

# Finding Kosovars in Manchester

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## 1. Introduction

The 1990s saw an escalation of tensions and violence across the Balkans; and as a result, Greater Manchester came to play host to a number of communities and individuals seeking safety and refuge from the homes they had fled, or been forced to leave. Having worked in the field of human rights and post-conflict recovery both in Kosovo and the UK since 1999, Manchester Aid to Kosovo (MaK) has built enduring relationships and friendships with a significant number of Kosovars that have lived, and are still living in Greater Manchester and beyond. As such, MaK has gained a privileged insight into the experiences of many of its Kosovar friends that have called Greater Manchester home. That said, a particular focus of this research was to understand the experiences of Kosovars who came to live in the UK - particularly in the North West - and to try to locate how many people have remained in the region. This report will set out the difficulties of trying to pin-point refugee numbers and why the Kosovar example is fairly unique. The report will also set out some of the interesting themes that occurred during the research, such as the differences in experience of different cohorts of Kosovar refugees.

## 2. Research Method and Challenges

I began this research when I was a student at Manchester University, and had access to library resources. After initially using Google Scholar to find relevant academic resources using a short-list of key search terms, and struggling to find more than a couple of useful articles, I made an appointment with a research librarian at the University library. With her help, I was able to pin-point a small number of additional academic sources, which I then used to analyse bibliographies to pick out other key readings. Even after this effort, I still had less than ten sources to use. These sources were made up of official agency reports by the United Nations, Refugee Council, Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees, and the National Asylum Support Service. I also found articles produced by health professionals, and a couple of critical academic research pieces.

My next step was to email the author of one of the academic texts that I had read, who also happened to be a professor at Manchester University. In particular, I asked the professor for her insight into any other useful texts that she knew of, and if she could offer any insight into how I could find reliable statistics about refugees. After providing the reading list that I had found, the professor confirmed that they were the main sources for the research topic, and was unable to advise on other sources, or how I would find more reliable statistics. My early experience when conducting this research appeared to confirm the “information vacuum” described by Kate Smart in the ICAR Kosovar Refugee Population guide, compiled in 2004.

I also used the Office of National Statistics (ONS) website to try and find information from the 2001 and 2011 Censuses that would indicate accurately the numbers of Kosovars living in the UK. Some of the difficulties in doing this are set out below. After many searches, I was not able to find the information that I was searching for. It was many months after beginning the research that I entered some effective search terms into a general Google search, and found two data tables produced in 2013 and 2014 that provided an indication of how many Kosovars were living in the UK at the time of the last Census.

### **3. Key Themes and Findings**

This section sets out some of the key themes and findings that emerged during my research, namely; the difficulty of finding statistics about Kosovars, and the differences experienced by those refugees that were medically evacuated from Kosovo, and those that made their way to the UK by their own means.

#### **3.1. The difficulty of counting Kosovars**

Conducting this research highlighted the inconsistencies in the recording of refugee population statistics. Outside of those that arrived as part of the Humanitarian Evacuation Programme (HEP), the total number of Kosovars that entered the UK has largely relied on approximations and educated guesses. Interestingly, the case of calculating the number of Kosovar refugees is particularly challenging for a number of reasons. For example, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, before Kosovo declared independence, spontaneous arrivals from Kosovo were not separately identified in Home Office statistics. As such, they were recorded in statistics as ‘Former Republic of Yugoslavia’, and occasionally as ‘Serbia and Montenegro’ (Smart, 2004:9). Furthermore, more recent population data-sets provide

