State was very generous to people coming from abroad. However, in the case of the people in our study - half of the Kosovan families had actually arrived in Great Britain after the war and even those who had arrived before the war would logically be expected to return to Kosovo when the war and persecution was ended. We can understand why the UK changed their asylum policy towards Kosovans after June 1999, but how did it appear from the Kosovan point of view?

Our survey shows that most of the respondents and their families had had very traumatic experiences that were not initially taken into account when the policy was changed in 1999. Having had personal contact with the Kosovan families it was obvious from the humanitarian perspective that it would not have been right to send them back to Kosovo immediately after the war. The international news informed us that even in June 2005 there was still great unrest in Kosovo and we know from many situations of unrest in the world that it takes many years for reconciliation to occur between neighbours with different ethnic backgrounds and to arrive at a situation where everyone can live in peace and harmony.

Regarding the way the families came to the UK was very often extremely difficult and dangerous. Many travelled in a closed lorry, without the right to disembark to stretch or even to use a toilet. It is important to remember that we are talking about families with very young

children, many with babies who needed to be drugged to keep them quiet during the journey and prevent detection by the authorities.

Some of the Kosovans interviewed told us about their journey:

‘When we got into the lorry we did not know where we were going. There was just our family plus one boy. The journey took seven days. When we got out of the lorry someone asked us – “Why did you come here?” I replied: “I don’t know where I am.” When we arrived we were put into prison for twelve hours and then sent to social services.’

Another said: ‘The boat was a sixteen seat fishing boat from Albania. It took us to Italy. We lived for four days on the street in Italy and were then put on a lorry. We sat with carpets. They gave our six months old baby drugs to keep quiet. We were also given food and water. I was very frightened. When we arrived in Dover the police asked us to get out. I was terrified and pleaded, “Please don’t take my baby.” The police gave us a travel card to get to London.’

Another described in more detail what had happened:

‘With my sister and her husband we took a train to Albania. With a lot of other people we got a tiny boat at midnight to cross over to Italy. I had never seen the sea before. I was very frightened and held my four years old son close to me. I hadn’t realised how cold it would be and my son whimpered. The agent who had arranged the trip told me to shut him up or he would shoot him. I was frightened and kept whispering to my son to be quiet. We had no food and few clothes. On arriving in Italy we got on a lorry but on finding us in the back the drivers dumped us on the road miles from anywhere. I drew a picture of a train and a young lad told us how to get to a station. We were very hungry. An Italian lady asked why my son was crying and with signs I told her he was hungry. She produced from her bag two very hard biscuits, which my son sucked and eventually fell asleep. We got onto another lorry. It was full of bottles and we had to climb in between the crates to hide. It was difficult carrying my son but I wouldn’t be parted from him. I was afraid even to let my younger sister take him.’

Describing his family’s journey a Kosovan man said:

‘When we decided to leave Kosovo we went first to Albania and stayed there for two days. We had arranged to take a boat to Italy. It was only a small inflatable boat meant for a few people but about forty-five people went on this boat. The journey by sea took four hours in the dark. The night before two boats had collided in the dark – one travelling from Albania, the second from Italy. All forty-five asylum-seekers had been drowned. It was very frightening. It took three attempts before we got safely to Italy and was very expensive. We started the journey with 25,000 marks and by the time we reached Dover we only had 5,000 marks (about £1900) left. From Italy we took a lorry through France. It was meant to take us to London but it took us to Spain. We were on the lorry for two days and nights with nothing to eat. In Spain we were asked what we wanted to do and we said we wanted to go to England. They took us straight to Paris. In Paris we were put on a big lorry in the night which took us to Dover.’

To opt to travel in such a way showed that the families must have had very compelling motivation to leave Kosovo. They were indeed desperate and determined to escape whatever the cost to them and their families.

1.2. The Kosovan families survey

1.2.1. Description of the Questionnaire¹

We interviewed fifty Albanian speakers, of whom forty-four were Kosovans although one was originally from Yugoslavia, five Albanians and one Montenegrin. Our method of finding interviewees was ‘Snowballing’. Starting with Kosovan families we already knew, we relied on these contacts to put us in touch with other Albanian speakers and various NGO support centres in the East End of London, who could put us in contact with further Kosovan asylum-seekers.

In all there were seventy questions in the original questionnaire, with eight questions in the March 2004 update and twenty-three in the October 2004 update for those granted the Amnesty and twenty-one for those who had not received the Amnesty but had been granted either Refugee Status or Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR), Humanitarian protection, Discretionary Leave or were either still awaiting the Home Office decision or were appealing against a refusal.

In the original questionnaire the following topics were covered:

- Profile of family: age, marital status, children, household, education and occupation in country of origin, affiliation to any faith group
- Choice of the UK, way of arrival legally/illegally, application processes for asylum
- Assimilation: English lessons, children’s education, accommodation, medical & legal care, present status in UK, permission to work, help by Church/ Faith groups, treatment received from other people in London
- Well being, health, material situation, help from voluntary and state groups
- Links with home country & future plans, hopes regarding a future immigration policy.
- Affects of the Amnesty on status, wellbeing and occupation

The March 2004 update questionnaire covered the following topics:

- Present Status
- Changes to family’s material situation since the spring of 2003
- Present accommodation
- Immigration lawyer
- Children – another baby? Changes to school?
- Benefits / problems with benefits

The October 2004 update questionnaire covered the following topics:

- Present status, date of arrival in UK
- Date granted Amnesty
- Present Accommodation, condition, number of rooms, settled or required to move, any problems when moving from Social Services/NASS to housing provided by Local Council, emergency accommodation
- Benefits,
- British citizenship, passport, travel documents

1.2.2. Sex and age of Respondents

Although we were interested in the family we only interviewed one member of each family who responded on the family’s behalf. The majority of respondents were women (45) (Table 1.) this was mainly due to two facts. Firstly most of the interviews took place at Refugee centres where

¹ Kosovan Families Survey 2003-4.

the women were receiving English lessons and had formed support groups for themselves and their children. The second reason appeared to be quite simply reluctance on the part of the men to attend these classes and therefore it was more difficult to make contact with them. We asked the respondent's age. By far the majority (33) was in the age group 31-40, while eleven were aged 21-30. There were three aged 41-50 and only one aged 16-20. There were only two people over 50 at the time of the first interview.

Table 1. Sex and age of Respondents

Years old	Male	Female
16 – 20		1
21 – 30		11
31 – 40	3	30
41 – 50	1	2
51 - 60	1	1
Number of respondents	5	45

Source: Kosovan Families Survey 2003-4

1.2.3. Marital status

All the respondents had been married although two came to the UK single, of which one came to join her boyfriend and married once they arrived in England. Forty were still married and living with their partners, while five of the women's husbands had died during the conflict in Kosovo and circumstances had forced five couples to live apart, of whom two husbands had been deported without their wives even though one wife was six months pregnant and they had a two years old son.

Through an interpreter she explained what had happened:

'My husband went to sign on at the local police station as usual on Monday 7 April 2003. However this time he was not allowed to return home instead he was taken to a detention centre at Heathrow and told he would be returned to Kosovo on the following Thursday, 10 April. He was allowed to phone me and he told me to be ready with our son to leave for Kosovo. I packed our few belongings and waited anxiously. Two days later he was told he would not be travelling that week but the following. He asked if we could travel as a family with him and the Immigration officials told him that would happen. I heard nothing more until he phoned me from the capital of Kosovo and said that he had been awoken that day, Thursday, 10 April at 3am and taken to the airport. He had asked once again where his wife and son were and the officials had told him that his family was already on the plane. They were not and he was very distressed. He was flown back to Kosovo without us.'

