

“It’s not easy to be a refugee,
it takes courage. A lot of courage”

Rita, Congolese woman, 59

A long-term commitment: integration of resettled refugees in the UK

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A research project of this size and complexity has obviously benefited from contributions from a wide range of people all across the country. We are particularly grateful to all the refugees, almost 300 in all, who gave up their time to share their experiences with us through focus groups, interviews and questionnaire surveys. We worked with 11 refugee peer researchers who shaped the programme from the beginning and conducted many of the questionnaires: Patrick Changa, Sharon Chitambala, Jacques Kalume, Abiyot Shiferaw, Obse Dirirsa, Abdi Aden-Khalif, Nouri Baker Hussein, Elshada Yared Asfaw, Wondi Gashu Moges, Fatuma Wario Wako and Elias Tuffa. Three PhD students helped with interviewing participants: Sayanti Banerjee, Marta Paluch, and Elizabeth Maber. We are also grateful to case workers and representatives of local government for additional insights into the provision of the GPP and representatives of Refugee Action and the Refugee Council for invaluable guidance and logistical support. Crucial stages of the research were supported by a Steering Committee who provided expert advice: Carolyn Tah (Home Office), Lisa Doyle (Refugee Council), Rob Clarke (Refugee Action), Lucy Bryson (Brighton & Hove City Council), Tim Griffiths (Manchester City Council), Sue Gee (retired from Norfolk County Council), Ben Gidley (COMPAS, University of Oxford) and Charles Watters (University of Sussex). All Steering Group members acted in a personal capacity and did not represent their organisations. While acknowledging this huge array of support, responsibility for any errors remains our own.

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Published December 2018

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Foreword

Refugee resettlement offers a route of arrival into the UK, which is distinct from the asylum system. Refugees are identified by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in countries of first asylum, selected by the UK Home Office on the basis of their vulnerability and flown directly to the UK with refugee status on arrival. In terms of rights, resettled refugees are identical to those who manage to reach the UK by themselves, claim asylum and are recognized as refugees, although the situation of resettled refugees is distinct.

The integration of refugees is at the centre of political debates across Europe. In line with most current analysis, we take integration to mean equality of access and treatment between established residents and newer arrivals. It is a multi-dimensional process and involves adaptation and commitment on the part of both refugees and the receiving society. This report presents data from a longitudinal study and its major contribution is the focus on the long-term integration of refugees who have been resettled to the UK. The report demonstrates that integration, in all its aspects, is closely related to wellbeing. If it is to be successful it requires a long-term commitment. Refugees themselves demonstrate that commitment on a daily basis. The report examines refugees' experiences and focuses on the ways in which their commitment can be supported by a parallel commitment from statutory and non-statutory organisations.

The report draws on a unique set of data from a four-year research project 'Optimising Refugee Resettlement in the UK: A comparative study' funded by the ESRC, which ran from 2013 to 2018. Research involved 280 refugees who had been resettled to the UK from a variety of locations under the Gateway Protection Programme (GPP). Research took place in Manchester, Brighton & Hove and Norwich, with some additional research in Sheffield.

The project involved refugees at all stages of planning and research. We hope that the refugees' perspectives on the programme and the suggested recommendations on the service provision of the GPP will help to empower future resettled refugees to shape their new lives in the UK with more autonomy. We also hope that the findings presented will inform the post 2020 refugee resettlement programmes.

Preface



Since the refugee crisis hit UK television screens in 2015, refugee resettlement has risen up the political agenda as the public demanded politicians showed greater solidarity with people fleeing war and persecution.

At that time, then-Prime Minister David Cameron committed to resettling 20,000 refugees affected by the Syrian conflict by 2020. This was followed by a further commitment to bringing an additional 3,000 vulnerable children and their families from the Middle East and North Africa.

However, this important research shows that this is not so new. The UK has a history of refugee resettlement, dating back to 2004 when the Gateway programme was established. Previously, refugees from specific conflicts had been relocated, but Gateway provided the first annual commitment to resettling 750 people a year.

The UK is now one of the leading countries in the world for refugee resettlement, at a time when the need has never been greater. It is nonetheless a sad fact that on current global capacity, only 1% of the total number of the world's refugees will be able to find safety through a resettlement scheme.

As is detailed in this report, though, resettlement is not just about numbers. What is equally vital is a concrete focus on support and integration, so that refugees new to the UK can begin to move on with their lives.

This is clear in the report's findings on the importance of access to education, English language lessons, secure housing, and mental health support in successful resettlement, and their integral role in helping people to integrate.

The publication of this report is also incredibly timely for two reasons. The UK Home Office is currently considering what form its resettlement commitment will take after 2020. Currently there are three major resettlement schemes, but it surely makes sense to consolidate these into one overarching system which is not tied to a particular conflict or region.

A decision on the new scheme needs to be made as soon as possible to provide time for other partners – local authorities, charities, and others – to ensure infrastructure is in place, and there is no wasteful gap between one scheme ending and another starting.

This report underlines the principles that should be followed when facilitating future resettlement. It also shows the need for adequate funding to accompany it. But it is also timely because it points to good practice in terms of integration for refugees, whether they arrive in the UK via resettlement or through the asylum process.

The UK's current support for resettled refugees does not extend to those who arrive here independently, and who then acquire refugee status through the asylum system. This has led to a two-tier system, presenting a clear barrier to integration for that group of refugees.

The Government's upcoming Integration Strategy is a chance to put this right. The Home Office has previously acknowledged that integration support for those coming through the asylum process can learn positive lessons from our recent experiences in resettlement.

The findings of this research should be part of that learning, and part of moving towards a more humane approach to all refugees who come to the UK.



THANGAM DEBBOAIRE
MP FOR BRISTOL WEST AND CHAIR APPG ON REFUGEES

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Executive Summary

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH

- This research considered the long-term integration of refugees who were resettled to the UK in 2010 or before.
- Resettlement is one of three durable solutions to refugee displacement and provides a distinct route of arrival from the asylum system.
- There are currently three resettlement schemes in operation in the UK: the Gateway Resettlement Programme (formerly the Gateway Protection Programme), the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS). This research considers the experience of refugees who arrived under Gateway.
- Survey and interview research took place at three time points in 2014, 2015 and 2016. Over this period we interviewed 280 refugees, 180 of whom were interviewed at each of the three time points. In addition, at each time point we conducted 30 in-depth interviews.
- Interviews were significantly conducted by 11 peer researchers, resettled refugees who were employed on the project.
- We focused initially on Greater Manchester, Norwich and Brighton & Hove but included some refugees in Sheffield due to strong social networks.
- Previous research with resettled refugees in the UK has considered their situation within the first year or two after arrival¹. It is the focus on long-term integration (four years or more after arrival) that is the major new contribution of this project.
- We hope that this research highlights the value of the UK's commitment to refugee resettlement and will help to inform the design of new, post 2020 resettlement schemes.
- The report is organised in 10 sections, each considering a major component of long-term integration for resettled refugees. These are summarised below.

KEY FINDINGS

1. PRE-DEPARTURE ORIENTATION IS LOW COST AND HAS IMPACTS ON LATER INTEGRATION

- There have been significant variations in the delivery of pre-departure orientation over time and between individuals. This has concerned the duration of orientation sessions and the nature of information which is covered.
- Gaps between expectations and reality are significant and relate to levels of wellbeing even years after arrival. Larger gaps between expectations and reality was associated with lower levels of well-being and less frequent contact with the wider British population. However, these are correlations, and we do not know the causal direction of these links.
- The provision of pre-departure information provides an opportunity to begin to address these gaps between expectations and reality. Innovations such as delivering some orientation after arrival and employing previously resettled refugees have been shown to have an impact elsewhere.

2. EDUCATION IS THE KEY TO LONG TERM INTEGRATION AND MUST BE FACILITATED FOR ALL WHO NEED IT

- The majority of children who were 16 and under on arrival entered full time education. Children over the age of 13 found the transition harder, due to language difficulties and the struggle to catch up with academic content, often after years of missed schooling. Some of those in the 15-16 age group did not enter school at all. Difficulties in the school system were associated with language and literacy barriers, unfamiliar systems and academic practices. There was lack of knowledge among parents and the broader refugee community about the UK education system.
- Refugees who arrived as adults had very diverse educational backgrounds. Similar proportions had no education (17.1%) as those who arrived with University level qualifications (20.8%). Adults were offered very limited educational opportunities. This was mostly

¹ The largest previous survey involved 146 refugees and followed them for the first 18 months of their life in the UK (Platts-Fowler and Robinson 2011).

short, employment focused training such as CV-writing workshops, and English language.

- The group of young adults (13-24) faced the greatest difficulties. They arrived expecting to be able to continue with or transition to full time education, yet they struggled to gain qualifications at 16 and 18 years, and faced pressures to find a job as soon as they turned 18. The few people in this age group who managed to achieve a University qualification required very significant family support.

3. GOOD ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS ARE A PREREQUISITE, NOT A RESULT OF INTEGRATION

- Our research confirmed the importance of good English language skills for all other aspects of integration. These links are well known, but the longitudinal design of this project, with three time points allowed us to highlight the direction of this relationship, which is different from how it has been previously understood.
- Good, self-assessed English language ability at time point one was positively related to reporting increased contact with the wider British population at later time points. In turn, increased contact was associated with improvements in overall levels of wellbeing over time. This is as we would expect. However, the reverse was not the case. That means that those reporting high levels of contact with the majority population at time point one did not experience any increase in English language ability one or two years later.
- This is a completely new finding and underlines the importance of English language as a key driver of integration and refugee well-being. Daily interactions alone are not sufficient for learning English and high quality learning opportunities are crucial.

4. REFUGEES REQUIRE MORE TAILORED APPROACHES TO EMPLOYMENT

- Employment rates for resettled refugees are very low. Four years or more after arrival resettled refugees are employed at less than half the rate for the entire population in each of the cities in which we conducted research.

- Employment was directly related to levels of education on arrival. Only 2.7% of those who arrived in the UK with no formal education at all were employed four or more years after arrival. At the other end of the spectrum, 41.2% of those who arrived in the UK with University level qualifications had a job more than four years later, although almost never one which required or even related to their qualifications.
- The other clear determinant of employment status was the duration of time that individuals had been without work before coming to the UK. Of those who had spent time in a refugee camp, those in employment five years after arrival had spent a mean time of 132 months (just under 11 years) in a camp, whereas those who were still looking for work five years after arrival had spent on average more than two years longer in a camp, a mean of 160 months.
- The most significant barriers to employment were language and lack of recognition of qualifications, even more than four years after arrival.

5. POOR HEALTH CREATES A CYCLE OF ISOLATION. MORE MENTAL HEALTH CARE IS NEEDED

- Just over a fifth of refugees (22.3% of men and 20.6% of women) reported that they had suffered from emotional problems 'a lot' or 'extremely' in the four weeks preceding the survey. Health is also associated with English language skills. Those refugees with poor physical and mental health were more likely to report poor language skills.
- Refugees expressed very high levels of satisfaction with NHS services and appreciated being treated 'like everyone else' but there was very little evidence of tailored mental health support offered to refugees, even though those needs should have been reported before arrival.

6. HOUSING SHOULD BE SAFE, SECURE AND AS STABLE AS POSSIBLE

- The safety of Housing was widely remarked upon by refugees and must be considered a key element of success of the programme.
- Yet the provision of housing is a major difficulty faced by local authorities and partly explains why Brighton & Hove Council is the only local authority in the South East to have engaged with Gateway.
- Refugees were significantly more satisfied with their current house than with their first house, but frequency of moves was a source of anxiety. In Brighton & Hove refugees have experienced as many as 7 moves in eight years since the end of the programme.

7. LIFE IN THE UK IS SAFE AND SECURE BUT DISCRIMINATION IS WIDESPREAD

- At time point three, 78.9% of respondents reported that they felt either safe (31.1%) or 'very safe' (47.8%) in the UK and only 1.1% of individuals (a total of 2 individuals) reported that they felt 'not at all safe'
- Nevertheless many individuals reported that they had faced racist abuse in the UK, ranging from verbal attacks to physical assaults. More than half (51%, 133 people) reported that they had not been given a job as a result of discrimination.

8. ACQUIRING UK CITIZENSHIP HAS AN IMPACT BUT BARRIERS TO NATURALISATION REMAIN TOO GREAT FOR MANY

- At the final research point all refugees had been eligible to apply for UK citizenship for at least a year and 60% had acquired it.
- The acquisition of citizenship related to an increase in overall levels of wellbeing. This can be separated into higher levels of emotional security due to certainty that they would be able to remain in the UK, an increase in personal confidence and contacts with the local council, improved labour market integration, opportunity to travel beyond the UK, particularly to visit family and friends.

- Despite these attractions the large minority who had not acquired British citizenship cited reasons of cost which for a family with two adults and two children more than tripled over the course of our research to well over £4,000 and has become considerably more difficult.

9. SOCIAL CONTACTS: BRIDGING AND BONDING ARE IMPORTANT BUT ALSO TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL LINKS

- Our research confirmed the complementary functions of 'bridging' and 'bonding' social capital. Bridging involves links with people from different social and ethnic backgrounds and bonding with people of the same background, including immediate family.
- The quality of both bridging and bonding relationships was significantly correlated with overall wellbeing for refugees.
- Quantity of contact with British people was significantly and positively associated with wellbeing over time.
- A surprising finding for this research is that transnational links were also found to have a strong positive influence on wellbeing in the UK. We asked refugees specifically about the quality of their contact with family and friends in their country of origin or in the refugee camp where many of them spent many years. Recognising the importance of these connections is a good way to promote wellbeing and resilience.

10. PROGRAMME SUPPORT IS MOST EFFECTIVE WHEN IT IS TAILORED TO INDIVIDUALS' NEEDS

- Research has demonstrated that refugees are a very heterogeneous group. This includes the presence or absence of family networks or existing contacts in the UK, the state of their mental and physical health, their ability to speak English, their previous qualifications and experience of employment. This diversity affects all aspects of their integration.
- Programme support for resettlement is considered most effective by refugees concerned when it takes account of and builds on these various needs.

Background and Aims

Refugee resettlement is one of three durable solutions to refugee displacement recognised by UNHCR. Resettlement schemes are a vital instrument of international solidarity and humanitarian cooperation, and a crucial component of international protection regimes. As one of the top three resettlement countries in Europe, the UK has a long-standing experience of resettlement initiatives (Beirens and Fratzke 2017). The UK currently receives refugees through three main resettlement schemes: the Gateway Protection Programme (GPP) which began operating in 2004, the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), established in 2015 and the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS), established in 2016.

This research project began in 2013. At that time only the GPP operated, with a quota of 750 people a year from anywhere in the world. In 2015, the UK Government expanded this quota by committing to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020 under the VPRS, though this was relaxed in 2017 to include refugees of any nationality fleeing as a result of the war in Syria. Since 2015, 10,538 refugees have arrived under the VPRS and it is anticipated that the target of 20,000 will be reached before 2020 (Home Office 2018a). Only 18 local authorities have been involved in the GPP, although more than 160 local authorities have signed up to accept refugees through the VPRS (Home Office, 2017a), meaning that refugees are increasingly being resettled to areas of the UK with no history or prior experience of resettlement.

We hope that the findings from this four-year longitudinal study will inspire authorities receiving resettled refugees to maximise long-term integration policies by providing ample support and improving refugees' well-being. This research has followed the largest cohort of resettled refugees of any research in the UK. It is also the first to follow refugees long term, that is from four to 11 years after their arrival in the UK. Our central finding in this research is that, despite many individual success stories, refugees resettled to the UK are struggling in the medium to long term. Addressing this requires a long-term commitment to their continued integration on the part of national and local governments. This strategy has clear economic and social benefits. It will allow resettled refugees to make the contribution to the UK which they are keen to do.

We also hope that this report will contribute to the long-term future of refugee resettled in the UK. Despite the challenges, our research underlines the tremendous benefits of resettlement for the individuals concerned, the communities to which they move to and the UK as a whole. All of this supports ongoing advocacy to continue to expand resettlement once the VPRS comes to an end in 2020.

The Organisation of the Research Process

The ESRC funded project *Optimising Refugee Resettlement in the UK: A Comparative Analysis* explored the integration outcomes for refugees resettled to the UK under Gateway Protection Programme in Brighton, Norwich, and Greater Manchester. These cities were selected to investigate different ways of managing the GPP. Different combinations of local government and voluntary sector involvement were implemented in the three cities, although ultimately we found no significant difference in the welfare of refugees that may have arisen from these different approaches. Cities were also selected to ensure that each national group of refugees was represented in more than one city. For this reason a small number of Iraqi refugees resettled to Sheffield were also included in the questionnaire survey.