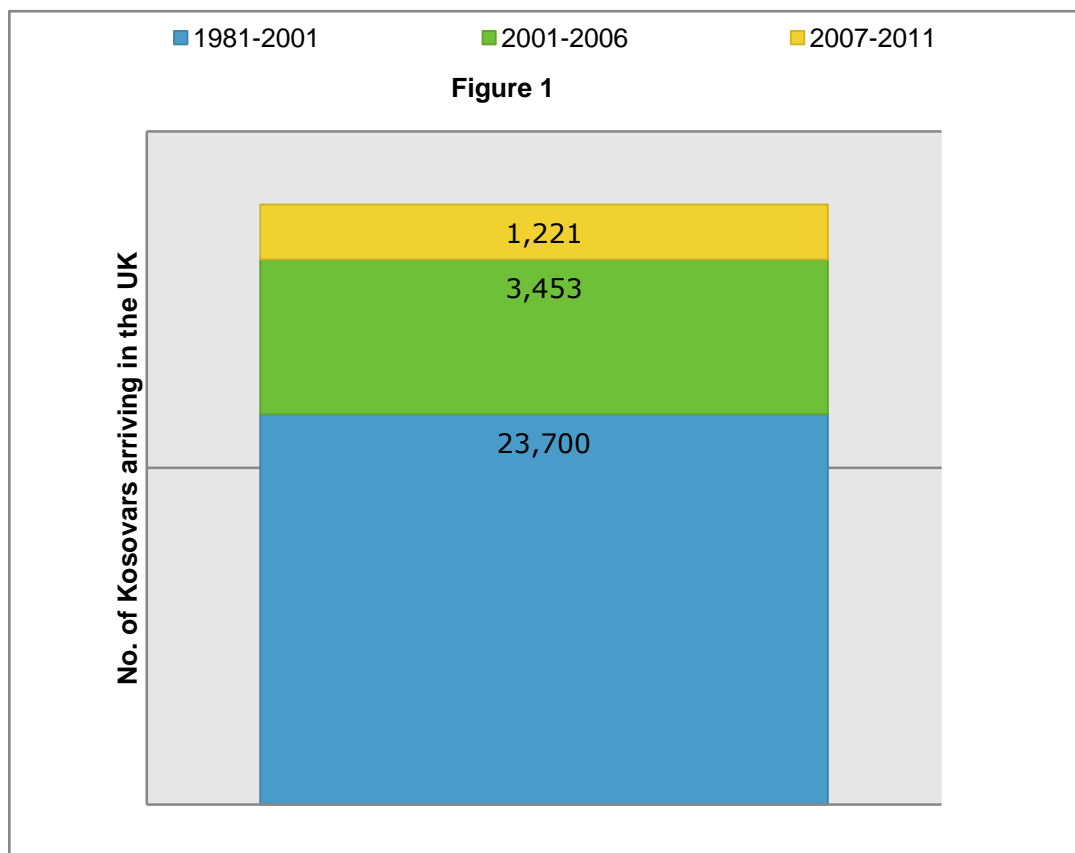
further complexity, as statistics are not easily obtained at a level that is granular enough to ascertain particular nationalities. For example, in the 2011 Census, it is possible to search for a data table that shows the passports held in the North West of England. However, the most relevant label when looking for Kosovars is 'Other Europe: Non EU Countries'. Of the 7,653 individuals in this category, it is impossible to ascertain in which non-EU European country they were born.

What can be known for certain is that 4,346 refugees arrived in the UK as part of the HEP, and of this number, it is accepted that 2,400 refugees were accommodated in the North West of England (Refugee Council, 2000; Sram and Ward, 2000). Outside of these officially recorded statistics, all other indications are based on Census or Annual Population Survey information, which requires some level of caution about the accuracy of the numbers.

One of the first useful documents that I found during my research was an International Organisation for Migration (IOM) report from 2008, which provides a map of the likely number of Albanians living in the UK. Importantly, the map is made up of Albanians from both Kosovo and Albania, and is based on largely anecdotal estimations from refugee agencies and community groups (pp.12). The IOM report estimates that in 2008, some 1000-2000 Albanians were living in the North West of England. This report, and others like it, illustrates the inadequacy in available and reliable data about Kosovars until very recently.