1.2.4. Number of children per family

We concentrated on families, the majority of whom had very young children. The average number of children in a family was two. Twenty-four families had two children. Only two families had no children, nine families had one child while fourteen families had three children. Only one family had four children.

1.2.5. Ages and sex of children

The majority of the children, sixty-seven were under nine years old, while only thirty-six were over nine years old. Interestingly the families had fifty-eight boys and only forty-five girls (Table 2.). Not all the children were with their parents. One respondent told us that her son, aged fifteen, was missing in Kosovo and another told us that as she and her husband were separated their son spent four days with her and three with his dad. Two respondents were pregnant. Both had baby boys who arrived after the initial interviews – one child in late June 2003 and the other in late July 2003. Not included in Table 2 are three new arrivals - a baby girl born in February 2004 and another two babies (a boy and a girl) born in August 2004.

Table 2. Ages and sex of children

Age in Years	0-2	3-5	6-8	9-11	12-14	15-17	18+	Total
Boys	6	13	15	10	4	6	4	58
Girls	10	10	13	2	5	3	2	45
Total number of children	16	23	28	12	9	9	6	103

Source: Kosovan Families Survey 2003-4

1.2.6. Year respondent arrived in England

All the families interviewed arrived during the period 1997 to 2003 (Table 3.). As we can see the majority arrived immediately before the intervention of the United Nations in the Kosovan conflict or during the conflict or immediately after it, with thirteen arriving in the UK between March 1998 and December 1998 and twenty-six arriving during 1999 while only six arrived in 2000, one in 1997, one in 2001 and 2003 with two in 2002.

Table 3. Year respondent arrived in England

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Jan-Mar		1	3	1			
Apr-Jun	1	3	6	3	1		1
Jul-Sept		3	9	1		1	
Oct-Dec		2	5	1		1	
Not stated		4	4				
Number of families	1	13	26	6	1	2	1

Source: Kosovan Families Survey 2003-4

1.2.7. Motivation to leave country of Origin

The respondents were asked to give no more than five reasons for leaving their home country although some gave more than five and others less (Table 4.) The majority forty gave ‘war’ as the main motivation to leave their own country, twenty-four cited ‘people being killed’ while twenty-two people cited ‘death threats’ as another reason and twenty cited ‘their own house was burnt down’. As one Kosovan explained: ‘The situation was terrible. Houses burnt down and our cousins killed.’ Nineteen declared ‘it was unsafe’ and fourteen also declared ‘women raped’ as a reason for leaving. Many of the women admitted feeling unable to tell their husbands that they also had been raped. A third of the group cited ‘political persecution’ as a reason, while eleven cited ‘religious persecution’ as a reason for leaving. A small number (3) said they hoped for a

better life. Some gave another reason to those listed – fear for their children’s safety. As one Kosovan lady explained: ‘I left my country because there was a war in which I lost my husband and my family. I wanted to save my own life and my son’s.’

Some of the asylum seekers explained in more detail what had happened to make them leave Kosovo. A lady related her story:

‘All the houses were burnt. My uncle was killed. He left six children, the oldest only thirteen. It was a very bad experience. I saw two young people who had their earrings pulled off and then their two hands put in the fire. It was horrible, frightening. I cannot forget their screaming, cannot forget what I saw. My family moved with an uncle to Macedonia. We heard guns. We were threatened with death.’

It wasn’t an easy decision many didn’t want to leave their country. One of the men told us: ‘We didn’t want to leave Kosovo but when the bombs started falling we had to leave if we were to survive. If our family had stayed in Kosovo we would have needed to change our name or religion. Our family had always been Catholic but we were not allowed to practise our religion. I was attacked many times with weapons. I was shot through both legs, stabbed through my foot and in my side and also my head.’

A lady told us:

‘Every day and every night people were arrested. They came and killed people in the night. With our children we saw our house burnt down. My father was arrested. He was beaten and he died a few months later. He had been teaching for forty-two years. My mum died six months later. My mother-in-law and father-in-law were very sick. They are somewhere in Kosovo, aged seventy-five. My big brother was in prison for several years. When he came back he was very sick. After spending a day at the police station and finding our house burnt Mum said it wasn’t safe for us to stay there. We took the car to Macedonia and stayed there for two weeks. Some friends found a lorry going to England.’

Table 4. Motivation to leave country of Origin

Reasons given for leaving country of origin	
War	40
Religious persecution	11
Political persecution	15
People being killed	24
Houses burnt down	18
Own house burnt down	20
It was unsafe	19
People assaulted	9
Death threats	22
People arrested	8
Women raped	14
Hope for a better life	3
Famine	2
Poverty	2

Source: Kosovan Families Survey 2003-4

Another told us: ‘I lost my teeth and my husband was in prison twice.’ A teenager translating for her mother told us: ‘We had to leave our home. Her husband was killed during the war.’

Another lady told us:

“So many people died, so many houses burnt, my husband joined Serbs to fight. After six months the commandant came to my house and said ‘sorry for your husband – a very strong man but he has died,’ Many cousins, family came to my house to say ‘sorry.’ This is tradition. My son was fourteen then some people hit my son and told him, ‘you will die next.’ My son returned to our house and cried and cried. After two to three months some cousins arranged for my son to leave Kosovo and go to another country. I had no contact with anyone to know where my son was going and because of the war there was no telephone. After two to three days or more I heard that my son was with his cousin and had left on a lorry. I left my house and went to my husband’s brother but he is an invalid and has six children so I couldn’t stay. After six months, with help from my family, I paid \$5000 to leave Kosovo.”

The only asylum-seeker we interviewed from Montenegro, a man was also affected by the Kosovan crisis. He told us: ‘I had helped the Kosovan Albanians so the Serbs threatened us with death. I was arrested twice and released as there wasn’t enough evidence however when I was summoned to the High Court for a third time I decided I must leave the country. My wife had been tortured in our country.’

Some of the children offered to draw pictures of their memories of Kosovo. Arnold’s (aged 12) picture showed his home on fire, his dog being shot, many people being killed and many crying. He told Sister Anne: ‘when the soldiers came I was with my grandfather. The soldiers killed my dog and I was very upset. There were tanks everywhere and soldiers shooting.’

II. WELFARE DIMENSION

2.1. Treatment by authorities (police, Home Office)

Treatment by others when the asylum seekers arrived in the UK naturally also affected their sense of well being. The majority of families (36) claimed to have been treated either very well or well by the authorities, police and immigration personnel. (Table 5.) Six said they had been treated okay while only two complained that they had been treated badly. A respondent who arrived initially in Portsmouth declared: ‘We were treated well by Authorities in Croydon but very badly in Portsmouth.’ Another said with anguish: ‘They didn’t believe me.’

Table 5. Treatment by authorities (police, Home Office)

Sent to	London	Southend	Aldershot	Other	Family	Total
Treated Very well	24			2	1	27
Well	12				2	14
Okay	4	1	1			6
Badly	2					2
Very badly						
n/a					1	1
Number of respondents	42	1	1	2	4	50

Source: Kosovan Families Survey 2003-4

Describing her interview one Kosovan said:

‘At the first meeting they took my fingerprints – people were very nice to me. There was an interpreter there. I was given some letters however I wasn’t told they must be returned within 28 days or I would receive a negative. I waited one month and then went to solicitor but I wasn’t given a negative.’