In total, 280 individuals took part in the multi-method and longitudinal research. The quantitative data was collected at three time points over three years, starting in 2014. Given the low annual quotas that operated in the years when refugees arrived, participants were selected from a population that in some cities was not much larger than the sample size. In Brighton and Hove, for example, almost all households who had arrived in 2006 were involved in the research. Sampling was not necessary since all refugees who could be identified who had arrived before 2010 were invited to participate and all those who agreed were included in the research. Since refugees' direct contact with programme providers had ended several years before research began, there were no up to date records for our target cohorts. Identification therefore proceeded by network methods and using the community knowledge of the peer researchers.

All refugees who had participated in the survey at time point one were invited again at time points two and three. One hundred and eighty refugees (64% of all research participants) filled out the questionnaires all three times, each time about a year apart, which allowed for longitudinal analyses looking at different variables. The questionnaire explored a number of areas: employment, education, physical health, well-being, housing, language, culture, social connections and identity.

In addition to the survey, we conducted 90 interviews with refugee participants and 9 interviews with stakeholders in each area. These interviews were conducted at 3 time points between 2014 and 2016, and eight focus groups were held with a total of 53 people which took place at the start of the project in 2014. The qualitative data was collected from a selection of the participants who had filled out the questionnaires. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in English and audio-recorded. Data were analysed using inductive thematic analysis. Participants have been given pseudonyms in this report. Where data from only one time point is used it is based on data from T1 only unless otherwise stated.

Interview time 1 (T1): beginning Jan 2014:
280 questionnaires, 31 interviews

Interview time 2 (T2): beginning Jan 2015:
211 questionnaires, 30 interviews

Interview time 3 (T3): beginning Jan 2016:
206 questionnaires, 29 interviews

An additional innovation was employment of a team of peer group researchers. Eleven formerly resettled refugees, who had an existing network among refugee communities in the UK were provided with a week of research methods training to become research assistants (RAs). They supported the research team in elaborating the questionnaires by highlighting important topics from their experiences. Translations of the items used in the questionnaire were extensively discussed with RAs and agreed on before data collection started. RAs further assisted in the questionnaire data collection by providing contacts to their community as well as to their network of people from city and county councils and civil society organizations for further contacts.

The final element of the research was the steering group, which met annually at key stages in the research process. Members included representatives of national and local government, key civil society organisations and representatives from international organisations and the resettled refugee community.

PARTICIPANTS

In total 132 women and 148 men took part in this longitudinal study. Refugees were originally from Ethiopia (40%), Iraq (32%), Republic of Congo (19%), and Somalia (9%), although all of them had spent some time, varying from a few months to several decades, in another country before coming to the UK.

	Brighton	Norwich	Manchester	Sheffield
Ethiopian N=111	37 (14 men, 23 women)	0	74 (42 men, 32 women)	0
Congolese N=54	0	44 (22 men, 22 women)	10 (6 men, 4 women)	0
Iraqi N=91	0	4 (3 men, 1 woman)	69 (36 men, 33 women)	18 (10 men, 8 women)
Somali N=24	0	0	24 (15 men, 9 women)	0
Total	37	48	177	18

Table 1: Distribution of participants by resettlement location and nationality

The refugees across all four research locations aged between 18 and 80-years old. The mean age of research participants in each city was:

	Brighton	Norwich	Manchester	Sheffield
Mean age (range)	40 (18-80)	34 (20-60)	36 (18-75)	35 (18-52)

Table 2: Mean age and age range of refugee participants in each city at T3

The refugees arrived in the UK in 2010 or earlier. On average, refugees interviewed in Brighton were resettled approximately two years earlier than in the other two locations. The table below (Table 3) indicates the refugees' average years of stay for each city at the last time of interview (time 3) in 2016.

Length of time in UK (years)	Brighton	Norwich	Manchester	Sheffield	Overall
Mean	9.81	7.41	7.48	7.19	7.77

Table 3: Average time refugee participants had lived in each city at T3

The report now turns to our key findings, which make up the remainder of the report. These fall into ten sections highlighting key areas in which policy engagement has a long term impact. Our findings reflect the challenges that refugees faced in settling in the UK. Specific policy recommendations follow each of the eight sections.



1. Pre-departure orientation is low cost and has impacts on later integration

Like every state-led resettlement programme, the GPP involved a number of organisations before refugees arrived in the UK. First, all refugees had been through a status determination process, carried out by UNHCR. They were subsequently identified by UNHCR as a priority for resettlement, based on UNHCR's indicators of vulnerability. Having been identified by UNHCR all refugees were interviewed in their country of first asylum by representatives of the Home Office. They then attended orientation courses before their departure for resettlement, as part of the pre-arrival support period. Most of the courses were carried out by the International Organisation for Migration. Participants resettled to Manchester also had information sessions once they have arrived in the UK

ADDRESS THE SIGNIFICANT VARIATIONS IN THE DELIVERY OF PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION

A solid pre-departure preparation in refugees' first country of asylum is crucial for a smooth implementation of the programme and for refugees' initial steps towards integration in the UK. For institutions in the resettlement community, information about pre-migration experiences of refugees is vital to ensure that adequate support services are in place before refugees arrive. For refugees, pre-departure orientation courses are vital preparation for potential challenges they may face in the UK, and to manage their expectations regarding their resettlement to the UK.

There was substantial variation in the level of pre-departure information refugees received. Research participants arriving in 2010 or earlier had between 3 and 14 days of training. The courses mainly contained information on the journey, cultural norms of the UK, and daily life, such as the use of electricity. According to our interviewees, their friends who arrived later than them, around 2015, received three hours of cultural orientation to prepare them for life in Britain. Currently, other countries of resettlement devote more time to pre-arrival cultural orientation. Workshops delivered by IOM on behalf of the United States, for instance, run for four days, and the Australian government sponsors the delivery of five days of training (Bolt 2018).

Participants who had 3 days of training found that the general information provided on life in the UK was insufficient. It was reported that due to the limited time, the workshops focused predominantly on practical aspects on the journey to the UK. Jira felt unprepared on arrival in the UK:

'I am very satisfied, and I am very grateful for the way the UK government has given us a chance for second life. But the problem is that when we came here we were not ready'

Jira, 62, male, Ethiopian

Kofi highlighted a range of issues that could have been covered much better, though many of these issues would have been more easily communicated after arrival.

'How to go to the GP and explain your sickness, how to apply for jobs, courses like that. I missed courses that gives us the chance to have job access and getting help from the course teacher, where you can ask. And that is what I feel the bad side of the government system. Having courses like would help'

Kofi, 52, male, Ethiopian

Most participants found the training useful. However, for some interviewees the emphasis of the courses was too much about socio/cultural norms like how to say 'please' and 'thank you'. They would have preferred to receive more information on the type and length of the GPP support. Others considered that, with hindsight, the information provided in these workshops was not accurate. This especially concerned information on finding employment, or on access to education which were considered to have been 'too positive' compared to their reality in the UK.

A final, commonly mentioned issue was the need for more frequent translation in the provision of training. Given the amount of information provided in a short period of time and the unfamiliarity of the topic, refugees pointed to a need for more translation during the workshops, and hand-outs to re-read the information at a later point.

GAPS BETWEEN PRE-DEPARTURE EXPECTATIONS AND REALITY ARE RELATED TO LATER WELLBEING

There is a strong relationship between integration several years after arrival and the size of the gap between refugees' pre-arrival expectations and the subsequent reality. In our study, we asked participants to rate their expectations about their lives in the UK regarding finding a job, having access to education, housing and feeling safe in the UK on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). The same questions were asked about reality. The results showed that a difference between expectation and reality was related to a number of variables that could support integration. Larger gaps between expectations and reality was strongly associated with lower levels of well-being and less frequent contact with the wider British population.

There was a significant difference in the gap between expectation and reality by national groups: Iraqis experienced the largest gap, and Somalis the smallest. This result might be linked to the fact that many Iraqis had much better living standards, prior to becoming refugees, so they experienced the change much more abruptly. In general, interviewees living in camps before their arrival to the UK had smaller differences between expectations and reality than those who had not lived in a camp.

Finally, we also found regional differences. Refugees resettled to Brighton and Hove experienced a smaller gap between expectations and reality than those living in Greater Manchester and Sheffield. These findings point to the importance of pre-departure cultural orientation which prepares refugees for the realities of resettlement.

A TWO-STAGE INFORMATION MODEL WOULD FACILITATE THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES

It is impossible to eliminate high expectations regarding a new life in the UK entirely. Refugees will inevitably be influenced by a wide range of sources over which the pre-departure information session has no control, such as media or social networks. Yet the data clearly show that the smaller the gap between expectation and reality the better the outcomes are overall.

One way of reducing this gap is to provide a two-stage information model which bridges pre-departure information sessions with post-arrival civic orientation courses. Refugees estimated that information on crucial topics, such as for instance housing, are more tangible when they are already in the UK. This combination would focus overall information on the programme as a whole in the pre-departure course, along with information on the journey, elementary language lessons and basic cultural observations. More detailed practical training would be offered through first information sessions in the UK. This occurs when refugees understand the context more effectively and are not burdened with the stress of leaving.

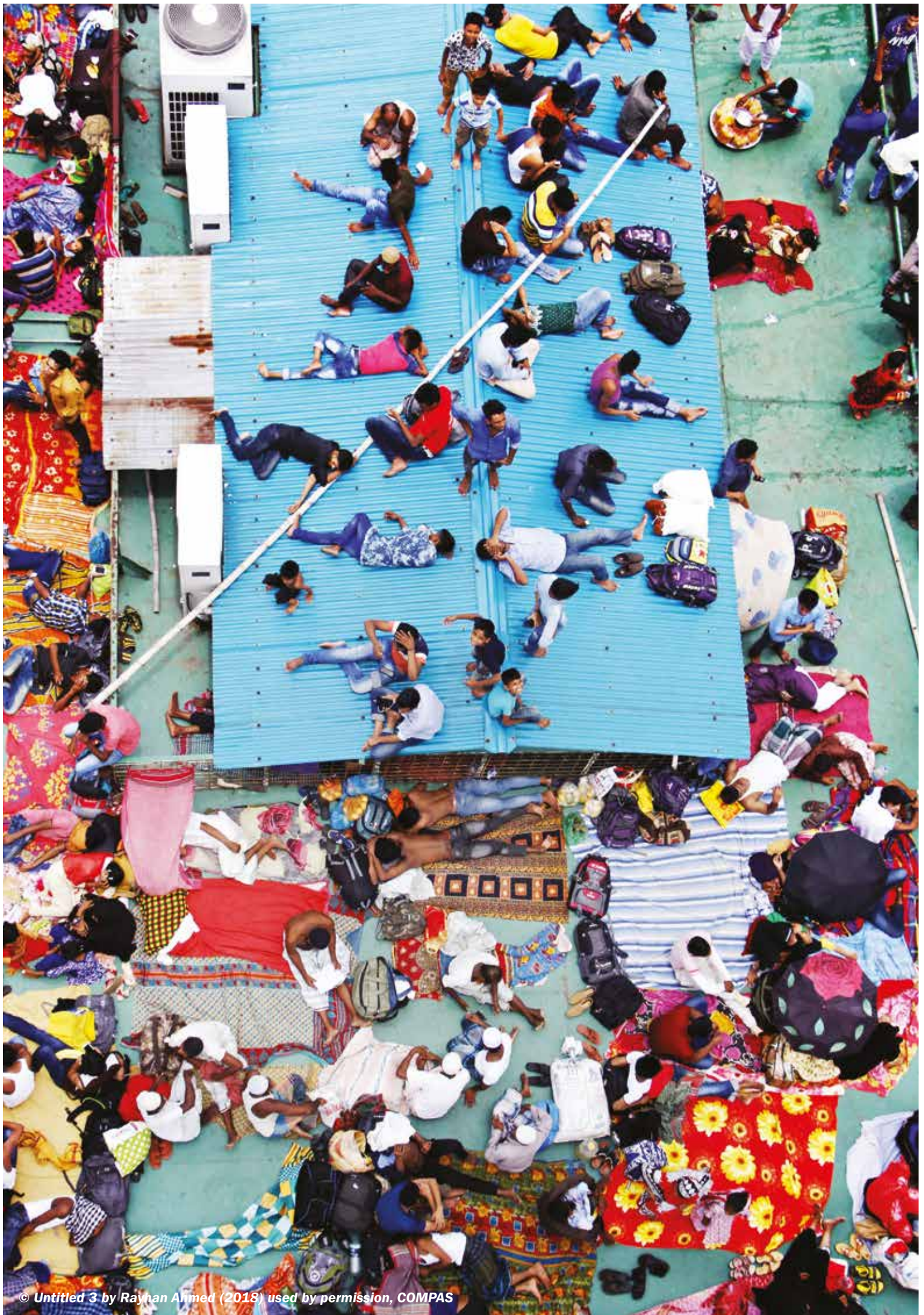
Still, although it may have an impact, improving the long-term situation of refugees requires much more than simply adjusting expectations. Refugees must also receive support on entry into employment, education and intensive language provision right after their arrival. In order to optimise the support during the first subsidised year, pre-departure information exchange between the IOM, the UNHCR and the service providers about the needs of refugees should run smoothly. This transfer of pre-departure information should contain:

- Special needs support (e.g. health services)
- Clarification of accreditation of refugees' health services qualifications in order to guarantee fast entry into the labour market
- Information on refugee children and youth for a timely integration into compulsory schools and further and higher education.

FURTHER POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The pre-departure orientation course has been extended from 1 day (5 hours) to 2 days (10 hours) in currently running programmes. Based on our findings, we recommend providing a minimum 3-day pre-departure workshop. If this is not possible, a 2-day pre-departure workshop should be combined with information courses on arrival.
- Optimise content of pre-departure orientation courses with post-arrival first information sessions or civic orientation courses.
- Pre-departure information should be place specific (not based on London), and contain information about local employment market.
- Involve resettled refugees in the design and delivery of cultural orientation courses, recognising the expertise of resettled refugees, and providing information directly without the need for translation.
- Use skills profiling tools in the pre-departure orientation course for refugees in order to improve advance information on their background, education and skills in order to facilitate a better integration outcome for refugees (see for instance pilot programmes such as the 'LINK IT' (IOM 2018)).
- Based on our finding that expectations regarding refugees' lives in the UK varied between the different refugee communities, cultural orientation courses need to be adjusted to meet the different needs.
- Due to the heterogeneity of the refugee groups, we suggest a better tailored design of pre-departure orientation courses according to refugees' life stages; for instance, for the youth, parents or for the elderly.
- Increase information about the resettlement programme and main support mechanisms in order to reduce gaps between expectations and reality.
- Improve sustainability of information provided with hand-outs, where refugees are literate, and translations into refugees' own language.





2. Education is the key to long term integration and must be facilitated for all who need it

CHILDREN

Refugee children and youth often experience severe disruption to their schooling prior to resettlement because of conflict and prolonged displacement. Trauma has an adverse impact on learning capacity and outcomes. The lack of education certificates from overseas may create further difficulties. Given these barriers to education, refugee children need specific support in their integration into compulsory education and in their educational pathway. Our data on education only covers children who were 13 years or older on arrival.

The majority of children who were 16 and under at the time of arrival were enrolled into mainstream compulsory schools within a few weeks of arrival. The support through specialist educational units in some areas, such as the Gateway Schools, or third sector educational programmes aimed to support refugee children's entry into learning environments, and to overcome language barriers. There were some instances of children arriving aged 15–16 who did not go to school and instead received language support before going straight to college. The language support offered was not full time and these young people expressed disappointment at not being able to access school.

Those who had entered the school system at 13 years and older did not always find the transition easy, and this largely depended on their level of English language, their level of education and the extent of disruption to their education prior to resettlement. Young people spoke of being 'thrown into' school and the assumption that, with limited support, they would be able to catch up with their non-refugee peers and gain the qualifications:

'As soon as I came, I had to do some exams. The GCSE exams for the year 9... we had just arrived. I had to do them exams. And then... So, obviously I'm gonna take them. I messed up. Obviously. And then, well, I didn't know that them exams decide your future.'

Ahmad, arrived aged 14, Iraq

The key barriers to educational attainment were insufficient support with language, lack of support to catch up with academic content, a lack of understanding of academic expectations and unfamiliar practices and

systems. Parents also highlighted their own lack of familiarity with the UK education system as a disadvantage in supporting their children, and not knowing how to communicate with schools, for example what questions they should be asking about their child's progress.