After many searches and months of conducting this research, I found three data-sets which I had not seen referenced in any of the materials that I had read around the topic of Kosovars living in the UK. I found these after abandoning the ONS website and conducting a google search and wading through the many pages of returned search items. Of particular interest is a data set (table number CT0236) produced by the ONS in 2014, comprising data from the 2011 Census. The dataset breaks down the population by country of birth by year of arrival. Interestingly, Kosovo appears within this dataset as a country in its own right, distinct from the FRY or any other denotation. The dataset indicates that 23,700 Kosovars arrived in the UK between 1981 and 200; that a further 3,453 arrived 2001-2006; and that some 1,223 individuals came to the UK from Kosovo between 2007 and 2011.

These numbers are displayed in figure 1 below.



These numbers corroborate with statistics provided in a second dataset that I found, which was produced in 2013, again using information from the 2011 Census. The data-set (table number QS213EW) illustrates the number of residents living in each geographical region of England and Wales by country of birth. Again, this research includes Kosovo as a separate country. The evidence provided in the data-set is presented in Figure 2 (over page) and shows that there were 814 individuals that were born in Kosovo living in the North West of England in 2011.

Figure 2

Region	Residents born in Kosovo (2011 Census)
North East	91
North West	814
Yorkshire and Humber	751
East Midlands	586
West Midlands	828
East	1,513
London	21,516
South East	1,969
South West	322
Wales	56
<b>England and Wales total:</b>	<b>28,446</b>

I found more up-to-date estimations in a data-table produced in 2015, which summarises Annual Population Survey (ANS) information from 2014 to provide projections of the population by country of birth and nationality at a local authority level. Unfortunately, the data-table does not provide information for any Greater Manchester or North West local authorities, as the table denotes that information is not available for confidentiality reasons in these areas. However, the data from the 2014 ANS provides a more recent indication of the likely numbers of Kosovars that remain living in the UK. The data uses a confidence interval of 95%, with all estimates and confidence levels rounded to the nearest thousand. With this in mind, figure 3 (over page) sets out the findings of the data.

Figure 3

Region	2014 estimate of number of residents born in Kosovo	Confidence Index ( +/- number)
North East	no data from ANS	no data from ANS
North West	1,000	2,000
Yorkshire and Humber	no data from ANS	no data from ANS
East Midlands	less than 500	1,000
West Midlands	1,000	2,000
East	1,000	2,000
London	23,000	7,000
South East	1,000	1,000
South West	no data from ANS	no data from ANS
Wales	no data from ANS	no data from ANS
<b>England and Wales total estimate:</b>	<b>23,000 (confidence range of 16,000 - 30,000)</b>	

The findings of this research appear to indicate that although very little has been written to map the experiences of Kosovars since their arrival, a significant percentage have remained living in the United Kingdom. Of particular significance to MaK, it is interesting to know that recent statistics appear to indicate that it is likely that around 1,000 Kosovars have remained living the North West of England.

### 3.2 Differences between Humanitarian Evacuation Programme refugees, and spontaneous refugees

A second key theme occurring throughout the literature that maps the experiences of Kosovar refugees, is the difference between those that arrived in the UK as part of the Humanitarian Evacuation Programme (HEP), and those that arrived independently, so-called “spontaneous refugees”. This sub section sets out the background to the arrivals, and the differences experiences by the different cohorts.

On March 24th 1999, following a long period of escalating tension and violence in Kosovo, NATO launched air strikes against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. These actions escalated the mass movement and dispersal of Kosovars which meant that 1.4million people were displaced, with 850,000 Kosovar Albanians eventually fleeing the country (UNHCR, 1999; Refugee Council, 2000). The numbers of those leaving Kosovo were made up of both those that fled to seek refuge in neighbouring countries, and others that were expelled by Serb forces (UNHCR, 1999).