One respondent said sadly: ‘Although some officials were polite, I didn’t feel respected even by the Kosovan interpreters.’ However, for most the experience was more positive as expressed by one asylum seeker who declared: ‘Social services were very respectful.’

2.2. Accommodation since arrival in UK

When asked: ‘How many flats/houses/hotels have you lived in since you arrived here?’ some families did not include the first property they were placed in; the time they stayed with friends or in a hotel or B&B so the following numbers are a little misleading. For example a family who stated on the questionnaire that they had lived in three properties when listing their homes in the UK recently, actually had lived in five properties and were about to move again as their present home had been declared a risk for health and safety. Twenty-three respondents said they had lived in two properties, twenty-one in three properties, three respondents had lived in four properties and two respondents declared they had lived in five properties.

2.3. Present Accommodation

The respondents were asked how many rooms (including the kitchen and bathroom) their present accommodation had for their own’ families sole use. (Table 6.) There appears to be little logic in the allocation of housing, with a family of four with seven rooms while another family of four has just four rooms. Two families of five had only two rooms each, while nine families of four had five rooms each and six families of four had six rooms each.

Table 6. Present accommodation

	1 room	2 rooms	3 rooms	4 rooms	5 rooms	6 or 7 rooms
B & B		1		1		
Council House/Flat			2	2	1	2
Emergency Accommodation	1					
Private rented house/flat				6	8	4
Social housing		1	1	3	11	5
Total number of families	1	2	1	12	20	11

Source: Kosovan Families Survey 2003-4

Table 6.1. Number in family compared to number of rooms in present accommodation

Number in family	1 Room	2 rooms	3 rooms	4 rooms	5 rooms	6 rooms	7 rooms
2	1		2	2			
3		1		7	3		
4				3	9	6	1
5		2	1	1	7	3	1
6							1
Total	1	3	3	12	19	9	3

Source: Kosovan Families Survey 2003-4

As we can see in the Table 6.2. while a staggering thirty respondents had been in the present accommodation less than three years, nine of those had had to move house within the last 6 months. Only six respondents had been in the same home for five to six years. When we consider the remarks of the respondents to the state of their accommodation we must bear in mind that while some were basing their evaluation on their comparison of housing in Kosovo (which is considerably poorer than in the UK) and seeing the accommodation here as at least adequate if not good or very good, others were basing their judgement on the type of housing they would aspire to with twelve stating their accommodation was either fair or poor.

Twenty-seven respondents declared they found their present accommodation either good (16), very good (10) or excellent (1). While eleven declared it was adequate, six said it was fair and six described it as poor. Among those who thought their accommodation was good we hear the comment: ‘Children like the garden. The house is in good condition.’ While other families were far from content. The following comments were expressed among many: ‘The bathroom is very poor. Water from the shower goes through to the kitchen,’ and another stated: ‘We have a very small kitchen with no window. It is difficult to cook as I have asthma.’ Another told us: ‘It was empty with no furniture and needed cleaning.’ and yet another respondent sadly told us: ‘We are waiting for permanent accommodation. We spent 4 years in Tower Hamlets before we moved here. It upset my son very much – he doesn’t smile now.’ And another: ‘We live in emergency accommodation with another family who are from Iran.’

Table 6.2. Length of time in and condition of present accommodation

Description of home	Time in Present home				
	Less than 6 months	6 months to less than one year	1-2 years	3- 4 years	5-6 years
Excellent	1				
Very good	4	1	3	1	1
Good	2	4	4	3	3
Adequate			3	6	2
Fair	1		5		
Poor	1		1	4	

Source: Kosovan Families Survey 2003-4

While many have described their accommodation as good they have also been tolerant of many problems a family born here would not tolerate. For example one couple with three children under six years old, are living at present in a flat for a single person. A few months ago the ceiling in their hall way collapsed on top of their two years old daughter who suffered cuts on her face plus a headache for days. The landlady instead of looking into the cause of the collapse asked the man in the upstairs flat to plaster over the ceiling and hide the damage. Whenever it rains, they have water flooding through their flat roof by their bathroom and are infested with cockroaches and mice. Discovering they had been without hot water for a month, Sr. Anne persuaded the landlady to take immediate action and within twelve hours she had installed a new boiler. Environmental health have declared their home unfit to live in and a health and safety risk. They visited the Homeless Centre on 25 February 2005 with a letter of eviction from their landlady, saying they had to vacate the house within three weeks. They were waiting to be placed in emergency accommodation until they could be rehoused. Between the end of February 2005 and June 2005 they were placed in three different temporary houses, one in Dagenham and two in Newham.

Although thirty-eight respondents appeared reasonably content with their accommodation, in reality accommodation has proved to be a major problem for the asylum seekers and not just on arrival in the UK but a problem that continues even after they have been granted refugee status or indefinite leave to remain after the Amnesty. One family spent their first night in a park and then three days in a hotel before they were given accommodation. Another family spent six months in a hotel in Dover. A family of four, although initially fortunate because they were invited to stay for three nights by a Kosovan family – who heard them talking on the street in Ilford to the children and recognised their language, were less fortunate once they approached the authorities. They had to spend their first eight months in the UK in one room in a hotel. One respondent told us: ‘For ten months I stayed with friends without money. I spent two years in Forest Gate and one year in Plaistow.’ Another respondent told us: ‘We spent two weeks in a hotel for homeless people in Liverpool and then social services gave us a flat. We stayed there for two years and then came to London to stay with a cousin who was sick. He has since been sent back to Kosovo.’

Another lady told us: ‘We spent eight hours at a Detention centre. They questioned my husband for seven hours and myself for two hours on my own. After that we received our IND and were allowed to go to London that afternoon at 4pm. We stayed one night with friends.’

One lady told us of her distress when NASS wanted to send her to accommodation in Glasgow: ‘I was afraid to go. If I wanted to stay in London they said they would have to place us in another hotel with no benefits. My daughter had become sick in the hotel as she could not eat the food so my cousin helped to pay for me to supplement NASS and live in a house with him.’

Another lady told us: ‘When we first arrived in England we were placed in a one bedroom flat with my husband. There were five of us – my sister & brother in law, my son and my husband and I. There was just one bed. Three of us slept in the bed and two on the floor.’

Another respondent related her experience:

‘We arrived in the UK one day in January at 1am in the morning, a friend had a brother in London. We waited at Brixton station but the man never came. We had no money. We went to the police station and talked using our hands but the Police sent us away. No one helped us. We were crying. A sixteen years old boy took us to a house and gave us one room but no food. There was no heating. In the morning the landlady came and told us we must leave. She said: “Get out, It’s my home!” We went back to the Home Office and were sent to Aldgate. We phoned 999 and the police took us to overnight accommodation. There was one single bed with not even a sheet for the three of us and we stayed a week. We looked for church people who gave us food but wouldn’t let us sleep in the church. For seven days in January we slept anywhere we could, at the station, in the underground, on a church bench. Each day we went to Social Services in Hackney eventually we were housed in Plaistow.’