For parents, after safety, the integration of their children into UK mainstream education was the second most important aspect of their new lives in Britain, positively affecting their well-being:

'The first important thing is we are safe. We saved our lives, we run away from our country because we were not safe. And second positive thing is education. My daughters they now go to college. I am so happy for that.'

Alma, 45, female, Ethiopian

Parents were hopeful that their children would have a better quality of life in the UK because they were able to get 'a proper education'.

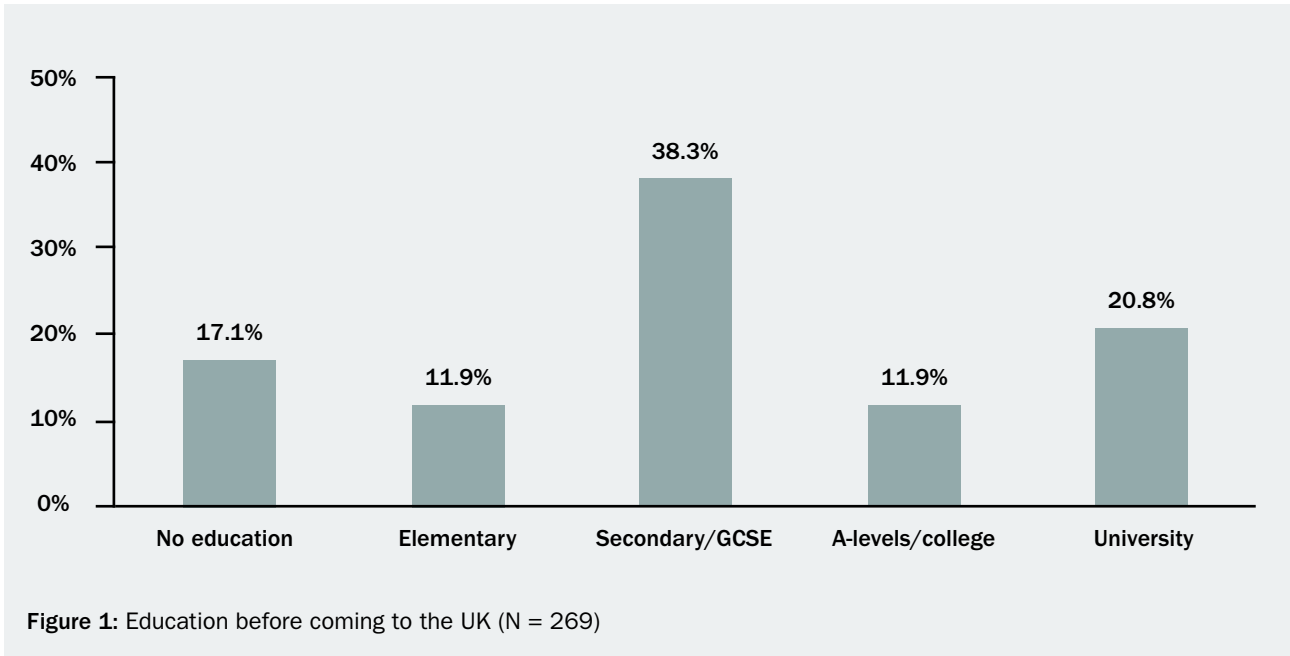
EDUCATION OF REFUGEE ADULTS

Contrary to the enrolment of refugee children into mainstream compulsory education, the integration of adults into education was problematic. Refugees who arrived as adults (i.e. over the age of 18) were unlikely to receive any education apart from language provision, and short training courses, such as CV writing offered by the Job Centre. In the early days after arrival the desire to become self-sufficient and to have a job outweighed thoughts of education. People were also unaware of how important qualifications are to gaining access to skilled employment and to progression within employment. Four or more years after arrival refugees regretted not having had the opportunity to access education and to gain the skills and qualifications which would open the doors to sustainable employment.

'To change it's hard. I need something, like I told you, I want to continue my education. But if I continue my education, I have to stop this job. So, from where do I get money? Who is going to help me and my wife? It is not easy, it is not easy.'

Negasi, 47, male, Ethiopian

As the graph below shows (Figure 1) refugees arrived with very diverse educational backgrounds.



Refugees arrived in the UK with a wide range of previous educational experiences: 17.1% had no education at all in their country of origin, whereas 20.8% had received a university education. Research participants included people who had previously worked in professional roles such as teachers, university lecturers, translators, midwives, doctors and a judge. Their qualifications from overseas were not recognised in the UK and they found there were no opportunities to ‘top-up’ or to build on existing skills and qualifications; instead they were told they would need to start from scratch. Without foundational qualifications of GCSE and A level, very few managed to access Higher Education. None of those interviewed were working in jobs which were commensurate with the skills and qualifications which they came with.

One participant, who had worked as a doctor in Ethiopia, described the impact on the community when previously well-respected and well-qualified people were unable to find employment:

‘...it killed the spirit in the community because if the doctor doesn’t work, if the doctor would not be accepted, who am I to be?’

Michael, 57, male, Ethiopian

EDUCATION OF REFUGEE YOUTH

Those aged 13-24 on arrival faced distinct barriers to education. Education was a high priority for refugee youth and they had high expectations. Quality education was a very widely reported aspiration on moving to the UK. Yet both our quantitative and qualitative data shows that for a significant number of research participants, particularly those arriving from mid-teens onwards, these aspirations for education were not recognised or met. Most of our young participants were highly disappointed about their lack of access to tertiary or vocational education.

A quarter (24.3%) of those arriving before they were 19 only received English language classes and no other education, while the large majority (75.7%) received some education, either secondary, tertiary, or university. The picture was very different for those who arrived age 19-24: over two-thirds (69%) received either no education or language classes only, while only 31% received some kind of formal UK education. Hence, it is no surprise that regrets and disappointment at not having had the opportunity to invest in education were a major theme among refugee youth (Morrice, Tip, Brown and Collyer, Forthcoming, *Journal of Youth Studies*).

THE MAIN BARRIERS TO ENTRY INTO POST-COMPULSORY EDUCATION WERE:

Insufficient language skills

Lack of necessary qualifications. Delays, or lack of opportunity, to gain qualifications meant that post-18 they were too old to access full time publicly funded education. Many told us how they would like to study hairdressing, plumbing or decorating, or to go to university but had been told that they required GCSEs in English or maths. As a consequence many felt 'let down' by the UK.

'Some of the things that we actually had on mind when we first came, didn't happen for us. We thought we would continue with our education and stuff like that. We didn't know about age concern and education wise we were let down.'

Amadi, 28, male, Ethiopian

'My sister, she's 19 and she got D in science, she wanted to get B, or A. When she went back to college and to try to do it GCSE, she was declined. And the reason was that she would have to pay full amount of money for the course, and it's GCSE. So I think one of the things they should change is this: 'cos she's 19, because she missed, just one year above 18, she would have to pay about, nearly about £800 to pay for a year.'

Daniel, 27, male, Ethiopian

Once they reached the age of 18 young refugees felt pressured to move into employment. Many commented that they had to take up jobs right away, or that 'they just put us on benefits'. Once in employment or on Jobseeker's Allowance it was very difficult to continue to attend English classes or to study part-time.

'Well I have some qualification but that is not relevant to that here. We didn't have GCSE. We didn't have A Levels. I mean I like the Job Centre when they are expecting for you to look for a job. And you end up like, in your mind you want education. You want to start with that. It is just too much. If you start education you can't work full time. So you claim job seekers allowance. All of that pushed me back.'

Aaron, 28, male, Ethiopian

Refugees who had tried to combine claiming benefits with education of more than 15 hours a week (for example, GCSE English and a part-time Access to Higher Education course) were sanctioned by the Job Centre and required to repay their benefits, ending up in debt.

There was a lack of guidance about post-compulsory education pathways, career choices, and their further education outcomes:

'When we first came here I was 17 and for two or three weeks the Home Office they help us. Like they show us around. But education, I didn't know where I can start. My only need is to get education. So that's what I needed, but no help.'

Jemal, 24, male, Ethiopian

Independent initiatives of refugees to access Further or Higher Education often failed, because of unfamiliarity with the complex UK post compulsory sector, or due to financial issues: For instance:

- Refugees were late in their applications and lost money, time and motivation
- they struggled to find the financial means to enrol on courses
- they were unaware of the availability of Government student loans for Higher Education
- they could not afford the necessary equipment, or the transportation to attend their evening classes
- they were not able to complete their qualifications, either because they were unable to afford GCSE examination fees, or they didn't find the right information about exam dates.

Many refugees felt not only alone and lost in their choices on educational routes, but they were simply not encouraged to take up further education, which would have potentially increased their chances to find long-term secure employment:

'Um. Because when we came here, yeah, our caseworker, I asked him about education, he says if I pursue the course that I want it will take me a long, long time. That's what he said. He didn't make it very easy for me. I don't know if he also lacked of information, or... yeah, it was just not helpful'

Didier, 31, male, Congolese

Others felt frustrated about the lack of flexibility of programmes and the delays in admission to education. Depending on when they arrived they often had to wait many months until the beginning of the next academic year to start a programme. This inevitably increases the risk that they will no longer be eligible for publicly funded full-time education. In their opinion, the waiting periods could have been avoided with an improved preparation of their arrival in the UK, and organising their integration into education prior to resettlement:

‘They should consider that applying for college is in September. So, if somebody comes in September you have to wait [a year]. They should do that, to apply before people they arrive in September – obviously they got your file when they bring you from Africa, and they know your age, they could do it.’

Amadi, 28, male, Ethiopian

‘At the end of the day you have nothing. Pay the tax, make little money, and then in the evening sit down. No change in your life. Still sit. But maybe, if I had two years study, two years...then it would changed, honestly. Yeah, in two years’ time you can learn any course. You can learn painting, decorating in 6 months you can learn...some kind of, if you have a bit of background, obviously.’

Michael, 22, male, Ethiopian

‘Basically, they should give us 1 or 2 years of education or qualification on how to start a job...How to use a computer for example. All this is important. Makes big changes. But nobody cares.’

Amadi, 28, male, Ethiopian

Caring responsibilities also reduced opportunities to pursue education. Some refugees, both male and female reported taking care of an ill or disabled partner, child, or parent as a barrier to education. Parenthood added a significant gender dimension, with women more likely to be caring for children. The lack of support and opportunity to pursue education comes with tremendous cost for long-term social integration, upward mobility and overall well-being:

In the few cases, where refugees reported positive experiences with their further education, they were proud of their achievements. Their success boosted their confidence in getting along in their new environment and their overall well-being.

To secure education which equips refugees with qualifications and skills required for the UK job market should be a high priority in future UK resettlement policy. Without significant support to pursue education refugees are caught in poverty-trap conditions of low income, precarious employment or benefits. Their ability to contribute to the local economy, to public services and to British society as a whole is limited. Education opens up new opportunities.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

REFUGEE CHILDREN:

Provision of adapted approaches to language and literacy support and bridging programmes for successful integration of children into compulsory schooling, through:

- Tailored educational support, including intensive language and literacy support alongside mainstream education
- Support to catch up with academic content
- Additional time in exams
- Financial support for NGOs in the educational sector providing homework clubs and informal learning spaces
- Initiatives to support families and carers to engage with schools
- Support for social and emotional well-being of children

REFUGEE YOUTH:

- Access to additional routes to further and higher education; i.e. the creation of bridging programmes to enable refugees to catch up on content and language skills.

- Better support for refugee youth to navigate the complicated and unfamiliar education system, including the use of mentors and coaches.
- Extension of support for full time education up to the age of 25 (in line with provision for care leavers).
- Enrol young refugees into education prior to resettlement in order to minimise waiting periods (i.e. to colleges)
- Flexible approach to college and university admissions. For example, alternatives to GCSE English and alternative ways of assessing suitability

REFUGEE ADULTS:

- Support for transferring or 'topping up' qualifications and skills to the UK context.
- Entitlement to a period of full-time education to gain UK qualifications commensurate with their background and aspirations.
- English language provision with embedded vocational or academic content to support progression to employment and further study
- More information and guidance for parents regarding how to optimise the education of their children.



3. Good English language skills are a prerequisite not a result of integration

LANGUAGE AS THE KEY TO INTEGRATION

Learning English is the key to refugees’ ability to communicate in the UK, to integrate and to gain confidence and independence. Language proficiency significantly and positively relates to different aspects of refugees’ lives (Fig. 2):

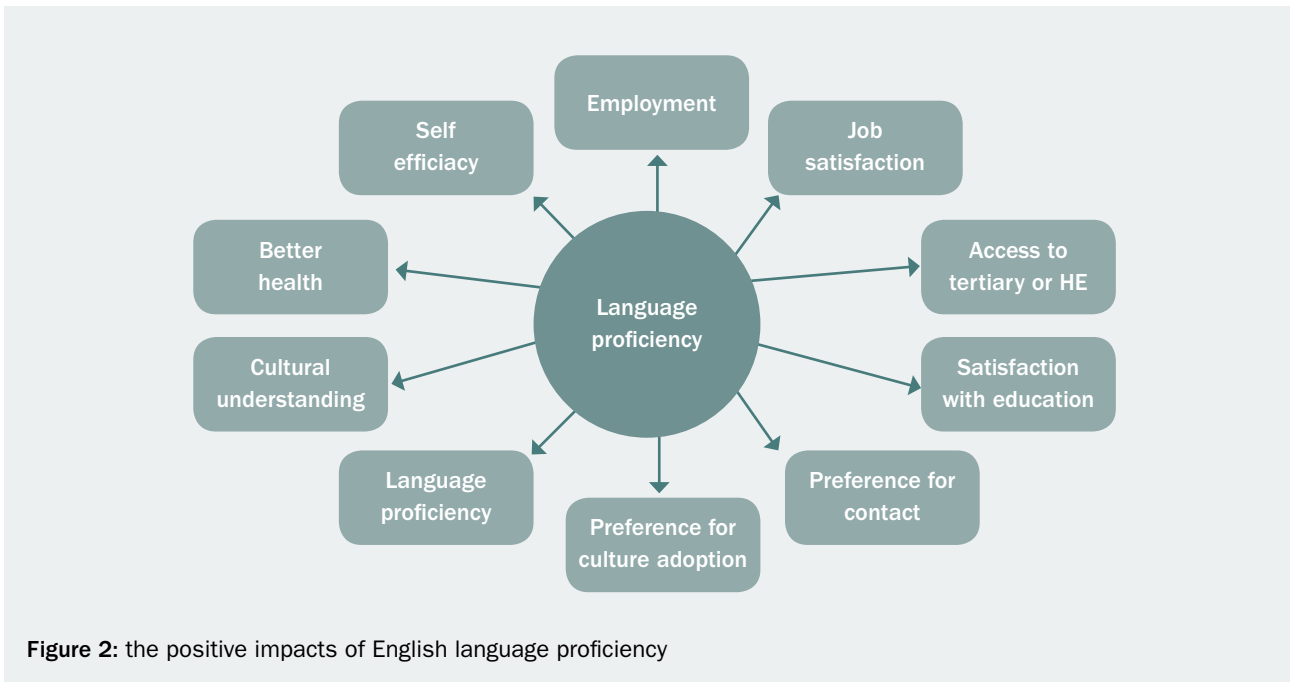


Figure 2: the positive impacts of English language proficiency

Higher language proficiency was linked to better health, greater belief in refugees’ own abilities (self-efficacy); better cultural understanding and a preference for adopting British culture. Refugees with higher language skills were more likely to be employed and to have higher job satisfaction; they were more likely to access further and higher education and more likely to be satisfied with education. Overall higher levels of language were correlated with higher levels of well-being. Importantly we found that the higher refugees language levels, the more contact they had with British people, and the more positive contact.

As this was a longitudinal study we have been able to investigate the direction of the effects of English language skills over time. We find that better language skills lead to more contact with British people at later time points, but not vice versa. In turn, more contact with British people leads to better well-being over time among refugees, but again not the other way round. This means that people need language classes before they can make these contacts, and making these contacts is important because they are associated with better refugee well-being over time. The effect is displayed in the figure below (Fig. 3).

These findings reconfirm the importance of skills in the dominant language for integration. Yet this research has further refined this established connection.

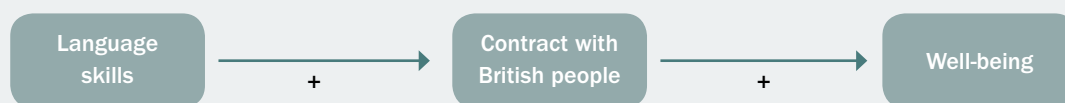


Figure 3: the direction of effect between English language skills and wellbeing.