The majority of dispersed Kosovars entered refugee camps in Albania, Macedonia, and Montenegro. This led to grave concerns as the influx overwhelmed the response capacity of neighbouring governments and humanitarian organisations. What is more, in Macedonia in particular, relations between majority and minority ethnic groups were already frail, and the government feared that the arrival of Kosovar Albanians would have a further destabilising effect (UNHCR, 1999). As a result of this, the Macedonian Government requested a system of “international burden sharing” be put in place to transfer some of the refugees to other countries (UNHCR, 1999).

In response to the grave situation, the UK agreed to take an unspecified number of refugees. In April 1999, the UK Government participated in a Humanitarian Evacuation Programme (HEP) and airlifted thousands of people out of refugee camps in Macedonia to the UK (Refugee Council, 2000:7). Between April and August 1999, 4,346 Kosovars were flown to the UK, where they were then supported by refugee agencies and local authorities. Of these, 2,400 people were located in the North West of England (Sram and Ward, 2000:314). Outside of the HEP, many other refugees arrived in the UK from Kosovo. Indeed, the Home Office received 7,980 applications for asylum from individuals from the Former Republic of Yugoslavia (mainly Kosovars) in 1998, and 3,290 in the months before the HEP in 1999 (Bloch, 1999:5). Estimates suggest that the total number of spontaneous Kosovar refugees arriving in the UK in 1999 alone reached around 15,000 (Refugee Council, 2000:43).

The differences in experience faced by those refugees that arrived as part of the HEP, and those that arrived independently are marked. Indeed, the disparity led Alice Bloch to suggest that the former cohort had “Rolls Royce” treatment, while the latter had “rickshaw”



treatment (2000). As noted by the UNHCR in 1999, “an independent evaluation of the UNHCR’s response to the Kosovo refugee crisis commissioned by the UNHCR’s Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit concluded in February 2000 that the HEP was an exceptional programme, and that similar large-scale humanitarian evacuation schemes were likely to be rare in the future” (pp.345).

A number of features of the “exceptional programme” meant that HEP refugees were offered more advantages than many of the Kosovars that reached the UK by other means. For example, those arriving as part of the HEP benefitted from a programme of significant joined-up, multi-agency planning and coordination, as well as sympathetic publicity, which managed to evoke empathy in the host population. Indeed, as Sram and Ward (2000) describe, HEP arrivals were greeted at reception centres by a programme designed by the Refugee Council (commissioned by the Home Office), and executed by a number of government agencies. This is significant as it means that an agency with a deep understanding of refugee needs and issues was responsible for coordinating support, which led to arrivals being greeted at the airport by a team of specially trained and sympathetic professionals that could effectively anticipate their needs (pp.314). However, Bloch notes that the needs of the Kosovar community were not wholly anticipated. For example, many of the agency staff involved in the reception centres were on secondment, and had recent experience of working with Bosnian refugees just a few years before. As such, the needs of the Kosovar refugees were expected to be directly comparable to those of the Bosnians. In reality, there were marked needs between the two communities, and some of the needs and preferences of the Kosovars were overlooked as resources were modelled on the Bosnian example (2000:5).

Former Trafford Council Leader, Councillor David Acton conducted an interview with Manchester Aid to Kosovo in January 2016 as part of the Voices of Kosovo in Manchester project. During this interview, Acton recalls that out of a period of crisis, the ten leaders of the Association of Greater Manchester Councils (AGMA) were required to make fast decisions about where in Greater Manchester refugees could be housed and educated. Acton also describes that the situation in Kosovo and the imminent arrivals was a whole-community approach:

“It was absolutely remarkable the strength of feeling. Practically everybody in the community took part in trying to help wherever they can - as little or as much as

they could do really. I was really motivated in terms of that. So, that's a stand out thought that this was driven more by the community than politicians like myself. All I could do was really lend support" (2016).