Another respondent said: ‘We have to share the bathroom, kitchen and living room. It is dirty. I’m afraid my baby son will catch something. He wants to touch everything.’

2.4. Time spent living in Hotel Accommodation.

Many families spent time living in hotels or Bed and Breakfast (B & B). Some were actually placed in one hotel and then moved to another or even to a B& B. (Table 7.)

Two respondents are at present living in B&B’s. One has been in a B&B for 4 years and has lived in a hotel for a year before she moved to the B&B. She hasn’t lived anywhere else in the 5 years she has lived in England. In total thirty-five respondents were accommodated in hotels/B&B’s and four of those spent time in more than one establishment. Only one respondent felt able to describe her hotel accommodation as excellent, while seven said their hotel accommodation had

been good. The majority (15) described their hotel as poor. Eight had had to stay in a poor hotel for at least five weeks and four had been in very poor hotels for six months to a year. Sixteen respondents had stayed in B & B accommodation.

Table 7. Time spent living in Hotel Accommodation.

Time	Excellent hotel	Good hotel	Poor hotel	Bed & Breakfast
Less than a week			1	2
1-2 weeks		1	5	4
3-4 weeks		2	1	1
5-10 weeks	1		4	4
6-8 months		2	2	
1 year		2	2	1
2 years				
4 years				1
Not stated				3

Source: Kosovan Families Survey 2003-4

The respondents were not asked to evaluate their B & B accommodation but Sr. Anne visited a family of three - a husband & wife (both ill), with their 16 years old son (who was sitting his GCSE's) in May 2004. On being granted refugee status they had been told to leave their NASS accommodation and were put into emergency accommodation for almost 6 weeks in a one room in a B & B hotel in Ilford, Essex. It was dingy and dirty. Their room was a double room with a single bed squeezed in. They hardly had room to turn around. It had a wardrobe and a chest of drawers. The bedding was stained and looked filthy. Breakfast was provided but they had to fend for themselves for all other meals. They had to eat out which is very expensive and difficult when you are also having problems obtaining benefits as they were and having to rely on friends to lend you money. However, some experiences were better.

2.5. Health

Respondents were asked if they had suffered any Health Problems since they arrived in the UK. A staggering forty-three respondents claimed that either they or their husband or both of them had suffered with health problems since they came to the UK. As one respondent told us: 'We both have health problems but it is difficult to describe here.'

Table 8. Have you suffered from any health problems since you came to the UK?

	Yes	No
Number of respondents	43	7

Source : Kosovan Families Survey 2003-4

Seven respondents declared that no one in their family had suffered with their health since they came here yet when asked if they had any of the symptoms in Table 8.1. many had suffered from one symptom or several since they arrived in the UK.

Generally the greatest health problems relate to stress. Half of the respondents declared they had had trouble sleeping since they arrived in the UK.

With seventeen of their partners also having problems sleeping and twelve of their children. Fifty-five of the family members were still experiencing insomnia after being in the UK for five years, with eleven family members complaining of nightmares or bad dreams. One lady told how she would awake each night terrified after a nightmare in which a man came into her home to kill her. She had been raped in Kosovo and one of her family killed. Her son aged fourteen still slept

with her, he was so afraid to sleep alone. Almost half the respondents (24) suffered from depression and seventeen of their partners also suffered, with nine children also suffering from depression. Six of the respondents had psychiatric problems with three attending a psychiatrist in 2004 and eight attending counselling. A total of twenty-two family members suffered from panic attacks and while sixteen adults suffered from stress/anxiety, twenty-seven suffered from tension or feeling irritable. Forty-four adults suffered from migraines and a few (7) from headaches all the time. Eighteen describe feeling constantly tired and fifteen declared they had no interest in life. These figures are particularly striking and worrying when we remember that forty-five of the respondents are still relatively young, all under forty years old.

Table 8.1. Are you or any of your family suffering from any of the following?

Are you or any of Your family Suffering from any of the following?	respondent	Partner	1st child	2nd child	3rd child	total
Unable to sleep	25	17	11		1	55
Bad dreams/ nightmares	8	1	2			11
Lack of appetite/ excessive appetite	8	3	13	9	2	35
Feeling of tension/ irritable	16	11	1			28
Feeling constantly tired	14	4	3			21
Disinterest in life	7	8				15
palpitations	7	3	1			11
Panic attacks	14	5	3			22
Headaches/ migraines	31	13	2			46
Headache all the time	4	3				7
Aches and pains/ abdominal pain	8	11	1			20
Heart problems	6	3				9
Kidney problems		1				1
Depression	24	14	7	2		47
asthma	2	1				3
Psychiatric	6					6
Stress/anxiety	9	7				16
Very itchy rash	1	1	1	1	2	6
Child extremely noisy			7	8	2	17
Child over active			7	6		13
Child silent/withdrawn			2	2		4
miscellaneous	2	5				7
Total number of symptoms	198	111	61	28	7	404

Source : Kosovan Families Survey 2003-4

Let us hear what the respondents told us. One respondent said: ‘ I have very bad health – headache all the time, very depressed. I am attending a psychiatrist.’ Another respondent told us that she went with her son aged fourteen to the Medical Foundation for Victims of Torture in Kentish town. Her Husband had heart disease. A lady told us: ‘ I have to attend the hospital for psychiatric help.’ Another respondent’s daughter told us: ‘For the first three years after we arrived in England my mother couldn’t sleep properly. She would awake every few minutes with a start and was extremely anxious. She sleeps better now. She had very bad chest pains and was frequently very ill. She thought she had heart problems but it was caused by anxiety.’

Many of the children are suffering as well as their parents and not just those who were born in Kosovo and underwent the horrors of the war followed by the traumatic journey to the UK. Many were seriously affected by their stress their parents were under while awaiting the decision of the Home Office. Twenty-four children were having problems with their appetites in 2003/2004, the majority eating very little which is most unusual for children under ten who normally would eat well. Nine respondents declared they had a child who was suffering from depression, while seventeen children were extremely noisy. Thirteen children were pronounced as being overactive and four as being silent / withdrawn. One family that Sister Anne came to know a few months after they arrived in the UK had a three year old daughter. The child was very friendly but sister never heard her speak even in Albanian for at least a year after they arrived. One respondent whose oldest child was six years old when they left Kosovo declared: 'Our oldest child is silent and withdrawn. He was bullied in school.' Another told us: 'Our youngest child was thirteen years old when we came to England. He was so distressed by the whole situation that he was forever getting into trouble in school.' Another respondent told us: 'My son was very sick when we first arrived in England and needed psychiatric help. He suffered from many of the symptoms (listed in Table 8.1.) when we first came. The teacher in Liverpool was very supportive and helped a lot and he is happier now.' Yet another mother told us: 'My oldest daughter suffers from bad dreams about her dad and mum dying'

Another lady told us:

'My husband has not been well since he was beaten in the police station in Kosovo. He has serious nosebleeds and hurt his back. I am on medication for sleeping, pain in my hand and back. I go to the Medical Foundation every two weeks with my husband and every week with my children. Our oldest child receives 20 hours help a week in school. He has problems with hearing. Our second son was bitten by police dogs in Kosovo. He has difficulty sleeping and is depressed. The Medical Foundation help him. At first he was very withdrawn but he is speaking about his experiences now.'

2.6. Benefits

All the families mentioned in Table 9. had been given permission to stay in the UK and therefore were on main stream benefits.