Refugees themselves overwhelmingly expressed the desire to learn English and saw it as fundamental to their integration. As one participant said:

‘You can’t have a good integration when you don’t have a good communication.’

Jacques, male, 43, Congolese

English language was valued because it enabled them to access tangible benefits such as education and employment. It also allowed greater independence in their daily lives. This included going to the doctor alone, accessing local services and reading letters and bills. Being able to talk to their neighbours and make friends was also very important. Refugees found it difficult to make meaningful connections with other British people and communication was often limited to basic greetings. Once contacts and friendships were established it had a positive impact on their lives:

‘Uh, it’s difficult to make friends here. Like for example, when you don’t speak good English, to ask friend request it is difficult. Like for me, I felt shy before. It was about my confidence, because I couldn’t speak good English. But now it’s fine, because I speak better English and I found a friend.’

Rachel, female, 21, Congolese

‘I like to speak with English people. I learn English very well by speaking to them. I gain more skills when I talk to them. And it gets easier, much easier, when I speak to people, because practice is very important. When I stay alone, I forget everything.’

Asma, female, 61, Iraqi

REFUGEES WITH THE LOWEST ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY ARE MOST AT RISK OF EXCLUSION AND LONG-TERM DEPENDENCY

There were significant differences in the self-reported language ability of our participants. Four groups faced particular difficulties learning English: women, older refugees, those with poor health and those with limited pre-migration education. They were most likely to struggle to learn English and are consequently most at risk of exclusion. We consider each in turn.

First, men reported better language ability than women. The most significant gender effect was found where participants had caring responsibilities. Only 2.3% of men reported that they were looking after children, compared to 48.2% of women. Childcare and caring for sick relatives presented major barriers to learning English for women, but less for men. Overall, refugees with caring responsibilities scored among the lowest in the English proficiency score (Fig. 4).

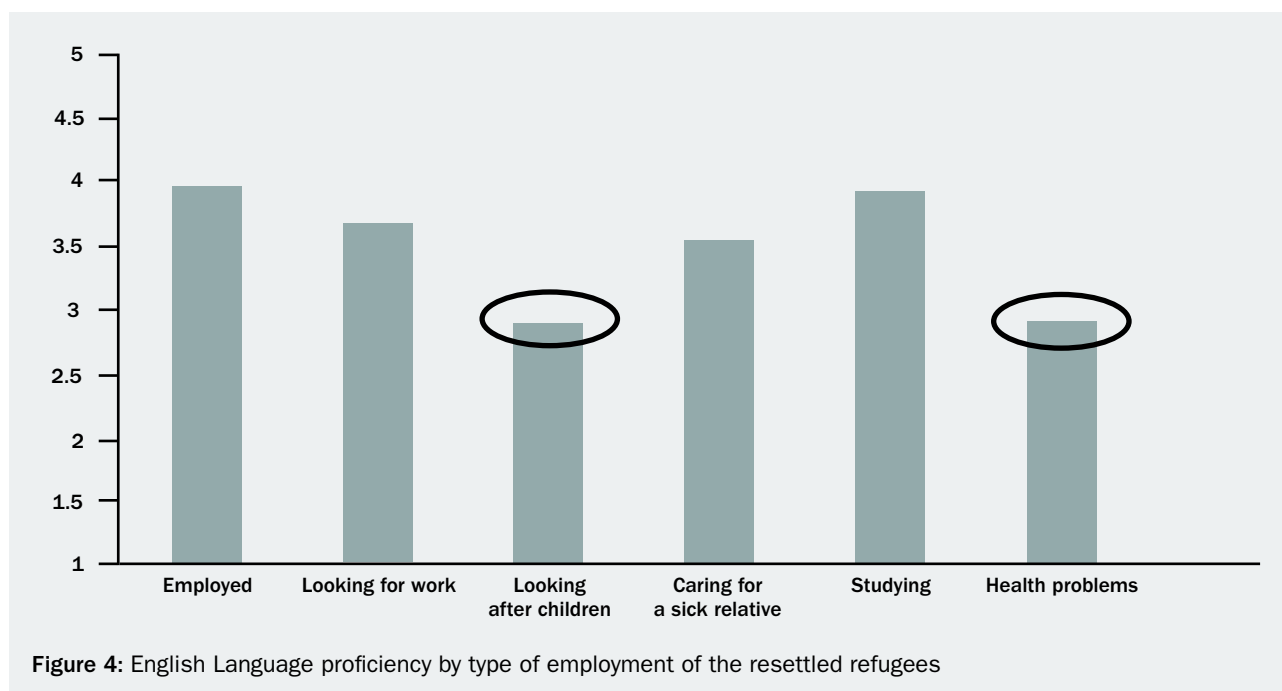


Figure 4: English Language proficiency by type of employment of the resettled refugees

Women also reported struggling with self-confidence when trying to communicate in public, and this was sometimes exacerbated by social and cultural norms:

‘Even if I knew what I was about to say I wouldn’t because I didn’t have the confidence ... I used to cry when I had to talk to someone, or I would look at somebody and just cry... One, it’s just the way I was created, and second it’s the way I was brought up: it was just not really respectful to talk to somebody - ‘cos I’m also a woman, so it’s a bit embarrassing to go out in front of somebody and just ask or talk to them ... I was very scared.’

Mona, female, 40, Ethiopian

Second, age was important. English language ability was significantly higher for refugees aged 18-34 years than for those older. We found that the older the refugees the worse their self-reported overall language skills. Elderly refugees also scored the lowest in improvement of their English skills since living in the UK.

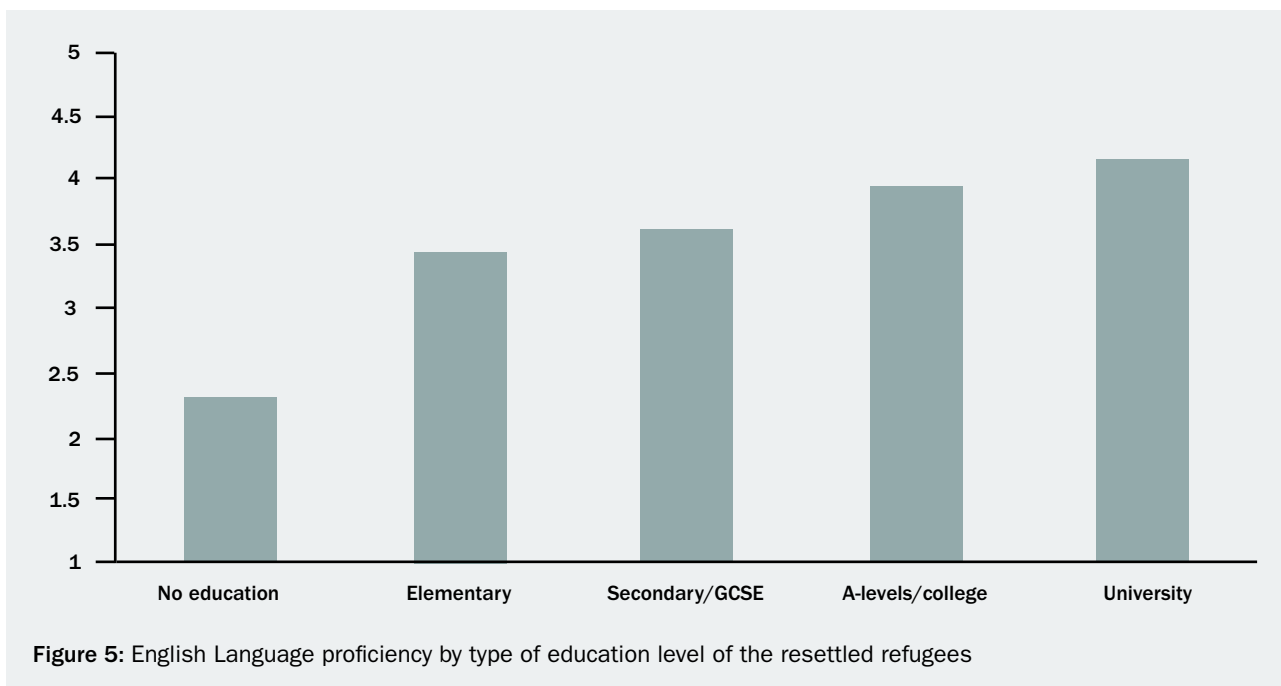
Third, English proficiency was lower for refugees who had mental or physical health problems. Our interview data indicates that stress caused by financial worries or concerns for family left behind also impaired refugees’

learning success. Individuals often faced more than one disadvantage. For example, older people learn more slowly but are also more likely to face health problems. One older participant commented that young people learn the language quickly, whereas older people:

‘We are helpless. Our mind is full of things since we experience very bad trauma in the past. And our mind is damaged. It hurts to learn more.’

Jira, 62, male, Ethiopian

Fourth, overall language ability increased with education level before arrival; refugees with no education scored lower than refugees with any other level of education. Refugees from urban areas scored better in their language proficiency than refugees from rural areas, since education levels are higher in cities. Women were more likely to have lower levels of pre-migration education (just 9.8% of women had completed university level education compared to 29.1% of men), which also accounts for the lower language ability among women.



REFUGEES' EXPERIENCES WITH ESOL² PROVISION

The number of hours of tuition during the first year varied considerably between locations and depended on the time of arrival. Participants reported between four and 15 hours a week of tuition. The standard mode of ESOL delivery once learners entered the mainstream was two hours twice a week. For the vast majority this was not considered sufficient for their needs. Participants living in all three research locations were not satisfied with the frequency and intensity of ESOL provision, nor with the teaching.

'When you learn English once a week, it's not enough. You can learn today, after seven days you forgotten. When you come back you start again, you understand? But if you can go maybe three days, four days a week, you should improve very quick.'

Jacques, 43, male, Congolese

'When I come here they have welcomed us good and then when we stay here we were ok, everything was provided. The problem which I'm still regretting is language. I can't speak well, and I can't listen because when we came here they have given us only two days and two hours in a week to learn English.'

Elisabeth, 49, female, Congolese

At first, most refugees in all locations received bespoke language classes with their co-nationals. This was reported as helpful in the early days after arrival as it was an opportunity to share experiences and gain support as they adjusted to living in a new context. However, mixed nationality groups of mainstream provision promoted greater use of English among students and therefore was more conducive to language learning; it was in these classes that people felt they learnt more, and it was here that they made contacts with other communities, making friends and extending their social networks.

Refugees often criticised the lack of opportunities to practice their conversation skills in class. Furthermore, they found that ESOL classes were not very useful in providing them with the necessary English vocabulary of 'how to get around in daily life':

'From all of our classes, I thought the most effective was the one at Cowley Club [a volunteer organisation], because all who studied there have a better chance to communicate more easily. You know, they don't only just go through basic verbal compositions and everything, but they also teach them how to communicate.'

Kofi, 52, male, Ethiopian

² English for Speakers of Other Languages

Language classes are about more than learning the language and providing a platform to develop social connections. Language providers also had an important role in solving practical issues after the Gateway support ended. Participants who struggled to manage their lives on their own without a local support system reported that teachers and the wider ESOL staff provided them with vital support in solving a variety of practical issues related to their life in the UK including problems with the benefits and housing. ESOL teachers and staff were often mentioned as the only local contacts refugees had after the support period:

‘And there is a lady in the ESOL, if you have any problems, any problems, you know, blankets or there is basic problem, benefits, any problem you have, go straight away to this lady and tell her about the problem. So, she can make her calls, she can help you. Anything she will do it for you.’

Hussein, 43, male, Iraqi

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO LEARNING ENGLISH

Research identified a range of barriers that prevented refugees accessing even those classes which were provided. Some of these are relatively easy to overcome with sufficient support, others are more intractable. At the most straightforward end, lack of childcare was a significant barrier to parents accessing classes. Transport costs to attend courses at colleges presented further barriers to learning English. Both of these are relatively easy to overcome.

A range of issues required specifically tailored educational programmes. Those participants with low or no literacy had particular difficulties following and benefitting from ESOL classes. Mainly, because regardless of their levels of education and literacy in their own languages, refugees were mixed according to their English language competence. No account was taken of prior level of education and capacity to learn a new language. This meant that those who with poor or low literacy skills dropped out because they lacked the basic skills needed to learn (i.e. how to write) while those who were highly educated found the courses inappropriate because they were too slow and did not make the progress they hoped for (i.e. intentions to learn English for academic or vocational purposes):

‘And in one classroom, we have several different levels of students. Some of us even can’t do our spelling, and then some of others have high education, they speak and write and understand English. All these people learn together, and some of them they understand. They go home happy, we are still there. Nothing changes.’

Jira, 62, male, Ethiopian

Participants with difficulties in reading and writing needed tailored provision, taught by teachers trained in working with non-literate learners. Paper-based teaching methods were not appropriate and often they did not understand the instructions given to them in English:

‘She [the teacher] give us paper, we don’t understand. Time is too short. The teacher says write down. We write down, but we don’t understand. She not repeat for us. We just fill the paper and then we go home. When we ask her she says, I give you the paper, I give you homework, so that’s it. She did not give us any example of how to do the home work. We can’t ask more, we still don’t understand.’

Fawzia, 28, female, Ethiopian

Refugees with no or very little literacy, reported that they made only progress in learning English once they started having home tuition (e.g. via volunteer schemes). Others told us that they found opportunities for mixing with other people through projects such as cookery classes very useful for advancing their practical language skills and for gaining confidence in English conversation.

Refugees reported long waiting times to start courses and lack of progression pathways through levels and between providers. They frequently found that a course finished and there was nothing suitable for them to move onto, or the gap between one class and the next was too great for them. Additionally, budget cuts during the research period drastically decreased opportunities for refugees to learn English³.

Refugees are resettled on grounds of vulnerability and our research uncovered high levels of caring responsibilities for sick and disabled relatives which prevented attendance at classes. These care responsibilities are more challenging to work since they cannot easily be solved with alternative provision, as childcare often can. The benefit

³ The government has cut ESOL classes funding drastically from £203m in 2010 to £90m in 2016 – a real terms cut of 60% (Foster and Bolton 2017).

system poses a similarly intractable challenge. Eligibility criteria for free ESOL classes excluded those who were not 'actively seeking work'. This excluded some refugees who were caring for children or sick relatives, or who were retired.

Traditionally, employment and social contacts with English speakers have been thought to further enhance English language ability. Our research found that this was not systematically the case. Entering employment could be both a boost to English language development, but given the type of employment of many refugees it was more likely to be a hindrance. Those in entry level jobs requiring limited language were often working on their own or with members of their own community, for example cleaning or night security guards. Opportunities to interact with English speakers and improve their English were much rarer. Employment also reduced formal opportunities to develop language skills. Refugees in employment pointed to the need for access to free language provision at weekends and after work:

'When you come from camp they put too much pressure to work. Even ESOL is hard for us to study. If you are working, what time you are going to ESOL?'

Amadi, 28 male, Ethiopian

All refugees requested more opportunities to communicate outside the classroom in order to improve their language skills, either through one-to-one mentoring, alternative language support by third sector organisations, or more interactions with other British people at work or in their local communities.

Our findings reinforce the importance of English as the key to refugees' long-term integration. Lack of English language skills hinders integration across a range of domains and prevents refugees fully contributing to UK society. It also creates systemic inequality. Without intensive language provision upon arrival in the UK refugees risk long term social exclusion. Certain groups tend to have lower English language proficiency: women, older refugees, those with poor health, those with caring responsibilities and those with limited pre-migration education. These groups face particular challenges, are most likely to struggle to learn English and are most at risk of exclusion.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Suggestions for support that helps to overcome these barriers are:

- Free extensive ESOL provision for participants in resettlement programs for a minimum of one year to minimise the risk of long term dependency and exclusion
- Recognition of diversity of needs – ESOL classes need to be more flexible and individually tailored. This includes specialist provision for those with low or no literacy but also fast-track and higher-level courses for more highly educated, professionally qualified refugees to enable them to join the labour market or to access Higher or Further Education.
- Provision of free childcare to ensure that classes are accessible to those most at risk of exclusion.
- Support for home carers (most likely to be women), and those with poor health. For example, through home tuition and befriending schemes.
- Availability of free language courses for those in employment, either through work-based ESOL or courses after work.
- A national ESOL strategy for England to enable a proper assessment of need.
- Local ESOL strategies to ensure clear signposting of provision and appropriate progression pathways between classes and providers.
- Provision of informal and additional support for the most vulnerable refugees who struggle to follow the standard ESOL classes (e.g. elderly refugees and those with low levels of education).
- Support for initiatives which bring refugee and other communities together in meaningful interactions. For example, the Great Get Together or Refugee Week.
- Support for civil society, the private sector, local government and other key stakeholders to develop additional language learning opportunities for resettled refugees to practice conversation skills and to gain confidence; e.g. through conversation clubs.



