

VOICES OF KOSOVO IN MANCHESTER

Following devastating violence and ethnic cleansing in Kosovo during the late 1990s, the UK Government agreed to accept an unspecified number of refugees as part of a Humanitarian Evacuation Programme. Individuals and families selected as part of the evacuation programme were chosen based on need - more than half were children or the elderly; and many others had serious medical conditions.

During an eight-week period between April-June 1999, 4,346 Kosovar refugees were airlifted to the UK. To take pressure off the capital and the South East, 2,400 Kosovar refugees were accommodated in the North West of England, including in Manchester.

ARRIVAL IN MANCHESTER

Health

Emergency first aid assistance was provided once the air-crafts landed in Manchester. Refugees were then transported to a nearby civic centre, where their immediate primary care needs were met. Health workers registered the arrivals with GPs, dentists and opticians and children were issued with any necessary vaccinations. Advocacy services and interpreters were provided, and specialist practitioners experienced in trauma-related health were at hand.

Housing

Local authorities worked with the Refugee Council to provide suitable accommodation for the Kosovar refugees. Some of the principles considered when housing the refugees included:

- consideration of existing social networks and family ties;
- appreciation of the services available in the area; and
- the safety of the refugees in the area.

Children and Education

Parents were provided with access to information about education in the UK. Access to special needs services was made available where necessary, and parent/ school liaison was provided to help to ease refugee children into the education system.

Schools received training on how to meet the needs of the Kosovar children, and language and interpreting services were provided to support them.

THE KOSOVAR DIASPORA

In addition to the refugees that were evacuated as part of the UK's official evacuation programme, thousands of Kosovar refugees arrived in the UK by their own means. The exact number of Kosovar refugees that came to the UK is not known, although estimates at the time suggested around 20,000 asylum seekers arrived in the country.

It is difficult to know how many Kosovars remain in the UK. As an initial condition, the Kosovar refugees were given asylum for one year. After the UN entered Kosovo as part of a peacebuilding programme, many of the refugees chose to return to Kosovo, with others returning subject to their asylum conditions in 2000-1.

However, a significant number of Kosovars remain in different parts of the UK. One of the reasons it is difficult to estimate the number of Kosovars is due to how their place of birth is recorded in official statistical databases. In the 2001 Census, the birthplace of Kosovar refugees fell under the category of the Former Yugoslavia (FRY). In the 2011 Census, the birthplace of Kosovars living in the UK would be described as 'other Europe not including EU countries and Turkey'. This makes it impossible to separate people born in Kosovo from - for example - people born in Bosnia or Albania.

What we do know based on Census data, is that 1,967 people born in the FRY were still living in the North West in 2001. What we know based on projects like Voices of Kosovo in Manchester, is that many Kosovars have made Manchester and its surrounding areas their home, and continue to contribute to the rich and diverse fabric of the region.