Table 9. Benefits given to asylum seekers who have been granted status

Number of children in family	Status granted	Support received	Amount a week	Housing Benefit a week	Child Benefit a week	Child Tax Credit
4	Amnesty	Income Support	£142.1	yes	yes	
2	Exceptional Leave	Job Seekers	£151	yes	yes	
2	Amnesty	Job Seekers	£151	yes	yes	
2	Humanitarian Protection	Income Support	£97	£110	£26	
2	Discretionary Leave	Income Support	£97	£160	£16	
2	Refugee Status	Job Seekers	£85	yes	£15	
3	Refugee Status	Income Support	£119	£90	£37.5	£93

Source: Kosovan Families Survey 2003-4

Due to the families' low incomes they were entitled to free prescriptions plus free school meals. The benefits were worked out on a very complicated system that means the amount given is dependant not only on status, but family circumstances that can appear to be the same but be perceived differently. If you receive Refugee status or the Amnesty you receive the same benefits as any UK citizen but if you receive Refugee status (in 2004) you still had the right to back dated benefits that you lose with the Amnesty and that can be considerable of money. It can be as much as £7,000 which is enough to give the family the opportunity to settle and get on with their life and shows how little they have been paid during their time in the UK.² A couple with a little girl aged three, with refugee status told us they receive £88 a week housing benefit, £15.75 a week child benefit and £150 Income support. Another respondent who also has refugee status, with two children under eleven, told us they get £26.80 a week child benefit and £68.64 Working Tax Credit. They also get free prescriptions & free school meals. Two of the families in the table above had been without benefits for a time.

Asylum seekers without status receive a fraction of mainstream benefits. Some of the respondents elaborated for us a little on the state support they were receiving. Those families still awaiting status are mainly supported by NASS or Social services as we can see below (Table 10.). There doesn't appear to be a set amount given by Social Services or NASS for a family of three or less children. A family with two children over eighteen, who were still awaiting a decision from the home Office told us they received £130 a week Job Seekers allowance, housing plus free prescriptions. A lady with two children under ten, declared: 'I receive Support from NASS of over £150 a week. We also receive free accommodation, school meals and prescriptions.' Another respondent told us that although her child received free school meals she hadn't received any other kind of financial support for the last year.

Table 10. Benefits for Asylum-Seekers without status

Number of children under 16	Support from Social Services / NASS	Child benefit (amount per week)	Free housing, prescriptions & school meals	Have you ever been without benefits?
4	£120	£37.50	Yes	8 months for New baby
3	£127	£31	Yes	1 month
3	£147	yes	Yes	No
3	£147	£26.50	Yes	No
3	£148	yes	Yes	2 months & 3 months
3	£156	?	Yes	No
3	£170	?	Yes	No
3	£138	yes	Yes	3 months for New baby
2	£121	yes	Yes	No
2	£117	?	Yes	No
2	£97	?	Yes	No
2	£112	Yes	Yes	6 months for new baby
1	£108	Yes	Yes	No

Source: Kosovan Families Survey 2003-4

One family told us that they were in Ilford for two weeks and then placed in rented accommodation in Manor Park. Shortly afterwards they were moved to another house and then after approximately one year they were evicted by their landlord because their Housing Benefit hadn't been paid for months due to the disorder and consequent backlog that had built up in the Benefits office. They moved to a privately rented flat over a shop, with most of the rent being

² E. Heffernan, Refugee Resettlement Worker, Newham Council.

paid by the State in the form of Housing Benefit. Another respondent told us that their rent is £205 a week. They receive £140 in benefits. Their present landlord is evicting them because they wanted to return to Liverpool and because they told him they had found alternative accommodation, he found new tenants but their new accommodation in Liverpool had fallen through so they are now homeless. A third respondent told us that they have to move shortly as their landlord wants to sell the property. The asylum team will help them to find housing near the children's schools.

III. EDUCATIONAL DIMENSION

3.1. Education received in home country

The majority of the respondents said that they and their partners had received some education although they admitted at times it had been sporadic due to the situation in the country (Table 10.). The majority of respondents (42) received at least eight years of intermittent education while eleven of those went onto some form of higher education and eight received four years or less. Eight respondents were unable to say how long their partners had been in school. However the questionnaires showed that often the wife appeared to have received more education than her husband. Possibly the reason for this was an emphasis on the husband needing to go out and earn a living as soon as he was old enough.

Naturally some of the older children also received some education in their home countries but that also was sporadic and we did not attempt to quantify how much education the children had received.

Table 11. Necessity of English lesson and Ease of Access

	Yes	No	Not needed	Not stated
Did you need English lessons?	47	1		2
Was it easy to get English lessons immediately?	21	23	1	5

Source: Kosovan Families Survey 2003-4

Many of the women expressed a desire to learn English but lack of available childcare came high on the list of difficulties. One man said: 'My wife went two days a week when we arrived here but since our baby arrived it hasn't been possible for her to attend. I feel unable to take lessons.' A lady declared: 'No, I'm not attending English lessons at present. It is difficult with a young child and pregnant.' While another said: 'It's not easy to attend lessons because I have to look after my child.' Another lady has a handicapped child aged four who needs her presence 24 hours a day. She is desperate to learn English and asked if there was anyone who could teach her in her home.

3.3. Acquiring English Classes and Attendance at lessons

Twenty-nine respondents are at present attending English lessons. Nineteen attend lessons at least three times a week and almost half (14) of the twenty-nine were taken by a friend to English lessons. One lady expressed the opinion of many when she declared: 'The Form to apply for English lessons could not be completed by a non- English speaker.' Another lady on arriving with her daughter in the UK said: 'I was very sick for the first three years after I arrived here. My daughter encouraged me to get out and helped me to find English lessons.'

3.4. Ease of Access for Children to local schools

While twenty-six families (Table 12.) had found it very easy or fairly easy to place their children in school and eight of the respondents' children were too young to require school when the family arrived in the UK, there were still fourteen families who found it difficult or very difficult.

Table 12. Ease of Access for Children to local schools

	Very easy	Fairly easy	difficult	Very Difficult	N/a	No comment
Number of respondents	12	14	12	2	8	2

Source: Kosovan Families Survey 2003-4

One respondent said: 'When our daughters started school, we had been in the country over five months.' A second respondent said they were here three months before they could get the children into a school. One respondent stated: 'We had to wait three months. We tried all the local schools.' While another respondent had had to wait six-seven months for a place. Another respondent said: 'It was difficult to get our oldest son into school but since then everything has been fine.' In another family the mother said: 'It took about six months to get into a school, because of temporary accommodation. Eventually our Son looked for schools on the internet and found a school himself - St. Bonaventures.'

Some parents were more fortunate as one said: 'We had to wait a few days for a place in a Catholic school, meanwhile children were placed in a local state school.' One Catholic family were dismayed to discover they had to prove they were Catholic before their child was given a place, as the parent proclaimed: 'It is very difficult when you have no documentation.'