4. Refugees require more tailored approaches to employment

LEVELS OF EMPLOYMENT REMAIN LOW FOR RESETTLED REFUGEES

Employment is one of the most significant factors facilitating long-term integration of resettled refugees. For most of our research participants, employment represented much more than just finding a job and financial security. It provides a sense of self-worth, the opportunity to deploy skills and qualifications, and to strengthen one's social integration:

‘Someone if he doesn’t have a job, is not human. I can’t treat myself like human, because I can’t work. I tried to find a job, I work two, three, places for cleaning job. At every single place I work they say it’s temporary, and I have to leave the job, and I have to find again another job’

Badessa, male, 38, Ethiopian

Unemployment among refugees is currently eight times higher than the national average (RISE 2018). Our research confirmed this picture for those who have been resettled. Across all three research locations, the employment rate of our research participants is lower than that of the general population (Figure 6). This would be expected soon after arrival, but after an average of six years living in the UK, only 12 out of 280 individuals had full-time employment. This is a much longer term problem.



It took refugees an average of 28 months to find their first job in Britain. Refugees with no education took more than twice as long to enter the labour market than those with a university degree.

Of more concern is the lack of improvement in the employment rate over the three years of the research (Table 4). There are two reasons for this. First, barriers to entry to employment accumulate over time. If the course for sustainable integration into employment is not set early, it will become more difficult for refugees to find a job at a later stage. Second, while some participants found new employment between the interview timepoints, others terminated their temporary employment, or they lost their jobs.

	No. people T1	Percentage T1	No. people T2	Percentage T2	No. people T3	Percentage T3
Employed	42	26.9%	43	24.3%	53	30.1%
Looking for work	29	18.6%	25	14.1%	38	21.6%

Table 4: Overall employment status at each time point.

Significantly more men were employed than women. At T1 41% of men were employed, compared to only 11.4% of women.

PRE-ARRIVAL EXPERIENCES STRONGLY INFLUENCE EMPLOYMENT

Refugees with higher levels of pre-migration education, higher literacy levels, and experience of employment prior to arrival, tended to find employment faster (Table 5).

Pre-arrival experiences	Percentage in employment
Literacy before arrival	
Literate	33.5%
Illiterate	9.3%
Education before arrival	
University	41.2%
A-levels/college	38.5%
Secondary/GCSEs	31.2%
Elementary	17.2%
No education	2.7%
Employment status prior to arrival in the UK	
Employed	35.8%
Unemployed	18.5%

Table 5: Pre-arrival experiences and levels of employment.

Research also identified a strong relationship between employment prior to their arrival in the UK and the likelihood of securing employment in the UK. Refugees who lived outside camps were more likely to be employed than those resettled from camps, who have been in average out of employment for a longer time.

		Length of stay in refugee camp in months	
		Mean	Number of people
Employment status	Employed	132	66
	Looking for work	160	51
	Looking after children	135	58
	Caring for a sick relative	129	10
	Studying	109	38
	Health problems	153	16
	Retired	236	3

Table 6: Link between duration in refugee camp and employment

Difficulties finding work are therefore highly predictable. Refugees who will need the greatest support can be identified as soon as they arrive. Even for those who find work, a good job is unlikely. The sectors in which refugees were employed were mostly in low-skilled jobs, such as in warehouse and distribution, car washes, taxi driving, retail, cleaning, and social care. According to a recently published report by The Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (2018), these are among the top sectors for high-risk of exploitation. Most refugees were stuck in multiple short-term employment contracts:

‘Jobs, oh, in the beginning it was very difficult for me to find a job, yeah. Um. The first year went by, the second one. In the third one I found a temporary job, I started working then I stopped. Yeah. After that a friend of mine helped me, I found another job and started working as a carer. But because of the expensive transport, I stopped. Yeah. Then it took again a super long time to find another job.’

Didier, 31, male, Congolese

‘I have done a lot of different jobs, but temporary only. But I would be happy to find a full-time job, a permanent one, but that is difficult. Yeah, it’s difficult.’

Rachel, 21, female, Congolese

Despite refugees’ high determination and persistence to find stable employment, most participants were unable to access anything other than low-paid, insecure, casual work in the UK’s service or gig economy, habitually involving anti-social hours and zero-hour contracts:

‘Zero-contract has exploited every refugee. The ones that have hopes and dreams. Their dreams got crushed because of zero-hour contract! Zero-hour contract simply say that you work when we only need you. That’s it. But my family they want to work! Refugees they want to participate, they want to...how can I say this? Be part of Britain. They want to work! They don’t just want to work when they get a text telling like six in the morning you want to work, yes or no.’

Dureessa, 22, male, Ethiopian

Due to the insecure part-time and low-paid nature of their jobs, many refugees struggled to make ends meet, and they felt constantly stressed in providing an income for their families:

‘And I am still on benefit now. Trying to find work. It’s very, very, very hard. And you find work maybe cleaners job, it’s less than 20 hours a week. You cannot save money, still pay bills. So that’s the main thing. It gives me stress all the time. I feel stress.’

Hussein, 27, male, Ethiopian

Refugees described their employment related frustration as their lives as having been ‘put on hold’, or as a feeling of being socially excluded before even been given a real chance to be a part of British society.

Our study found no difference in well-being between those refugees who were employed and those who were looking for employment. This finding is initially surprising, but appears to reflect the insecure, low-skilled nature of refugees’ jobs, and in some cases the exploitative characteristics of employment. As one of our participants said:

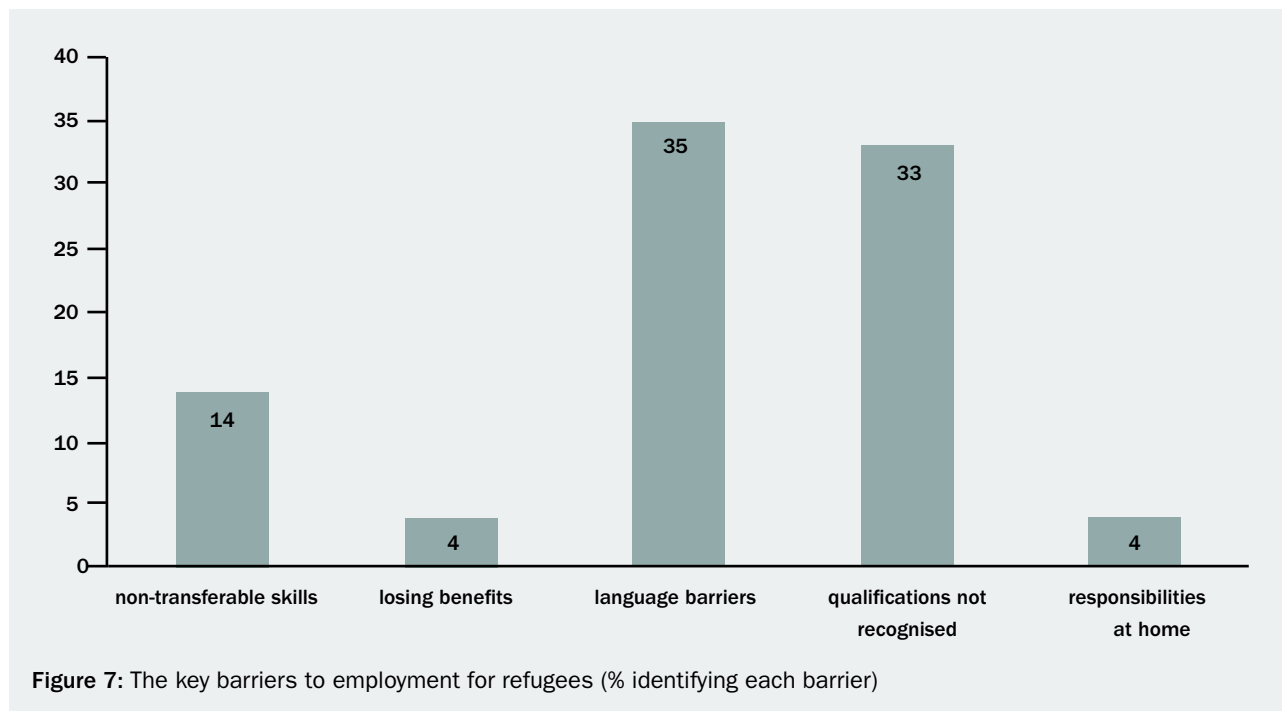
‘Don’t forget the jobs you are, uh...jobs...ha, where can I begin? It is simply very hard, very hard to find a job and uh...refugees are being exploited by these illegal jobs and, because they cannot find a job they settle for less, they settle for less than minimum wage. They came here, they have the right to work, they have the right freedom as everyone else in Britain, yet they cannot find any job.’

Dureessa, 22, male, Ethiopian

When refugees enter employment with very limited language skills they do not experience the level social mobility they expected. They initially believed that with sufficient effort they could start with entry level jobs, and then progress. They were therefore keen to start any kind of job, but they quickly realised that social mobility was unlikely in the jobs they were doing. There are a limited number of obvious barriers to securing employment.

BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

The main self-reported barriers to employment were language skills, followed by non-recognition of refugees' overseas qualifications and skills (Fig. 7).



Due to the non-recognition of refugees' pre-departure educational and professional qualifications and experiences, the number of refugees working in the same profession or sector prior to their resettlement is very low. Only 3 out of the 114 participants who were questioned about their current professional activity found employment in the same sector as prior to their resettlement⁴. This low number of participants working in the same professions prior to their departure points to a 'transferability gap', preventing refugees from being fully rewarded in Britain for their overseas-gained skills and work experience. Refugees would have liked more practical information about how to document their skills and qualifications, and shorter additional recognition procedures:

'So, at least they should support you with the paper, with the diploma, so you can find a job. But you have to do a course, and learn English for 5 years, or even ten, and when are you going to make your life? When you are old?'

Sifa, 33, male, Congolese

Lack of language proficiency was the most commonly cited barrier to securing employment.

'Yeah, if you don't speak English it's hard to get a job, it's hard to communicate to people. The only thing you can apply for is cleaning and that kind of job, and that will never change your life.'

Aaron, 28, male, Ethiopian

Refugees wanted more flexibility from employers about hiring people who don't speak perfect English. For some of them, practicing English at work had been crucial for improving their language skills, but this was restricted to the minority who used English at work. The Job Centre is the institution best place to support this process, although most refugees associated the Job Centre with pressure to find jobs quickly.

⁴ These consisted of 2 translators and one sales assistant.

Most refugees signed up at the Job Centre in the first or second week after arrival. At that time, participants were not familiar with British society, and they struggled with basic practicalities, such as where to buy food. Refugees reported that they simply did not understand what they were signing up for at the Job Centre, because it was 'too early' and they still felt lost in the UK:

'Well, the woman who first came down, we were taken to the Job Centre, to claim benefits. But we didn't understand what these benefits were and how will these affect us. They told us little bit but we didn't understand detail. And you don't go out... obviously you don't know the company and you don't know where to look for a job. It's even hard to go and meet your neighbours.'

Bereket, 41, male, Ethiopian

Early registration at the Job Centre and the pressure to enter the job market disadvantaged refugees in the long run. Early employment was prioritised at the expense of developing language skills and taking up training and education opportunities. As a result, refugees were not able to obtain even the most basic qualifications before being expected to find a job. They had very limited understanding of the UK job market and did not know how to answer questions about what jobs they were looking for.

'Straight away, they will send you to job centre sign on, which is a bit – that's very harsh to people. Signing on was not easy. You don't know what to do. He's going to ask you what job are you looking for, where have you been? But you have only been here about 2 weeks. You have been in camp, you only basically just arrived.'

Aaron, 28, male, Ethiopian

Refugee found themselves invited to job interviews where they were unable to understand and answer the questions, or were turned down for the most basic jobs, such as cleaning, as they did not have experience.

Going to the Job Centre was a very stressful experience. Most refugees reported cultural and linguistic misunderstandings at the Job Centre. Making mistakes led to sanctions and benefits being withheld. This led to further rounds of paperwork and further meetings.

'I am thinking always I make a mistake when I am going there. I blame myself always, and it doesn't make me comfortable. I try to talk in English, and some of them they understand my English, but some of them they don't understand it. I am confused as well. Speaking English or different language make me confused, and that's why I am worried. Maybe I make a mistake when I am talking.'

Jira, 62, male, Ethiopian

We were told many stories about difficulties at the Job Centre. These included the lack of adapted communication by staff, particularly employees speaking too quickly, and systemic issues, such as racism and discrimination. One woman reported that a Job Centre worker suggested that she couldn't find a job because she wore a hijab.

Alongside unfamiliarity with the British job application system and language barriers, refugees face technical barriers in filling in forms and in the use of the computerised system. These experiences were described as emotionally stressful, leaving many refugees with a feeling of helplessness and shame. This applied particularly to refugees with no computer and language literacy:

'You know that back in Kenya we stayed in a village where there's no education basically, for 11 years. So imagine that! ...when they come here you don't expect them to instantly be good at computers; no! It seems like at Job Centre they don't connect, don't understand what they saying and they think they're doing it on purpose [...] one of my uncles, he actually got stopped being paid because he hasn't applied for a job. That job he should be applying on computer; he doesn't know how to use computer.'

Dureessa, 22, male, Ethiopian

The Job Centre is the key institution that needs to be flexible enough to adapt to refugees from different backgrounds. This research has shown that decisions made very soon after refugees' arrival can influence key measures of integration even many years later.

BARRIERS TO SELF-EMPLOYMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

For generations, self-employment has provided a way for new immigrants to circumvent structural barriers to employment, including widespread racism. Refugees coming from both camps and urban areas where such entrepreneurialism was commonplace were naturally keen to develop ideas for micro-enterprise. They faced new barriers in the UK, but reported that they received very limited support in overcoming them. It was reported that refugees were told that their language skills were not sufficient and that the paper work would be too complicated for them to handle.

As a result, with the exception of four participants, all interviewees who expressed an interest in starting a micro-business had to abandon their plans. Frustrated by the lack of encouragement, support and information for his startup idea, Sifa, 33, a designer explains:

'I am telling you, they don't support ideas. I wait years and years for some advice and small help, but I had to give up. They say you need to prove a certificate from this place and this place. But with one budget of like 1000 pounds, I can get five second hand sewing machines, you know? I can buy some material. I just need somebody to help me at the beginning with a small fund and with paper work. I can start teaching women of my community. I have private clients already. I thought I can do something, here, but it is the opposite. I find myself stuck.'

Sifa, 33, male, Congolese

As Sifa suggests, self-employment can expand into employment for other refugees, generating positive spin-off benefits. The lack of support for refugees' new business ideas, startups or for the replication of the micro-businesses they led in their countries of origin, is a missed opportunity.

Overall, employment is a central element in any integration strategy. Resettled refugees have faced major difficulties in employment. Those facing the greatest difficulties can be easily identified from arrival. Refugees need support to develop their language skills and to obtain training and qualifications relevant to the UK labour market. Rapid entry into jobs requiring low or no language skills will not lead to upward social mobility. Our research indicates that failure to secure the most basic qualifications and language proficiency results in long term dependency and a churn of precarious and temporary jobs. This is one of the reasons why employment rates remain so low even more than 10 years after arrival.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Research has identified a range of options to support refugees into sustainable employment, including existing good practice. Some of this is now a part of the VPRS.

- Early tailored support for refugees to identify potential employment sectors and the training pathways. Pathways could involve language training, formal education, apprenticeships or other vocational training. It should also involve early assessment and validation of existing formal and informal skills and competences in the pre-departure phase which can be built upon on arrival. Existing initiatives such as ‘Skills2Work’ programmes (IOM/EU 2018); RISE (Refugees Into Sustainable Employment), (<http://www.renaisi.com/rise/>) or the **Breaking Barriers programme** (<https://breaking-barriers.co.uk>) provide good practice examples
- Bridging programmes and work placements which enable refugees to demonstrate skills and competences in the workplace, particularly where existing qualifications are not recognised.
- Mentoring and work shadowing opportunities across a range of employment sectors to enable refugees to gain UK work experience and understanding of work cultures
- Provision of guidance and training to Job Centre staff on the challenges facing resettled refugees seeking employment, and equip them with skills and strategies to support refugees.
- Support for civil society and voluntary organisations to provide mentoring and one-to-one support for refugees to find and access employment. For example, Time Bank (<https://timebank.org.uk/>)
- More private-public initiatives to support entrepreneurship among refugees, like the initiative of the Refugees Entrepreneurship Network. <https://centreforentrepreneurs.org/networks/refugee-entrepreneurship-network/>
- Support refugees with the means to start their own micro-businesses; for instance through a startup network providing legal aid, advice on bureaucracy, mentors, and funding for their business ideas. Such networks have been successfully implemented in other resettlement contexts, for instance Finland (<https://asyluminf inland.info>).