Acton's description above suggests that the community in Trafford, and Greater Manchester was sympathetic to the situation of the Kosovar refugees, and that many were prepared to donate their time, money and possessions to trying to alleviate their suffering. This suggests that the plight of the evacuated Kosovars had been publicised in such a way that it had captured the compassion and understanding of the host community.

Considering the sensitivity of the situation, Sram and Ward (2000) note that the arrival process was designed to ensure that opportunities for stress, intrusion and discomfort were minimized. Steps taken included: the assurance that refugees were met in warm and friendly surroundings; that essential formalities were conducted sensitively and efficiently; and that there was no intrusion from the media at the reception centre. In addition to this, the organisers were educated about and mindful of the recent traumatic experiences of the Kosovar population often perpetrated by those in uniforms, and therefore steps were taken to ensure that police presence was kept to a minimum, and - where possible - police officers were present in plain clothes (Sram and Ward, 2000:316). These few examples emphasise the intended sensitivity with which the receptions for HEP refugees were designed and carried out.

A second pertinent feature of the arrival for HEP refugees was the immediate provision of health and social care needs. Where necessary, emergency first aid was provided as soon as the aircraft touched down, and ambulances were provided to transfer individuals to local hospitals (Sram and Ward, 2000:315). Moreover, general practitioners were provided at the reception centre to attend to the primary care needs of the refugees (Sram and Ward, 2000:316).

The HEP refugees also benefitted from a strategic approach to social care, education, and housing provision. Sram and Ward document in detail how these needs were met, but some key features include: raising awareness of the availability of a range of social and community care services including those designed to support mental health, physical disabilities, sensory impairments, learning disabilities and support for carers (2000:316).

An important difference between HEP refugees and some of those that arrived independently is that those evacuated were selected due to their increased vulnerability. For example, many of those that were brought to the UK were medical evacuees, families with a number of young children, or were very elderly (Smart, 2004:13). Additionally, some sixty percent of HEP evacuees were family reunion cases, and were provided with the same status as the family members that they were reunited with (Bloch, 1999:5). By contrast, Alice Bloch (1999) notes that the majority of refugees that arrived in the UK of their own means were single men (pp.24).

Bloch highlights that as with all refugee populations, policies entrenched in the 1948 Local Assistance Act meant that those applying for asylum on arrival in the UK were only able to access 'assistance in kind', such as supermarket vouchers and travel cards, and were not eligible to receive any cash (pp.24). In comparison, refugees arriving as part of the HEP were given Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR), meaning that they could stay in the UK for one year, were eligible to apply for the same benefits as UK nationals, and had the opportunity to work (pp.24). On June 15th 1999, the Home Office declared that all asylum seekers from the Former Republic of Yugoslavia would be given temporary Exceptional Leave to Remain once their application came up. However, due to the significant back-log in asylum applications, this meant that many Kosovars that arrived spontaneously were forced to survive on the limited resources, or on the generosity of their friends, family or community members to share the benefits they had been afforded, while they waited for their status to be granted (Bloch, 2000:6).

The research emphasises that Kosovars were siphoned into two separate groups. While changes made by the Home Office meant that all Kosovar refugees were ultimately offered parity of status, the offer to those evacuated as part of the HEP was significantly more positive and rounded than what could be afforded those that arrived outside of an official programme. This suggests that while the programme can retrospectively be considered a success, this was a relatively small scale, as the majority of Kosovar refugees did not benefit from a wrapped-around approach of service and support provision.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This report has sought to understand the conditions and experiences of Kosovar refugees that came to live in the United Kingdom as a result of the humanitarian crisis in their homeland. The research was especially interested in gaining an insight into both the likely number of refugees that arrived in the UK in the years surrounding the war, and an indication of how many Kosovars have remained here. In addition, the research has highlighted the difficulties of finding reliable and easily obtainable statistics about Kosovar refugees, and emphasised the shortage of material about the experiences of the Kosovar community in the UK beyond the years immediately after the war.

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