Constantly moving house also causes problems with schooling. Not all families were able to be re-accommodated near to their children's schools which is very unsettling and causes great distress to the children. The following account gives an example of what some families suffer. A family with three children (two under five years old) contacted the Church on Monday 20th December 2004 at 8.30pm in great distress. They had just been informed that as they had been granted the Amnesty exactly one month previously their NASS support was discontinued and as they were living in a NASS property they must move out immediately. The original local authority that had dealt with them was Kensington & Chelsea. It was that borough that had placed them in a house in the borough of Newham two years previously. Now the Borough of Kensington & Chelsea were no longer willing to pay for housing in Newham and was moving them to the borough of Hillingdon the other side of London. They had to move the following day to temporary accommodation. It was heart rendering to visit the family that evening sitting in total shock around their Christmas tree with the lights glittering. They were being moved to a two bedroom flat in a new building with a shared lounge. They liked the area but were worried about sharing a living room with strangers and upset about leaving their friends. The oldest daughter aged 10 was particularly upset about changing school yet again. It would be her fourth change of school since arriving in England in 1998. There was nothing we could do except promise to keep in touch and give them some money to tide them over until their new benefits began after Christmas. Well into the spring school term the family told us they had at last managed to get the two oldest children aged five and ten into school. Then at the start of the Easter break they were told they were being moved again, once more to temporary accommodation, this time to the borough of Tower Hamlets. Once more the parents had to find another school for their children. After several weeks they managed but were unable to place both the children in the same school due to the schools being over subscribed.

IV. FAMILY STABILITY – CHILD DEVELOPMENT DIMENSION

4.1. Reasons respondents cannot return to their own country to live

Most of the respondents indicated that they had reasons (Table 13.) for not wishing or being able to return to their home country but few actually specified their reasons. Six declared they could not return because they had been subjected to religious persecution, while four declared they had suffered from political persecution. Five said they faced death threats and one ethnic persecution in their home country. Others (4) couldn't afford to return home, while five stated that they would find readjustment too difficult. Four said they now have family commitments in the UK. Among other comments we heard were: 'It is very difficult to live there' Another gave the reason, 'My house was burnt down. I have a daughter over here and I am married. I am ashamed of my community and the horrible things that happened in Kosovo.' While another explained that a Muslim wife who separates from her husband, loses all rights to see her son if she lives in Kosovo while here she has equal rights. As she said: 'Because of my son. If I lived in Kosovo I would have no rights over my son. I would never see my child. The father has all the rights. When parents separate both parents should see their child. I want my child to spend time with his dad as well as with me.' Although not wishing to return another stated, 'We would like to be able to visit.' An Albanian respondent sadly proclaimed: 'No, we wouldn't wish to return there to live. Many people sleep in Albania with a gun under their pillow. We never had one. There was a danger it might be used in anger.'

Table 13. Reasons Respondents cannot return to their own Country to Live

I am prevented from returning home by	
Religious persecution	6
Political persecution	4
National/ethnic persecution	1
Death threats	5
Family commitments here	4
I could not afford to move home	4
Readjustment too difficult	5
Other reasons not specified	
No reason given	

Source: Kosovan Families Survey 2003-4

4.2. Permission to stay indefinitely

Only six of those interviewed had permission to stay in the Spring of 2003 that number rose to 17 a year later, the Spring of 2004 when eleven were unavailable to be interviewed as they had been relocated or deported and consequently we were no longer able to contact them. In the spring of 2003 forty-four were awaiting the decision of the Home Office (Table 14). Among the comments we collected were 'I have no permission to stay indefinitely but my husband has full refugee status with travel documents,' and: 'My partner has permission to stay from NASS but not from the Home Office. He is living somewhere else in London. He is scared because if he is found living with me, he would be arrested. It is unlawful. We have always lived separately but we are legally married.'

Table 14. Permission to stay in England indefinitely

	Yes, permission to stay	Awaiting decision of Home Office	Information unavailable
Number of respondents in Spring 2003	6	44	
Number of Respondents in Spring 2004	17	22	11
Number of respondents in Autumn 2004	28	11	11

Source: Kosovan Families Survey 2003-4

4.3. Documentation from Home Office

The respondents were asked in the questionnaires which documents they had received from the Home Office. There was a little confusion as a few respondents were unsure of the legal terms of their status but their responses can be seen in Table 15.

On registration forty-six families received Identity documents (IND) that consisted of a single sheet of Home Office paper with the declaration that the family claimed to be ... (with their name and nationality) and then the husbands name and age, his wife's and his children. It included photographs. Four families already had documentation and didn't require IND. By the time the families were interviewed in 2003 there were only three who had received refugee status and one a travel document, one had received temporary residence, two permanent residence and two exceptional leave to remain, while one family had their case closed and another family claimed they had received other documents but the language barrier made it impossible for them to be more specific. Of the group of fifty an astounding thirty-four had no status whatsoever and were in a state of limbo awaiting a decision from the Home Office. In the Spring of 2003 there was some question about whether one family had exceptional leave to remain or not. The judge had granted it on appeal but then the Home Office had refused. The family was eventually granted the Amnesty in February 2004. By the Summer of 2004 just under half that group (16) had been granted the amnesty and three had received the questionnaire regarding the Amnesty but were still awaiting the outcome. Another two respondents husbands had been deported while they were left behind.

When the respondents were re-interviewed in the Spring of 2004, Of the thirty nine we were able to interview, only six had been granted the Amnesty introduced by the Government in October 2003 and only three other families had received the Amnesty Questionnaire and were awaiting its outcome while sixteen were still awaiting a decision and had not received the Amnesty questionnaire, while five respondents had arrived after Oct 2000 and therefore did not qualify for the Amnesty. Two had been granted exceptional leave, one discretionary leave and one permanent residence, three had refugee status and one humanitarian protection. Two of the group had also received travel documents.

Table 15. Documentation from Home Office

Documentation from Home Office	Spring 2003	Spring 2004
Identity	46	
Temporary residence	2	
Permanent residence	2	1
Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR)	2	2
Discretionary Leave	1	2
Humanitarian Protection		1
Refugee status	3	3
Travel document	1	2
Passport		2
Awaiting decision from home Office	34	16
Received Amnesty Questionnaire		3
Granted Amnesty		6
Case closed	1	
Husband deported	2	
Other	1	1

Source: Kosovan Families Survey 2003-4

4.4. National Insurance Numbers

In Table 16, we can see that the majority of the respondents (27) and the same number of their partners had not been granted a National Insurance Number. Twenty-three respondents had been granted a National Insurance number and eighteen of their partners, mainly for the purpose of obtaining benefits. Five of their respondents were widows so that accounts for the five that were not applicable.

Table 16. National Insurance Numbers

	Yes	No	N/A
Number of respondents with National Insurance number	23	27	
Number of partners with National Insurance number	18	27	5

Source: Kosovan Families Survey 2003-4

4.5. Permission to work and type of job held

Although nineteen of the respondents were allowed to work only four were actually doing so (Table 17.) The same number of partners (19) had permission to work and a slightly higher number (8) were doing so. Only one respondent was willing to admit that her husband was working illegally. Of those allowed to work many were unable either to find work that wasn't illegal or had not enough English to succeed when interviewed. The others who were not working claimed it was either due to their own ill health or the need to assist their partners who were suffering from ill health. One lady told us that her husband received permission to work first and was granted a National Insurance Number, now she also has a number. He was encouraged to work by the State and works part time but she cannot work while her youngest is still so young. Another said: "My husband is allowed to work but is unable to due to ill health." The majority of

female respondents who were permitted to work explained that they could not because of very young children not yet at school.

Table 17. Permission to work and Type of Job held.