5 Poor mental health creates a cycle of isolation. More mental health care is needed.

Health is an important prerequisite for the strenuous efforts refugees' have to make to adjust to their new environments. We found no significant difference between men and women in overall health, nor in the extent to which refugees have been disadvantaged in their daily lives by physical or psychological strains over the past four weeks at T1.



Health is associated with refugees' support network. This means that refugees who had nobody they could ask for help were more likely to have relatively poor physical health, than those who reported having 'a lot' of people they could talk to when facing problems. We also found a positive association between health and English language skills. Those with better English language skills were less likely to have physical and emotional health problems.

This positive association between health and language and between health and social networks may be explained by the impact of poor health on individuals' ability and confidence to get out and move around, including attending language classes and meeting people, which improves their English language ability and increases their social networks. Unfortunately, this means that those suffering from poor health have poorer English language ability and are less able to advocate for themselves.

Across all three research locations, most participants have been satisfied with the provision of health services through the NHS, and how they were treated as refugees. Visits to the GP were often narrated as a positive experience. Some refugees stressed that being a 'patient', like everybody else, made them feel 'human' again and gave them a welcome break from 'being reduced to a refugee' or a 'foreigner'. In many cases, refugees also asked their GPs to serve as references for their citizenship applications.

In all three cities, refugees and case workers identified a lack of mental health services for incoming refugees and their children. Few mental health services were in place upon refugees' arrival, although providers were informed that some of the newcomers experienced trauma before arriving, and the need for support mechanisms could have been anticipated.

It is also well-known that being a refugee can affect mental health and well-being adversely. In addition to any trauma that may have occurred before refugees arrive in the UK, their subsequent social isolation and lack of confidence to engage with the wider society and to form relationships can lead to emotional distress. Furthermore, mental health difficulties may be a more significant cultural taboo in countries and contexts from which refugees have come than in the UK. The resulting stigma may pose a barrier for refugees to seek treatment for mental health issues.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure newly arrived refugees are aware of translation support for NHS visits
- Recognise the strong correlation between poor health and poor English language ability.
- Make systematic use of pre-arrival information of refugees' potential health needs and specialist support.
- Improve provision of mental-health support and faster access to mental health treatments after arrival.
- Create low-threshold opportunities like monthly workshops in which refugees can become involved in social activities (e.g. writing groups or sewing classes) to form relationships, improve peer support and develop confidence.



6. Housing should be safe, secure and as stable as possible

In the first year following their arrival the comfort and safety of their housing was one of the most frequently remarked upon elements of refugees' new life in the UK (Collyer and Kushminder 2006). All refugees had come from highly crowded and often insecure environments, in refugee camps or extremely precarious living arrangements in cities, where they continued to face real threats to their safety. Compared to these contexts, the comfort and privacy of their first homes in the UK were a tremendously welcome change. A safe and habitable home lays an important foundation for migrants' wellbeing and their long-term integration efforts.

Yet housing provision is one of the most challenging elements of the provision of support through Gateway for local authorities. The national housing crisis involving very limited supply of social housing, long waiting lists and high rental costs exacerbates this problem. This is most obviously the case in Brighton, the only local authority in the South-East to have welcomed refugees under Gateway, but it is also increasingly an issue in the other research locations.

The overall approach to delivery of housing was different in the three research locations under the Gateway Protection Scheme. In Manchester, this has subsequently changed but during the research period the three systems were:

- **Brighton and Hove:** Accommodation was arranged with private landlords before refugees arrived. When the initial 12 months support ended, most refugees moved to other private accommodation.
- **Norwich:** Accommodation was leased from private landlords. Refugees often remained in the same home after the 12 months support period.
- **Greater Manchester:** Temporary accommodation was sourced from the local authority for the initial 6-8 months after arrival⁵. The local authorities supported refugees in securing a tenancy from a private landlord.

The majority of research participants were satisfied with their accommodation (Table 7). Satisfaction with housing correlates positively with well-being, social capital, and identification as 'British'. Despite the very different models of housing provision, no significant differences were found in satisfaction of housing between the three research sites.

REFUGEES HAVE MOVED HOUSE FREQUENTLY

Refugees have moved houses frequently. At time point one of our research, that is between four and eight years after refugees arrival, only 2.8% of the research participants were still living in the same house that they have been allocated when they arrived in the UK.

Rated on a 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much) scale:	Brighton	Norwich	Manchester	Sheffield
Mean satisfaction w. house now	3.55	3.31	3.45	3.31
Mean satisfaction w. 1 st house	3.00	2.78	2.69	2.21

Table 7: Satisfaction with housing

⁵ This system applied to all those involved in this research, although due to increasing pressure on local authority housing, this scheme has since changed.

There were positive elements to this movement. In all cities, refugees' mean level of satisfaction with their subsequent accommodation was higher than for their first allocated house. Although their direct role in the selection of the house was often limited, the selection was at least made with their needs in mind.

Significant differences in the impact of moving houses were found across the three cities. Interviewees in Norwich had moved fewer than twice (1.74) on average in the five or more years following arrival. This is significantly less than those relocated to Brighton (mean of 2.94 moves) and Greater Manchester (mean of 2.17 moves). Only one person out of the 48 participants had to move more than three times in Norwich, compared to Brighton, where 40% of the participants had to move house more than three times and up to seven moves in eight years were reported.

Moving houses this frequently was reported as an extremely stressful experience. Our qualitative data shows that multiple relocations had significant negative associations with refugees' well-being. This was particularly the case when the relocations were caused by the termination of the co-funded support period, or the expiry of the subsidised rental costs, which affected almost all refugees in Brighton.

'The temporary, it is difficult one, because we need to move from place to place, every single time, too much pressure. Too much pressure, every single night, you say "Where I move next? How I can find house? I don't know how to find help, to find a house? I don't know how to pay deposit again.'

Hermela, 39, female, Ethiopian

Moving house was not just a financial issue. Refugees also highlighted concerns related to overcrowding, particularly as households continue to grow. Some relocations were motivated by particular problems of racism from immediate neighbours or hate crime incidents in the wider neighbourhood. A further concern around relocations related to schooling for children. It was considered to be in children's interests to remain in the same schools, rather than move school with each new house. These moves, exacerbated by the financial pressure to find an affordable house resulted in refugees living in remote locations, particularly in relation to other members of the refugee community, and lack of access to public transport. This left some refugees feeling isolated and lonely.

'And in terms of housing it really getting worse. It's getting worse because when we came, they told us to find another job, another house. We applied and within less than 6 month they got us another house. But now, it's more than 2 years we are waiting so...'

Dureessa, 22, male, Ethiopian

Many of these issues are of course common to low income households in general, particularly in areas facing the greatest housing pressure such as the South East. There are however a range of reasons why refugees experience these difficulties more acutely, and high level of stress associated with moving houses relates specifically to the unique life challenges refugees face. In particular, these include unfamiliarity with the local area and local housing market, disappointment among some refugees about the temporary housing situations due to inappropriate or false pre-departure information on housing, and the stressful situation of changing schools, often shortly after children's entry to their first school in the UK. At the worst, these can lead to re-traumatising experiences due to high levels of stress.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Ensure** availability of affordable, sustainable and secure accommodation in order to avoid the stressful situation of moving houses
- **Provide further assistance with housing**, such as with bills, finding a new accommodation or access to public transport. This was highlighted in the 2017 UNHCR report on the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (UNHCR 2017).
- **Make sure that specific needs are met**, for instance in cases of disabilities
- **Consider innovative and inclusive housing examples**; such as affordable communal living space for young people, both existing residents and refugees, with co-management of communal living space like the STARTBLOK project in Amsterdam (Friends of Europe 2018).
- **Accompany new initiatives and the accommodation** of a larger number of refugees into a neighborhood with information meetings for the neighborhood, so that nearby residents can ask questions, meet tenants and generally learn more about the programme or projects, recognizing the two-way nature of integration.



7. Life in the UK is safe and secure but discrimination is widespread

The provision of a safe and secure environment is the fundamental logic of refugee resettlement as a durable solution to refugee displacement. A safe environment is vital for refugees' well-being, considering that many reported being worried to step outside their houses due to fear of violence or persecution in their home country. At this minimum level, the programme has been successful and the large majority of participants reported feeling safe, which contributes to refugees' overall satisfaction with their lives in the UK:

'The most important is to be safe, a safe life. Back home in Africa you are scared of your life, are you going to be kidnapped tomorrow, are you going to be killed tomorrow. You feeling hungry, where should I eat tomorrow? You think about eating and dying. But since you're here, your strongest worry is how you are going to work. And the security is good, so that's the most important in life. You are safe. That's it.'

Daniel, 27, male, Ethiopian

Refugees felt significantly safer at T3 than at T2. Figure 9 shows the percentage of how strongly refugees felt safe in the UK at T3.

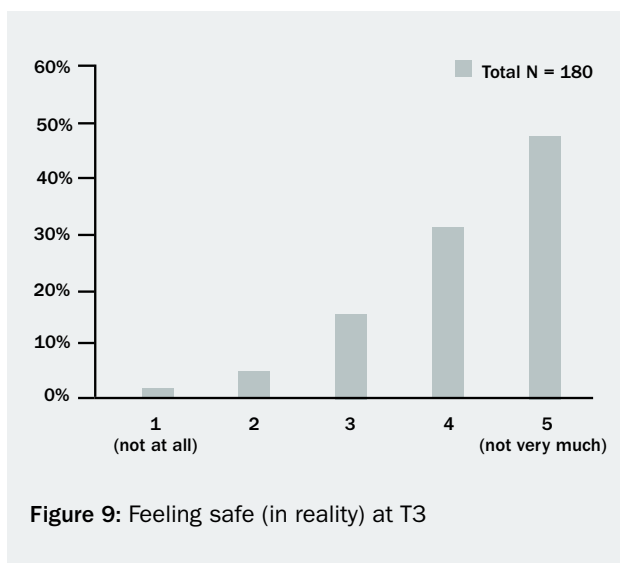


Figure 9: Feeling safe (in reality) at T3

The extent to which refugees feel safe also correlates positively with 'Satisfaction with Housing', 'Intergroup Confidence', and 'Positive Contact Experiences with British People'. This result is related to refugees' freedom to practice their own culture and religious belief, for which they were often prosecuted in their home country:

'Since we came here we need to have that our culture with us because this country it is, uh, free, freedom country. It is free country and everybody have a right to have his culture. His language. Everything. And the, because of the government give us a right to have a right to our culture and language, that why we are happy and, uh, safe.'

Jira, 62, male, Ethiopian

This overall impression of safety in the UK was widely expressed. Nevertheless, it was a long way short of complete satisfaction with life in the UK, as one woman argued.

'Err, good quality of life? I don't feel good quality of life, but I am safe. I feel safe. Yeah... but no quality...just safe.'

Yeabsira, 36, female, Ethiopian

Nor did an impression of overall safety mean a complete lack of experiences of discrimination or even outright hostility.

EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION ARE WIDESPREAD

Although participants feel safe in the UK, there is a significant discrepancy between their expectation of safety before being selected for resettlement to Britain, and their perceived actual safety. The vast majority of refugees reported that they had faced discrimination in both institutionalised settings, such as schools or employment, and in public spaces more broadly. There is no difference in perceived discrimination across the three research locations, and between men and women. Only 6% of the research participants feel accepted by their British neighbours 'all the time', and just 13% feel wanted in British society 'all the time'.

Experiences of racism and discrimination varied. Most refugees faced verbal comments once or on a regular basis⁶, others experienced physical attacks either personally or on their children. The majority of participants experienced racism in public places deliberately designed to create discomfort. Other interviewees reported racist incidents in their neighbourhood. For some this was so serious and repeated that they had to be removed from their accommodation. This included the use of dogs to threaten refugees and dumping rubbish on their doorsteps.

Just under half (49%) of research participants indicated that they had failed to secure a job because of some form of discrimination on at least one occasion. In some cases, interviewees had to leave their jobs because employers did not take action to prevent a recurrence of discrimination. Refugees recognised that these crimes were committed by a small minority. Still, it is no surprise that the majority of refugees reported that they did not feel 'comfortable' in the UK.

Many refugees regretted a lack of openness from other British people. The reserved attitude of locals was sometimes explained by 'insufficient sensitisation' or awareness raising before refugees arrived:

'I think maybe the government didn't prepare people to welcome other people here. Because it's normal, you're British, you just stay here, and maybe you never expect to receive refugees, you know? So, the government might prepare people better, sensibilise (sensitise) people, you know, explain we're going to receive this kind of people, they are like this, they come from abroad.'

Sergie, 30, female Congolese

⁶ This was mainly the case for black Congolese Refugees, who reported overall more negative contact experiences with British people than the other nationalities. Although, they had on average more contact with the British than the other refugee communities this result might indicate the still widespread stigma of being black in Britain (see Solanke 2018).

⁷ Refugees' personal experiences of an increasingly hostile environment towards foreigners is also reflected in the general increase in racist motivated hate crime in the UK (Home Office 2018b).

EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION HAVE INCREASED

At each interview in the longitudinal study, the majority of participants considered the overall atmosphere towards migrants in the UK in general, and the attitude towards refugees in particular to have become increasingly negative. Compared to their time of arrival in 2010 or earlier, refugees experienced a more hostile environment towards foreigners⁷. Participants reported that they are more often exposed to discrimination and public racist comments compared to their time of arrival. Two interviewees explained how this increasingly negative public discourse on migrants, repeatedly associated with criminality, and collectively accused of anti-social behaviour, for instance social benefit fraud, affects them:

'We came through British Airways, we came with airplane. So, there's this generalisation that all - asylum seekers and refugees are the same and illegal. Came in illegally. And if one asylum seeker did something bad or committed anything that is offence or crime, automatically I am one of them. So, I don't feel like I'm British, even though I have a passport, even though I am a citizen here.'

Meki, 29, male, Ethiopian

'Since a lot of refugees come in it's getting worse and worse. I think when I was, back in 2008 and - 7 when I came here it was a really good experience. I liked it! Ah, 'cos I lived in Bolton, a small town, but they're friendly. There was no bad media. Media didn't show anything about refugees back in 2007, I don't think so. But now all of a sudden...I am generalised negative for no reason, so that's one of the things you have to go through.'

Dureessa, 22, male, Ethiopian

Some participants, mainly those living in Brighton, also highlighted positive changes in public attitudes to refugees since the so called 'refugee crisis' in 2015 with examples of goodwill from the local community. In their view, the local population has opened up more towards refugees. This was commonly stressed with examples of public fundraising activities and a higher number of volunteer schemes and programmes, compared to the time of their arrival.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Provide proactive public awareness raising campaigns**, and the diffusion of 'positive refugee stories' to counterbalance ongoing anti-immigration public and policy discourse.
- **Tackle institutional racism** by providing refugee awareness courses and trainings in anti-discrimination practice for institutions involved in resettlement communities such as housing cooperation, job centres, banks, benefit system and police.
- **Provide additional community-led development support** in addressing race-related incidents, given the reported reluctance of some refugees to report incidents to the police.
- **Ensure that refugees and the local community are informed how** to report incidents of hate crime.



8. Acquiring UK Citizenship has an impact but barriers to naturalisation remain too great for many

Our interviews highlight a general perception of rule of law in the UK. Refugees' accounts emphasise satisfaction with their lives in the UK. They refer to fairness and non-discrimination by law. Even those participants who have experienced hate-crime in the UK, which is most of them, continue to associate their well-being with living in a democratic country where equality before the law is a widely respected principle.

ACQUISITION OF CITIZENSHIP

The Gateway scheme was designed to encourage full UK citizenship for resettled refugees. Part of the logic of this research project was to examine the impact of naturalisation, since research began at a time when refugees became eligible for UK citizenship and extended several years afterwards. In total, 56 interviewees had a British passport at T1, and this had increased to 107 at time point 3 of the interviews in 2016 (Table 8).