	Permission to work	No permission to work	Legal Full time	Legal Part time	Illegal Full time	Illegal Part time	no work or n/a
Respondents	19	31	2	2			46
Partners	19	26	3	5		1	41

Source: Kosovan Families Survey 2003-4

4.6. Preferred Job

It is possible to see from Table 18. that although almost half of the females (21) were housewives in their home country, only one wished to remain so in the UK.

Table 18. Preferred Job

Occupation	Respondent		Partner	
	In home Country	In the Future	In home Country	In the Future
Dress making/hand crafts		3		
Plumber	1	1		1
Painter				
Builder		1		5
Brick layer	1			
Carpenter			1	
Electrician			2	1
Architect			1	1
Government worker	2	1	2	
Engineer	3	1	3	2
Social worker		2		1
Policeman			1	
Military				1
Teacher/child care	7	8		
Student	2	4	1	
ESOL Tutor		1		
Work in a bank /Accountancy	3	2		
Secretary		1		
Factory manager			1	
Business person	3	2	6	5
Shop owner	1	1		
shop assistant		3	1	1
Hairdresser	1			
Driver			4	9
Mechanic			1	1
Working in a hospital		1		
Nurse	1	1		
Doctor	1	2	1	1
Vet			1	
Agriculture	2	3	6	3
Shepherd			3	
Any Job		4		1
Housewife	18	1	3	1
Carer for partner				1
Not specified or n/a	2	7	9	15
Unemployed	2		2	
Disabled				1

The most attractive occupation for women appeared to be childcare or teaching (8) while the preferred occupation for men appeared to be as drivers (9) with builders (5) and businessmen (5) tying for second place. A few of the women (4) wished to receive further education.

The respondents who we must remember were mainly women, had down a number of different jobs in their home countries including a hairdresser, a nurse, two who worked in banks, three engineers, three business persons and seven ladies who had worked with children either as teachers or in child care. The men also had various occupations. At least nine worked in agriculture, three of whom were shepherds and six worked in business, four were drivers and three were engineers, one husband and wife were doctors and a man a vet. The vet had also worked for a time as a builder and has now acquired legal work on a building site. One husband very keen to get a job as a driver has been receiving driving lessons. His wife commented: ‘My husband received driving lessons. He has taken his test five times.’

4.7. Suggestions for an UK Immigration Policy

In Table 19. we see that although some respondents gave two or more suggestions regarding the UK’s immigration policy, over half (28) of the group thought that people should be allowed to work on reception of identity. Nearly everyone cited that either there should be ‘quicker processing of claims’ or ‘asylum-status should be granted within one year.’ Almost a quarter (12) of the group supported the idea of short-term support centers for new arrivals, offering accommodation, interpretation, medical and language courses. They didn’t see these as detention centers but support centers. Many arrived traumatized and feeling totally lost. They found themselves in a strange city not understanding anyone they were sent to register at one center and then to another center for accommodation and then often elsewhere all within a few days or weeks and with no English felt even more confused, lost and frightened. They thought a single center that could cover all immediate needs would be helpful.

Table 19. What would you suggest regarding an immigration policy?

I would suggest:	
On reception of identity given right to work	28
Quicker processing of claims	28
Asylum status granted within one year	28
Travel documents so when someone is working they can travel around	1
On arrival – short term support centers – accommodation, interpretation, medical & language courses offered	12
Read and consider applications faster	1

Source: Kosovan Families Survey 2003-4

One respondent told us: “The real problem is status – not knowing if you can stay or not. If I have a document to stay I’d be happy with one room. I am willing to work. I don’t want benefits.” While one teenager interpreting for her mother said angrily: “They (the Home Office) should decide about status in one year not 5 years.”

A Kosovan adult said:

‘We are not happy with the lack of decision. We have plenty of documents, medical reports. The Immigration authorities should give people a chance. The middle of Kosovo’s capital is safe now but not the countryside. It is fine if you have money but every village, factory is gone. We can’t go back.’

One respondent thought the UK did not act according to the Geneva Convention: ‘Asylum seekers should be treated much better and according to the Geneva Convention.’ However while many vented their frustration on the time it was taking to be granted status, an independent support worker declared: ‘ I am proud of how England is helping asylum seekers with benefits and NHS.’

4.8. UK Home Office perspective

Regarding the UK Government perspective it is necessary to take into consideration the fact that a great number of illegal immigrants are coming to the country. The UK Government like other EU Governments tries to stop and control that flow. Between 1989 and 1998, over four million people applied for asylum in Europe. As the numbers seeking asylum grew the Western European governments felt pressurized into tightening their regulations regarding asylum. People who formerly could have entered legally as asylum-seekers or even as contract workers now found themselves with no choice but to seek alternative, illegal ways of entering Western Europe and many took to availing of the services of people smugglers.³

In 2001 the total minority ethnic population in the UK was 4.6 million (7.9% of the total population)⁴. It would be impossible to estimate how many initially came as asylum seekers. Many, naturally were economic migrants and many skilled immigrants had been invited to the country over many years to aid the ailing, ageing work force.

Taking into account the last five years, in 2000 there were 80,310 applications in Great Britain for asylum, with a drop of approximately nine thousand applicants for asylum in 2001 (71,025 applications). In 2002 there was a steep rise of thirteen thousand applications, bringing the total to 84,130. However in 2003 this number dropped to 49,170 and in 2004 it dropped even lower with a total of 33,930 new applications, a decrease of 31 percent from the 2003 total applications and a massive 60 percent drop on the 2002 total.

During the four years 2000 – 2003 the majority of people who applied for asylum in the UK were refused after full consideration. The largest number to be refused came in 2001 (87,990) with 75,675 refused in 2000, while 55,135 were refused in 2002 and 53,510 in 2003. Over the four years a total of 272,310.

In the same four years (2000-2003) just 33,705 people were granted Refugee Status, 55,446 had been refused refugee status but granted Exceptional Leave to Remain that is permission to reside in the UK for a temporary period, one hundred and thirty-five people had been granted Humanitarian Protection for a number of years and 3,105 had been granted Discretionary Leave to Remain. Of those granted Refugee status 10,375 had been granted status in 2000, a slightly larger number 11,180 in 2001, in 2002 the number dropped to 8,270 and in 2003 a 50% drop to 3,880.

Refugee status is the best possible status that an asylum seeker can be granted under UK law. Anyone granted refugee status is immediately entitled to Social assistance benefits equal with those available to British and EU citizens. Refugee status also allows for immediate family reunions with spouses and children and has a sympathetic approach to parents wishing to be reunited with their adult children. It includes access to nondiscriminatory education, equal economic rights and a right to permanent residence.⁵

³ K.Hailbronner, *Immigration and Asylum Law and Policy of the European Union*, Kluwer Law International, The Hague, London, Boston 2000, 15.

⁴ Home Office, *National Statistics Online 2001 by ethnic group*.

⁵ E. Guild *The United Kingdom: Kosovar Albanian Refugees* in J. Van Selm, ed *Kosovo's Refugees in the European Union*, Pinter, London, New York 2000, 78

The UK Government has over the last ten years found themselves with a huge problem regarding asylum issues. Between 1993 and 2002 there were approximately 526,000 applications for asylum not counting dependants. Although the majority received refusals only 31,565 were deported. By October 2003 the backlog had reached such a colossal size the Government were desperate to solve the problem. Mr Justice Maurice Kay in the High Court criticized the way Mr. Blunkett handled the asylum system, saying: "the lack of an 'efficient decision-making procedure' was the main reason why courts were flooded with an "almost unmanageable" number of asylum support cases"⁶.

In an attempt to seek an answer to the growing problem on the 24 October 2003 David Blunkett announced an asylum Amnesty for approximately 50,000 asylum-seekers, mainly from Kosovo, the former republic of Yugoslavia and Turkey, allowing them to stay in the UK. Most of the 15,000 families affected lived in London and the South East. These families had suffered from the historic delays in the system and although they had exhausted the appeals system the Government had not managed to deport them⁷. Under the Amnesty families who had sought asylum before 2 October 2000 would be eligible for Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK and in five years time would be eligible to apply for British Citizenship. (The cut off date was not chosen at random but marked the introduction of new legislation preventing rejected asylum seekers from making multiple appeals against being removed from the country.) Many of the asylum seekers' families covered by the Amnesty had already been in the UK for seven years and yet were still entitled to challenge official removal directions in the high court under human rights legislation which means they could remain in the UK until 2008 even without the Amnesty. The Home Office claimed it would save the taxpayer money as the country was supporting 12,000 families who were not allowed to work, costing the tax payers £180 million a year. However it stated that another 3,000 families already allowed to work would also be eligible for the Amnesty⁸.

Maeve Sherlock of the Refugee Council declared:

"It is the right and moral thing to do. It is utterly unfair on families - and especially children - to leave them in limbo, unable to rebuild their lives for years on end. Now the government must focus on getting decisions right much earlier, so people are not left in years of uncertainty"⁹.

Oliver Letwin, the (Conservative) Shadow Home Secretary was gravely concerned that news of the Amnesty would attract even more asylum-seekers to the UK and said that the Conservative Government would scrap the current system completely, replacing it with a system of quotas for all genuine refugees while processing applications offshore to deter all genuine asylum claims. It is interesting to note that the Conservatives actually had applied a similar amnesty ten years ago allowing approximately 32,000 adults to stay in the UK¹⁰.

CONCLUSION

The Convention on the Rights of the Child put on all States the obligations necessary to ensure the development of every child on the physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social levels. (*States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development*, Art. 27.1).

⁶ R.Ford, Amnesty on asylum opens door to 50,000, 'The Times' (UK), October 25, 2003.

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ A.Travis Asylum amnesty for 50,000 heralds tough new measures, 'The Guardian' (UK), October 25, 2003.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

1) Regarding the welfare dimension (*States Parties, in accordance with national conditions and within their means, shall take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing - Art.27,3.*) - looking at the Kosovan family experience we can say that the UK policy towards asylum seekers has had many positive patterns. The UK government spends by £15,000 a year supporting each asylum family with accommodation, health care and benefits for food and clothing which is indeed generous.

2) Regarding to educational dimension, Convention on the Rights of the Child states in Article 28:

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:

(a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;

(b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need;

(c) Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means;

(d) Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children;

(e) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates.

2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention.

Our survey showed that while the UK fulfilled its obligations often administrative decisions regarding housing and education did not take into account the interests of the children. Our survey of just fifty families showed that many children had been expected to move house and therefore change school on a frequent basis and consequently leave their friends and the teachers behind. Many parents told us that their children were upset at having to change school yet again just when they had settled in. In particular for primary school children this proved to be very distressing and unsettling and common sense tells us that must have an adverse effect not only on their levels of attainment in school but also on their general well-being.

3) Regarding general well being of the family, and child development Convention on the Rights of the Child says:

Preamble:

- *Convinced that the family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community,*
- *Recognizing that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding,*

Unfortunately the new asylum legislation in the UK doesn't always support this clause. Sister Anne was contacted in early June 2005 by a refugee support worker who was phoning on behalf of a young asylum-seeker with a six months old baby. They had been staying with friends but were now homeless. They were about to be deported and all benefits had been

stopped. The local authority had offered to take the baby into care but had refused the mother any assistance.

Article 2

1. States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

Article 3

1. In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

2. States Parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being, taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for him or her, and, to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures.

Article 22

1. States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure that a child who is seeking refugee status or who is considered a refugee in accordance with applicable international or domestic law and procedures shall, whether unaccompanied or accompanied by his or her parents or by any other person, receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance in the enjoyment of applicable rights set forth in the present Convention and in other international human rights or humanitarian instruments to which the said States are Parties.

Article 39

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child.

To meet the Child Rights cited above a family must have stability, with a clear future perspective. Unfortunately many asylum seekers have no sense of stability. Until they receive status they do not know whether they will be allowed to stay in the host country, deported or forced to move on.

In a case, reported in the Guardian newspaper in May 2005 by Helen Carter, a school in Manchester was appealing to the government on behalf of many asylum seekers children who face deportation along with their families. The school was appealing on the grounds that the international convention for the rights of the child should offer the children some protection. The head teacher of St John's, Jed Morgan said that the recent deportation of a family had been as shocking as a death in the family: 'One minute they are here and the next minute they are gone. These children are victims and they are very vulnerable. Over the last three or four years they have become very settled and they have made good progress at school.'¹¹

The families have little stability and it is the children who suffer. Stability can only be reached by integrating the family into society. The UK Government appreciates the importance of integrating new comers to Great Britain, but on the principle that this process starts after a person receives refugee status. As a consequences asylum seekers are deprived access to this process. The UK motive is logical because before asylum seekers are granted status they do not have permission to stay permanently in the UK. However the processing of asylum claims has been far too slow, often taking five years or more. Consequently the Kosovan families along with many other

¹¹ H. Carter, School fights to save pupils from deportation, 'The Guardian'(UK), May 12, 2005

asylum seekers who have recently been granted permission to stay indefinitely in the UK have lost several years' opportunity for integration into the host society.

Even if the UK policy is not in contradiction with Human Rights and international conventions it is clear that these fifty families and thousands others will stay in Great Britain for good and therefore should be given the opportunity to integrate into British Society as quickly as possible. Looking from this perspective we could ask the question: Was it possible to predict this fact and if so, start the process of integration shortly after the asylum seekers arrived in the UK?

As was mentioned above, between 1993-2002 there were almost 526,000 applications for asylum, not counting dependents. Although the majority received a negative decision only 31,500 were deported. Does the UK Government take these facts into account when drawing up the asylum seekers policy? Statistically speaking, asylum-seekers families should be treated as a potential unit of hosting society and therefore be encouraged to integrate as soon as possible. The policy should be based on individual causes, looking on the history of the family in their own countries. In the case of Kosovan families it is very clear what kind of preparation they have had for life and work. They might not have been invited to the UK but they have a lot to offer British society. Their children are well-mannered, hard working, keen students and integrate quickly. The UK offered the families many ways of integrating. They were treated well by local authorities, given housing and benefits. Their children were offered schooling and the opportunity for the parents to receive English lessons. But the families' process of integration was greatly hindered by the fact the parents were not allowed to work. Therefore they were denied the ability to support their own families and to mix with other ethnic groups in the work place. All major decisions (e.g. where to live, work) were removed from them and they were left feeling inadequate as people and as parents. They were left with too much time to worry about the Home Office decision and consequently many now suffer from ill health and are not fit enough to work. As each year passed their ability to integrate was hindered even further rather than encouraged, until it had become too late for them ever to fully integrate. Now it will be up to their children to fully integrate into British Society.

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