	Citizenship T1	Citizenship T2	Citizenship T3
Brighton (N = 32)	26	26	27
Norwich (N = 23)	2	2	3
Manchester (N = 108)	23	45	64
Sheffield (N = 17)	5	6	13
Total number of people with citizenship	56	79	107

Table 8: Participants who had acquired British Citizenship at the three timepoints

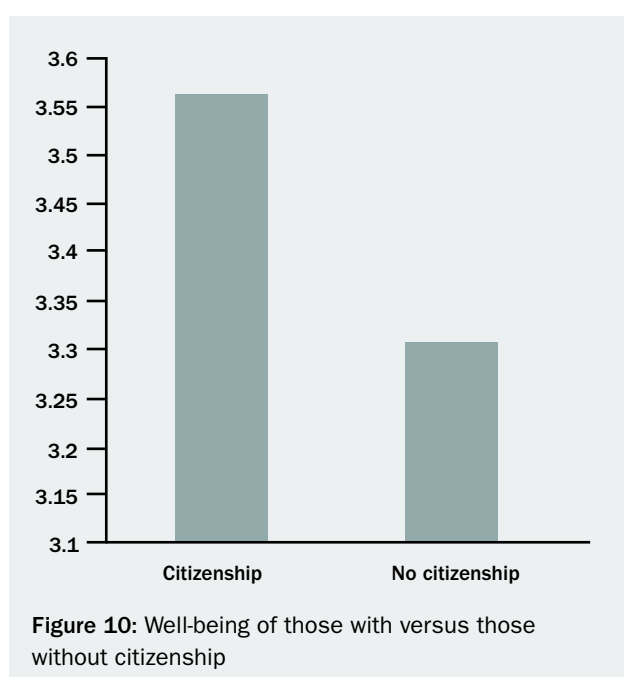
Refugees living in Brighton were financially and administratively supported to achieve UK citizenship. They also arrived on average 2 years earlier in the UK than refugees resettled to Greater Manchester and Norwich. These two factors explain the higher percentage of the individuals who applied for citizenship among refugees living in Brighton compared to Manchester and Norwich.

The percentage of research participants possessing British citizenship in Norwich is significantly lower,

compared to the other two research locations: 13% of the refugees interviewed in Norwich possessed citizenship at the interview time 1, compared to 31% in Manchester and Sheffield, and 76% in Brighton. Our research shows that British citizenship is related to ease of building a new life in the UK. Survey data show a positive relation between citizenship and well-being (Fig. 10), while in the interviews people spoke of the positive effects of acquiring citizenship in the following domains:

- increase of emotional perception of safety to stay in the UK.
- increase in personal confidence and contacts with the local community.
- structural integration; in the UK's environment of suspicion against migrants, citizenship reduces barriers in the labour market.
- the ability to visit family and friends overseas.

All of these contribute to the positive impact of citizenship on wellbeing.



Possessing citizenship can also positively shape refugees' sense of belonging to the UK. In the majority of cases 'to be British' was related with to 'be settled' or to 'belong' to the UK. Participants reported that the possession of British nationality positively changed, or would change, their self-identification into a 'full British citizen':

'Still I cannot call myself British yet, I cannot call myself a refugee, so I am lost in the middle. Now, I feel like someone who is lost. Because when I get citizenship I will feel I am British, belong. So now I'm not British yet, I'm not a refugee anymore, so I am a person who is lost in the middle. And I don't know when I will get that money to apply for citizenship.'

Daniel, 27, male, Ethiopian

Refugees stated four main reasons for not applying for British citizenship. First, and most significantly is the high costs involved. The fees for registration have been rising since 2011 – exactly at the point when participants in our research began to apply for citizenship. Between 2011 and 2018, the cost of registering two children has more than tripled, because of fee increases and the abolition of second child discounts (Home Office 2017b). At the time of writing, the cost of UK citizenship is £1,163 for one adult and £973 for each child, though an above inflation increase is planned. Given the low wages earned by many refugees, the overall cost for a family with two adults and two or more children is completely out of reach. The fee for the citizenship ceremony alone is £80 per adult. Refugees have very high levels of unemployment and large families are common. Many are unable to exercise their rights of becoming British citizens after five years:

'To apply for British citizenship costs £900 for me and for my wife, and then £750 for maybe for the children, which is really, really...bit out of my league. Over expensive for people living on benefits [...]. We save maybe for over 3 years period of time to be able to apply for the...then you need to pay again for, to apply for passport.'

Ali, 37, male, Iraqi

'We don't have money because we are a lot of us, there's like six or seven, so it's going to be hard to get the money, finding money, for one person it is like £800 or £1000, something like that, Yeah.'

Jolainne, 20, female, Congolese

'And for the passport, when you are applying... Now for me, now, nearly six years I didn't get a passport because of no money, it's very, very expensive. A single person is, I think it's 900-and-something for one person. Nearly a thousand with the passport, so me and my wife, now we have to spend two thousand pounds, and we don't have at the moment, we have benefit.'

Hussein, 27, male, Ethiopian

The second most frequently mentioned reason for not applying for British citizenship were concerns of failing the language test or the 'Life in the UK' test. This was especially the case for women with insufficient language proficiency (Morrice 2016):

'One of the hardest things to go through is actually getting the British citizen [...]. That is the most stressful and worrying things for refugees, especially because...compared to... when we came here, now, is harder to get any passport, any citizenship. You have to go through tests which they call 'Life in the UK' tests. I did the test, and I thought...my mum and brother can never do this. Because this is only someone who's educated can do.'

Dureessa, 22, male Ethiopian

Thirdly, refugees find it difficult to understand the immigration system, including processes of applying for citizenship and family reunification. Cuts to legal aid, which impact people well beyond the refugee population, meant that refugees without language proficiency would have to navigate through the complex field of immigration law on their own. Across all three cities, the Citizen Advice Bureau was mentioned as an important provider of immigration advice. However, their services are no longer free and participants cannot afford to seek advice from solicitors. Consequently, some refugees paid agencies up to £250 to fill out application forms, in addition to the high fees to different outsourced affiliated agencies that administer peripheral processes, such as English tests and interviews.

Finally, we also found concerns, especially among the Congolese community, that the possession of British citizenship would not change their sense of identity, nor the ways others will perceive them. This result highlights an awareness of the significant levels of race inequality and prejudice in Britain with which newcomers are confronted:

'Other people think when you become British, you have the same rights, which is wrong. I might become British by paper, you know what I mean, but not by colour. I prefer to be just black refugee than to be black British. Because if you become British, the way they will treat me does not change. If I could say 'oh my god I wish if I was British', because it will change the way they treat me, yes. But I'm still seen as African, so why become British?'

Joseph, 30, male, Congolese

Despite the strong association between citizenship and well-being of refugees, a British passport alone does not automatically shape refugees' sense of identity and belonging to the UK. For some participants, other factors were more relevant for their sense of belonging to the UK. These included stable employment, financial independence and acceptance by their local community. Alma explains:

'No, the passport did not change. Even before getting the passport – last year, yeah, even before, you know I feel this. This is now my home, since 4 years. Because I work four years. Before that very difficult years.'

Alma, 45, female, Ethiopian

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Consider introducing cost exemption or a price reduction of the naturalisation fees** for resettled refugees and their families, given that the government has a declared interest in their naturalisation, their numbers are small and they have clear structural barriers to meeting the rising cost of naturalisation.
- **Reintroduce free legal aid and information for Immigration matters**, such as family reunion and citizenship applications in order to make it affordable

for refugees to navigate the complicated process of exercising their rights of applying for citizenship and/or being reunited with their families (see Angus MacNeil's private member's bill on refugee family reunion had its second reading in the House of Commons on Friday, 16 March 2018).

- **Prevent systemic inequality and/or discrimination in citizenship matters** by providing access to intensive language classes for women and refugees with care duties, to improve their chances of success in the English language test.



9. Social contacts: bridging and bonding are important, but also transnational links

Research emphasised the distinctive role of bridging and bonding social capital and these are commonly built into programme design, including with Gateway. Bridging capital involves links beyond individuals' immediate social group, with the wider UK population. Bonding capital focused on the quality of connections between close friends and family, which are also fundamental to provide a resilient basis to integration. The original additional finding of this research was the significance of transnational social networks, which are often overlooked. This section falls into three sub-sections considering each of these elements of social contacts.

BRIDGING: CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERGROUP CONTACTS

For the refugees to be able to make contacts with the wider community where they live and to be socially included, they must first learn to operate in a practical sense in their new context. Many refugees faced an 'extended period of arrival', in which they were pre-occupied with arranging their lives, including things like navigating through the diverse mainstream social provisions. We further saw that lack of tailored English classes and job opportunities has hampered the social integration of refugees, even over many years. However, building up and maintaining positive contacts with the wider society is important for the well-being of refugees. The three-wave longitudinal study allowed us to see that intergroup contact at earlier time points is associated with increased well-being of refugees at later time points. In addition, positive contacts with the wider society are facilitated by English language proficiency. This means that early English language competence is positively associated with later intergroup contact, illustrating once more the crucial role of availability of language training at an early stage for improving English proficiency as key to better well-being.

To practice English language skills through interactions with members of the wider society where they live, however, is only really possible once refugees already know people well enough. This is exactly the crux of the matter. Although, refugees would wish to have more contacts with British people, without English language proficiency it is difficult to interact with the majority of the population.

Thus, similarly to the finding that poor language skills underpin the 'revolving door' between the Job Centre and multiple short-term employment contracts, the majority of refugee remains caught in a Catch 22 situation with regard to improving their contacts with the British population. Without significant English language ability, their daily contacts with their neighbours did not progress beyond polite nods and smiles. To go any further required better command of English, but they couldn't develop their English sufficiently without those closer relationships.

'You know the culture here we can't talk to anybody we don't know, and English people are sometimes not properly friendly. If you don't know them we can't talk to them. You need to know somebody before talk to him.'

Jacques, 43, male, Congolese

'Yeah, you know when we came here we were lonely, and now we start to have friends with English people. I can say English people are not easy to make friends with. I am never invited to English people house, and English people...they don't say anything to you without knowing you, knowing you deeply.'

Alain, 53, male, Congolese

There was no significant difference in the preference for contact with British people between men and women, nor in positive and or negative contact experiences with British between the two sexes. However, men interacted significantly more often with British people than women. This observation refers back to the finding that women have fewer language skills than men. Hence, especially for women with care duties it is a real challenge to make close friends, as they struggle to find the time and resources to improve their language and intergroup contacts in-between their struggle to find work and their childcare efforts.

The frequency of total contact with British people was highest among the Congolese refugees, followed by Ethiopians, Iraqi and Somali refugees. Participants living in Norwich and Brighton noted significantly more contacts with British people than refugees living in Manchester, where refugees had the least contact with British people.

The abrupt transition to a new unknown country is an emotionally stressful situation for refugees. They came from situations in which everyone interacted on a daily basis with their neighbours. To adjust to the perceived 'closed' and individualised British lifestyle has been a particular challenge:

'Um, it's not easy, mentally, especially moving to another country. New culture, different people. I would like to be more involved in the local community, coming more together. You know, here the way of British life is so difficult. Here, maybe not everyone is in their homes or doing their own things, but in our culture, people come together. Yes, it's difficult, I would like to see more things like that.'

Rita, 43, female, Congolese

'Our neighbours are not like our people. With our people, if you make friends with them, they come close to you. They come to our house, or they invite you. You can sit and talk through everything you want. But the British people just say 'Hi', short talk, and then go to their houses and close the doors.'

Yusuf, 44, male, Congolese

The necessary bridging capital linking refugees with wider society was generally experienced as difficult. Most refugees experienced most contacts with British people as friendly, but at best distant. For some this exacerbated intermittent feelings of isolation and loneliness:

'You know, the Gateway Project organised for us everything at the beginning: sofa, food, home and safety. Everything positive. But now September, I sit with my children at home. I see car outside, but only car. Nobody is outside. How to live in this country now? I feel not myself. How can I live here, where you only see people through window? Nobody is going anywhere, just sitting inside.'

Shegaw, 45, male, Ethiopian

'I don't have any British friends, I don't have anybody now. And at my workplace people are not very friendly. Yeah, maybe at Christmas party, I see them, but otherwise you know they have distance.'

Sheva, 45, male, Brighton

Those who arrived as children generally had more social contacts with the majority of society, due to better language skills:

'Yeah! Yeah I feel I belong here, I feel it is my country now. I think 'cos like, they take care of us like, um. Like for example when we came here, they welcomed us nicely and they helped us. Like if we need anything they would help us, yeah.'

Anne, 18, female, Congolese

Because refugee children and youth have in general more inter group contacts than their parents, they also inform them about current- and cultural events happening in the UK. Or, they accompany them on their visits to the GP and on administrative appointments for translation:

'They [the children] speak very good English. Uh, they explain for me everything like, um, the other day when you celebrate, Halloween. Halloween day? Lots of celebration here. If I don't understand, there is one of the kids to explain for me: 'Daddy Halloween is blah, blah blah, people do like this', if I don't understand. They are very clever because at school they talk to others.'

Jacques, 43, male, Congolese

In some cases this variation in bridging social capital between children and parents created certain tensions in families. Some parents expressed concerns that their children might adjust ‘too much’ to British society, by adapting not only to the good parts of British culture, such as tolerance towards minorities, but also what they considered the more problematic aspects such as the perceived loss of intergenerational respect:

‘I always tell them [the children] it’s not good to learn everything, but it’s easy for you to see everything. But don’t learn everything you see.’

Benoit, 40, male, Congolese

Refugees accounts of the ‘British way of life’ were sometimes slightly distorted, resulting from little personal contacts with the British and limited opportunities for insights into their private lives. Refugees were rarely invited into private homes, which would have allowed a more nuanced image of a British family life.

The achievements of those who arrived as children in their multidimensional integration is very positive. Yet, we should not forget that some of these children and youth live with high levels of unemployment and poverty. Financial problems and/or anti-social working hours are one of the reasons why many parents find it difficult to socialise regularly with the local community. Deeper personal contacts and friendships mostly happened within refugees’ own communities or with individuals of other national backgrounds. This is the essential role of bonding social capital.

BONDING: PROVIDE PLATFORMS FOR INTRA-GROUP CONTACTS

Our data on the refugees’ interactions with members of the same community show a positive correlation between well-being and contacts with one’s own ethnic community. Although some of the resettled communities are far from being harmonious and intra-group tensions exists, in general, contacts with community members were narrated as being helpful, especially in difficult times:

‘Really, I am so happy because when I think too much, when I am lonely, and too much stress, I go to my friends’ home. We speak the same language, and I tell her about my problems, and then she makes me feel relaxed. I forget, and I am so happy to chat with her. I eat, and then something changes my mind, and I go home, and I am fine after that.’

Genno, 28, female, Ethiopian

In this context, refugees also highlighted the crucial role of the church and mosques as important meeting points for interacting with other members of their community. Religious institutions also provide a way of meeting individuals from other nationalities. In all three cities, many refugees meet after school, they stay in contact via telephone, or they visit each other at home. They also get together through community organisations, around nationality or ethnicity.

The majority of respondents considered community organisations as a welcome means for practical and emotional support and for the practice of their culture and language. They saw the growing number of refugees and community organisations as a positive development and an advantage for incoming refugees – something which they missed upon their arrival. Refugees who arrived on their own were especially keen to highlight the value of attending community groups:

‘So, when you are alone it is a problem. But people who come now, they are not alone. They will not feel like I felt. They will feel more happiness, because they can see that people are already here. We can teach them, and they can come to our gatherings, and we explain them the bills.’

Hussein, 27, male, Ethiopian

‘When I came here, it was 2008, there was not too much people, but now there are many refugees, and that’s very nice. But 2008, I felt like I’m alone. I felt like I’m the only person here and I can’t see any person who speak my language. So now it’s positive, I feel good.’

Ali, 29, male, Ethiopian

Community organisations were particularly important for older refugees, as a vital means for maintaining their cultural identity. Community organisations also played a crucial role for emotional and financial support for refugees who go through a loss of a family member back home. In contrast, younger refugees who arrived at an early age, and who were mainly socialised in the UK considered community organisations to be less relevant. With the exception of young refugees who are actively involved in intra-community youth activities, such as sport activities, most considered the associational life of their community as a place for ‘older people’:

‘Umm, I’ve got nothing in common with them. That’s the one thing. I wouldn’t mind them, but it would just be really weird, and awkward to go to their organisations. Obviously....I think it’s the older people, ‘cos there’s not a lot of young people in the community to actually get along with.’

Kidus, 21, male, Ethiopian

Participation and active engagement is vital to the well-being and self-worth of refugees. The participants’ overriding motivation to engage in community organisation was as an act of belonging to the local migrant community. Beyond this, community engagement allowed refugees a sense of self-worth and recognition that is otherwise unattainable in the UK due to their socially marginalised positions. For high-skilled refugees in low-skilled jobs, volunteering in community associations presented a welcome opportunity to employ their skills and resources. This allowed a temporary restoration of their identities.

This strong sense of self-help among some groups of refugees and the practical and emotional assistance they provide is positive, and worth supporting. Yet expectations of intra-community support should be put into perspective. It was unusual for this engagement to produce practical change, while a volunteering demands time, resources and energy, which many do not have because of destitution, low paid work, and insecurity about their future.⁸

NEW LIVES – OLD TIES: ACKNOWLEDGING TRANSNATIONAL TIES

While refugees create new contacts in the UK, they are still embedded into networks of old ties. In addition to the accepted significance of bridging and bonding relationships, our research has highlighted how the importance of maintaining active contacts with family and friends back home or in camps affects well-being:

‘Contact is still there because people in camp...we lived together, we lived together like brothers and sisters. And people back home, that is my family as well. And those people we can’t forget them, if we are out from there. We still remember them, still we share our problems.’

Mona, 38, female, Ethiopian

The value of these transnational links for refugees’ wellbeing in the UK is clear. Failure to stay in regular contact with friends and families back home can also cause refugees stress and anxiety in their already challenging daily lives in the UK. Feelings of guilt and helplessness in their failure to respond to relatives and friends back home or in camps negatively affected refugees’ well-being. This was especially pronounced when refugees were unable to meet their needs and expectations for support. Intensity of contacts with relatives and friends back home varied:

‘If I have the money I share, I like to call them every time, but sometime the situation is not good. We still contact them once a week, or every fifteen days. And sometimes, I’m getting angry as well; I stop calling them, because most of the time when I’m calling them they are always talking about problems, and I can’t help them.’

Aaron, 28, male, Ethiopian

⁸ This aspect is not specific to refugees, but also applies to the broader volunteer sector in the UK. Research has found that mostly the middle class is involved in volunteer engagements and not the most deprived population with less time and financial resources available (e.g. Beck 2011).

‘Because sometimes they talking about political problem or they have people still in fear of their life living there. Still uh, some people are kidnapped, arrested, uh every time, I am hearing that and I can’t help them; I can’t take them out from that area. And in that case, I feel helpless and I just start ignoring sometimes, or calling less.’

Jira, 62, male, Ethiopian

‘When they ask for help, I can’t help them. I am living in the UK and I still can’t help them. But because they think I am living in the UK, I can help them with what they need, everything. But I can’t do that. For that point I feel stress.’

Dureessa, 22, male, Ethiopian

These comments refer to transnational relationships that have lasted in some cases more than a decade since refugees arrived in the UK. The quality of these relationships has a significant impact on refugees’ reported levels of wellbeing and in turn on their openness to become involved in social life in the UK. Despite being a multicultural country, Britain can be isolating for newcomers. The undeniable positive effects of contacts with the wider society on refugees’ well-being highlights the need for the creation of more opportunities for contact.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Social integration is a dynamic process that takes place at the individual, local and national level. Bridging, bonding and transnational links are important to consider in each context:

Individual level

- Encourage and ensure access to bridging activities, so that refugees feel welcomed and can develop a sense of belonging in their new society, for example intercultural exchange projects or mentoring and buddy schemes.
- Increase publicity and information addressed to both locals and members of the refugee community about volunteer organisations and their programs to socially engage with refugees or with the local community
- Acknowledge that refugees still have strong ties to their families and friends back home or in camps, and that these relationships can both positively and negatively affect refugees' well-being and their social integration in the UK

Local level

- Encourage building bridges for refugee adults on a local level: Local authorities involve local public services, third sector organisations and businesses in their boroughs so that refugees can establish contacts where they live

- Local youth clubs are important spaces for young people to meet and engage in activities that are crucial to ensure they are positively engaged in their local communities
- To achieve integrated communities, it is vital that refugees have access to and free use of social infrastructure (such as libraries and community centres) where they live.
- Ensure that refugees feel safe and positive about their local community, so they are more likely to take an active part in the local society
- Support migrant associations (e.g. by providing free premises)

National level

- Actions on segregation and community cohesion can only succeed if the government revises some of its own policies to funding cuts to local authorities (e.g. closure of community centres and libraries as meeting points, etc.)



10. Programme support is most effective when it is tailored to individuals' needs

Under Gateway, refugees still receive 12 months of focused support, which then comes to a more or less abrupt end. Looking back with the perspective of as much as a decade after arrival, refugees were generally positive about the immediate programme support they received upon arrival:

'Everything was fine for us. It's just like we been on holiday and come back to our house; everything was clean and... our bed was ready, our mattress, everything was ready. So it was good. We had a caseworker, that day the caseworker was still with us, I think we came about 3 o'clock or 4 o'clock, I don't know. So the caseworker he was with us up to 9 o'clock. [...] Thanks to the Refugee Action and Gateway. Because they bring us here, they support us. They didn't leave us there. Until we get a council house, they were there for us. They were supportive, they were teaching us all the way round, in Bolton. How we can shop, how we can open our bank account. Yeah, they were there to support actually [...] they even take us to Blackpool, to the beach.'
Hussein, 27, male, Ethiopian

Praise for Gateway was very common and the greatest success of the scheme was in meeting immediate needs on and soon after arrival. Yet long-term integration of refugees into British society is just as important. Provision under Gateway was understandably focused at immediate support. With hindsight it is clear that programme support was planned less with a view to longer-term implications. The one-year government support, after which time it is assumed that refugees' needs will be accommodated by mainstream service provision, was considered adequate by some, but too short by many.

DEVELOPING A SYSTEM OF TAILORED SUPPORT

Any elements of the programme that seemed to be one-size fits all were obviously problematic for those that they left out. Two groups of people are worth highlighting: refugees with good English and refugees who arrived on their own. Beyond the specifics of support a more tailored approach to ending programme support was also recommended.

Although it was most common for refugees to request higher levels of support, several refugees who arrived speaking good English argued that they could have learned more from doing some elements on their own:

'Really, it was not so good, only for a short period of time, nearly 6 months, yeah. The case worker registered with me at GP, that's it, yeah. Wasn't...got a lot to do because of... you are already speaking English, so what, why do you need support? No, you have to do for yourself.'

Negasi, 47, male, Ethiopian

A GENERIC APPROACH

Another clear group who were less well served by the generic approach was refugees resettled on their own. These participants considered the programme support as too family and children oriented, neglecting specific challenges in their integration process. For instance, they could not rely on other family members or wider family bonds in the UK to support them financially during their education. Without language skills and opportunities to socialise at work or in an educational setting, they felt particularly isolated in their early days in the UK. Their social isolation and risks of depression and anxiety even increased due to the fact that important service provisions, such as language tuition, were not readily available to them:

'I had to wait 3, 4 months; staying in the house, alone. I don't have job, I don't have anything, nobody. It's difficult, lonely, you know.'

Aaron, 28, male, Ethiopian

Refugees had different experiences of the management of the termination of support mechanisms. In some cases, the lack of appropriate information about upcoming changes caused refugees extra stress and anxiety. Many did not feel confident to manage everyday life independently. Thus, they stressed the need for more long-term integration measures, beyond the funding period, which would have allowed them to better understand the UK system. Those who struggled the most in managing their lives after the support ended were those who received support provisions over a shorter period (four to six months), elderly refugees, people with more limited English language skills, which disproportionately affected women and refugees with no local support networks:

‘I liked that support we had at the beginning, but what I can suggest is maybe to increase the time of six months. Maybe there should be support for one or two years. Because when we came here, we didn’t find many people from our country in this town. We found only few. And we had many problems. After 6 months it was not possible to know everything exactly.’

Max, 39, male, Congolese

After the end of the supporting period, refugees welcomed any opportunity to ask for official advice. Where there was an individual they were able to go to seek support or information, as in Brighton, they really welcomed this. The institutionalization of an official drop in to ease refugees away from case worker support was mentioned by many, in this case a refugee from Greater Manchester:

‘When they bring people here they have to support people until they work. Or, to lead them there. An education, a course, or even a job, like interpreting, so... so at least they offer something to these people they bring, not to throw them there, forget them. They support for six months. That’s it, they leave you. They have to contact you and ask you how you are doing, actually, to contact people two, three years later, ‘How’s your English? Did you improve? Do you have a job?’ Anything, but no.’

Hussein, 27, male, Ethiopian

Many of these difficulties are periodic and clear. For example, reading and understanding letters from utilities companies, HMRC or concerning benefits was something that few refugees felt confident with at the end of official Gateway support. Such letters could provoke significant anxiety:

‘Oh my God, you are worried every time, oh these people, they send you a letter, they traumatise you by letters. People are struggling with letters, you know letters can traumatise.’

Elisabeth, 49, female, Congolese

Once Gateway support has ended, the impersonal and complex access to support, for example by phone rather than in person, makes it particularly difficult for refugees with few English skills to explain their situation and to clarify misunderstandings. Such misunderstandings often occurred at times of moving home. A frequently mentioned issue in this regard was that refugees mistakenly paid remaining bills from previous tenants after their relocation into a new home. In some cases, refugees paid considerable sums of money, precisely because they could not explain their situation, and consequently struggled to make ends meet on their income.

The need for a more tailored approach to service provision through Gateway and for a more tapered transition once Gateway support ends was a common suggestion for improving the system. This could be developed in future provision, as it has in the VPRS. In the absence of such provision, some were lucky enough to find other support. Developing opportunities for other forms of solidarity and linking refugees into existing voluntary networks is a vital additional channel of support.

ENCOURAGE 'GOOD THINGS HAPPENING': FORMAL AND INFORMAL LOCAL SOLIDARITY

Many refugees relied on friends or local volunteers for ongoing support after their official support ended. On many occasions, formerly resettled refugees helped those who needed more guidance in coping with their daily lives. These community mentors reported that many of their mentees needed somebody to 'sit with them' to solve their administrative difficulties or to help them in accessing local services after the support mechanisms ended.

Befriending and mentoring schemes have become increasingly common across the UK in recent years. Refugees considered these to be extremely helpful during both the arrival period and afterwards. The mentoring support network in place helped many to absorb the 'abrupt' termination of support, and to cover their needs:

'My mentor was helping me a lot! For people who are newly resettled a mentor is very important. They show you everything, rather than your caseworker. By the time when we came here there was a lot of difficult things, you know? You don't know how to walk around the city, how to do supermarkets, but they show.'

Negasi, male, 47, Ethiopian

Some parents found it crucial to have positive role models for their children in the wider community, like friends, mentors and neighbours. Hussein was particularly keen to pass on their positive experiences of local solidarity to their children:

'When we came here, we put in our mind not going to change the rules here. We are going to take the good things from these people and learn it to our children, and that's what's happening. And lots of things we get it from the neighbours, from the school. They say, excuse me please, can I do this for you? The way to deal with things, you know? Lots of good, good things to be honest. Lots of extra help. I want my children learning from it.'

Hussein, 43, male, Iraqi

This reinforces the broader survey result of a positive correlation between positive contacts with the local community and the overall well-being of refugees. It further highlights the importance of a more inclusive approach to resettlement beyond the main service providers. Yet it is obviously that refugees are not only beneficiaries of solidarity. As the UK becomes a more and more established resettlement country, larger numbers of refugees have relevant expertise.

ALLOW FORMER REFUGEES TO 'GIVE BACK SOMETHING TO THE UK'

Many formerly resettled refugees expressed their wish to 'give back something' to the UK, because they had 'been chosen' to be resettled to the UK. They want to be 'useful' for the wider English society by paying taxes and by 'trying to help' new incoming refugees – as a means to support the state-led resettlement programme. Many former refugees would be willing to help newcomers and to volunteer in the future, even if they are living in strained circumstances that limits their time and energy to take up a volunteer engagement.

'And to work more for the community, to help other people just as... because England...they give me a lot. Nowhere else they give you this kind of life and options so it's part of how to payback some of the good things that they give you. And I did many volunteer work. Like I worked for Refugee Action for 6 months as a volunteer – just to say thanks. It's a way of saying thanks for your help. Yeah.'

Jim, 37, male, Iraqi

'If I go to Uni, obviously my life will change for better, and my life will also change if I can help other people. I don't want to depend forever on benefits, you know, I want to give back to the UK. I can't be useful like that to UK, that's why I try to be more, you know, to do...to go the extra mile really. To work night shifts and study during the day, that's what really motivates me.'

Hassan, 27, male, Ethiopian

Living on benefits, however, prevents many refugees from feeling useful to the British society. There is certainly great potential in involving former resettled refugees in a more systematic way as mentors and volunteers into currently running or future resettlement programmes.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Some of these policy elements have already been introduced in our study areas during the research process or since we have completed the research, they are worth highlighting

- Provide individualised assessment and tailored responses to promote sustainable support in long-term integration with a standardised, one stop-shop approach covering access to all relevant services during the support period.
- Create time-flexible schemes: resettlement programs should be more responsive to the heterogeneity of refugees with regard to age, gender and individual capabilities of the participants (see Joyce, 2018).
- Resettle refugees to locations where there is already a structure of community groups, volunteer initiatives and NGOs with the necessary expertise in supporting resettled refugees in their long-term integration in place, e.g. volunteer mentoring schemes, such as the initiative Hostnation in London (<https://www.hostnation.org.uk/>).
- Provide punctual assistance to refugees to break down barriers to accessing vital services after the support period ends. For example by identifying a named contact person.
- Given that social isolation is strongly linked to precarity, ensure possibilities to entry into education, work and the local community, and tackle social isolation of refugees by supporting the involvement of local communities in resettlement programmes.
- Represent socially isolated refugees in the new national conversation about the scale and impact of loneliness in the UK.
- Systematic integration and training of members of refugee communities interested to become volunteers and mentors in current and future resettlement programmes.
- A sound knowledge of resettlement programmes and a mutual understanding of resettlement policies among all stakeholders involved: this requires an early investigation of refugees' expectations towards the programme, improved pre-departure information about the joint programme goals, ensuring that all stakeholders share the same understanding of the resettlement programme.

Conclusion: committing to the future

This is the first study into long-term integration of resettled refugees in the UK. Our three-wave longitudinal study followed resettled refugees as far as ten years after their initial arrival in the UK. Although there can be no doubt that resettlement has brought them tremendous benefits there is also reason for significant concerns. Previous research followed refugees for the first year or two after arrival and found that major difficulties persisted in access to education, employment and English language skills and that these contributed to very substantial inequalities between resettled refugees and the UK population as a whole. Our research demonstrates that these inequalities persist. Severe inequality remains pronounced even in our final wave of research, which followed some refugees into their second decade in the UK. Countering this inequality requires a long-term commitment to the integration of resettled refugees.

Our research has highlighted many things that can be done to ease the difficulties that refugees encounter in the UK if they are to reach their potential in the future. The most significant barriers faced by refugees on their pathways to a settled life in the UK are closely related and reinforce each other. They are compounded by gendered vulnerabilities: unemployment makes it difficult to afford decent housing; the lack of language skills, and the non-recognition of refugees' qualifications aggravates the search for employment, and the precarious life situations make further education and upward mobility almost impossible for the majority of refugees involved in this research. All of these factors can push refugees into long-term vulnerability.

To mitigate these negative consequences, and in order to avoid the production of new inequalities we suggest it is necessary to find ways to deliver an overall holistic support model – which requires increased collaboration between resettlement providers, refugee support organisations, mainstream service providers, local employers and the wider society, especially where housing, language, employment and social integration are concerned. A more holistic approach to the needs of refugees also involves adapting a model beyond trying to merely fit refugees in to existing systems, and instead recognises their different trajectories, to improve access to different institutions and provides the structures and opportunities to enable them to invest in their futures.

As the UK government considers the development of a new refugee resettlement programme after 2020, the findings of this research have a lot to contribute. Ambitious state-led resettlement programmes, including integration programmes should be combined with additional innovative private or third sector projects. A special priority should be given to projects and initiatives which, despite cultural and linguistic differences, focus on collaboration, whether among resettled refugees and citizens or between the public and private sector. Newly launched projects should ideally focus on concepts of self-management and autonomy of refugees. In doing so, new initiatives can contribute to changing the more negative narrative around refugees, based on victimhood, towards a story of personal agency. They can make enormous contribution to helping refugees to become part of their new environment. The UK is now seen as a world leader in refugee resettlement. It is ideally placed to make a long-term commitment in this area.

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