



**Refugee Council and
University of Birmingham**
Refugees' Experiences of Integration
Policy related findings on employment,
ESOL and vocational training

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About the Refugee Council

The Refugee Council is the largest organisation in the UK working with asylum seekers and refugees. We give help and support to asylum seekers and refugees, and work with them to ensure their needs and concerns are addressed by decision-makers

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1 Introduction

This policy report presents findings concerning employment, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and vocational training from a two-year qualitative study of *Refugees' Experiences of Integration*, carried out in partnership by the Refugee Council and the University of Birmingham.

The aim of the study was to explore the social aspects of refugees' and asylum seekers' integration, particularly in relation to how these were experienced in two different localities and across different groups of refugees. Evidence was collected by conducting 116 semi-structured qualitative interviews with refugees in Haringey and Dudley, comprising 45 initial interviews in each area, with a further 26 follow-up interviews with a sub-sample of respondents. In both areas, the research team gathered profiling information and data on: refugee populations (i.e. size, distribution, composition, etc.); the nature and development of statutory refugee services and integration policies; and the presence and work of third sector voluntary and community organisations working with refugees. This data was used to inform the research agenda and policy recommendations.

The principle aim of the research was to explore the impact of different local contexts on experiences of integration; the nature and impact of refugees' access to and participation in social networks and how this facilitated or constrained their integration; and refugees' own conceptions of, and aspirations regarding, integration into British society. The project's main report *'Refugees' Experiences of Integration: research findings'* gives a detailed account of the role of social networks in integration. This policy report focuses on respondents' experiences of accessing employment, ESOL and vocational training and how these impacted on their processes of integration.

The research found that refugees' conceptions and understandings of integration were clustered into three main areas; functional, emotional and equality related areas. The emphasis of this paper is predominantly on access and barriers to outcomes

within the functional domain. At a policy level, the impact that lack of access to functional outcomes has on the lives of refugees and asylum seekers is crucial for organisations, like the Refugee Council, who campaign and lobby for fair and humane asylum processes. As a result, we have chosen to narrow the focus to employment, ESOL and vocational training because of the nature of the restrictions related to these areas and the consequent impact they have on the lives of our respondents. Additionally, these issues are particularly pertinent to the work of the Refugee Council.

The first part of the report provides a short overview of current literature relating to employment, ESOL and vocational training, highlighting the access routes and barriers to access, with a focus on gender, because previous studies have found that women sometimes use alternative access routes and experience different barriers to men. The review includes a focus on how barriers to employment, ESOL and vocational training have an impact on refugees' experiences of integration. Part two of the report looks at current UK policy relating to employment, ESOL and vocational training for both refugees and asylum seekers, and the final section outlines the research findings. This section looks at responses from the refugees and asylum seekers who were interviewed and summarises the impact that current policy and legislation has on their integration. The paper concludes with a series of recommendations based on the evidence provided in the report.

2 Literature Review

This review considers literature on the role of employment, education and training in the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK.

The review provides an overview of the issues related to refugees and asylum seekers' access to employment, ESOL and vocational training. It also gives an indication of the scope of existing research regarding the barriers, impacts and aspirations for integration that refugees and asylum seekers experience in these three areas.

Particular areas of concern addressed within each area are:

- Access routes
- Barriers faced by refugees and asylum seekers, particularly those faced by women
- Impacts on the integration of refugees and asylum seekers

The literature review is not intended to be an exhaustive study, especially given the ongoing developments in this area of work. Instead, the review provides an overview of literature available to support the policy positions outlined later in this paper. The review covers literature produced in the last ten years, reflecting the change in government policy on employment of asylum seekers which took place in mid 2002.

2.1 Employment

Refugees and asylum seekers with permission to work have been identified as two of the most unemployed and underemployed groups in the UK (Bloch and Levy 1999). A survey of 400 refugees conducted by the Department for Work and Pensions found only 29 percent of participants were in paid employment (Bloch 2002). Another survey suggests that recorded rates of unemployment range from 75 percent to 90 percent, depending on geographical area and mobility (Sommerville and Wintour 2004). There is a

considerable amount of literature available concerning the right of refugees and asylum seekers to work, and this continues to be a widely debated topic.

2.1.1 Access to employment

Research has shown that there are different methods used by refugees and asylum seekers to access employment. The use of informal networks was the most common method of job seeking and gaining employment advice identified in research. This included the use of personal contacts such as friends and family (Shiferaw and Hagos 2002, Bloch 2002). One report raised concerns, however, that this reliance on friends and family to locate information about employment can be unhelpful as refugees and asylum seekers often need specific and specialist advice which could be best provided by statutory bodies or refugee employment agencies (Phillimore et al 2003). Other methods of seeking employment used by refugees included the use of advertisements, private agencies and community groups. Interestingly, Bloch (2002) found that a large number (just under half) of refugees who were actively looking for employment were unaware of statutory schemes which might help them in to work. For those who had heard of statutory schemes, the New Deal scheme was found to be the most known. In other studies, Jobcentre Plus was used by a remarkably low number of refugees and asylum seekers (Shiferaw and Hagos 2002) and refugees looking for employment have reported having more positive experiences using refugee-specific employment agencies which are regarded as more welcoming and approachable (Humphries et al, 2005). Jobcentre Plus and other statutory agencies have been criticised for promoting short term goals (Phillimore et al 2003, Humphries et al 2005) and

a lack of joined up service provision within local authorities has been noted (Phillimore et al 2003). Recommendations have also been made that staff within these agencies should receive training specific to working with refugees and asylum seekers (Basford/LSC 2005).

2.1.2 Barriers to employment

Since 2002, there has been a growth in research carried out with the purpose of identifying the barriers faced by refugee and asylum seekers in accessing employment. Multiple barriers have been identified, with the key barriers being: difficulty speaking English and often inadequate language skills; the recognition of overseas qualifications; little relevant UK work experience and a lack of references; limited knowledge of the job market; problems with cultural (mis)understanding within the workplace and difficulties with housing and family circumstances, such as responsibility of care for dependents (Schreiber 2006, Bloch 2002, Sargeant 2001).

English language and literacy has been demonstrated to be by far the biggest barrier facing asylum seekers and refugees in their search for employment (Schreiber 2006, Griffiths 2003, Bloch 2002, Shiferaw and Hagos 2002, Sargeant 2001, Schellekens 2001). The government itself identified English language proficiency to be the key barrier to employment, linked closely with a lack of familiarity with the UK labour market (DWP 2003). The ECRE Task Force on Integration (1999) discovered that refugees interviewed placed fear of cultural clashes after language problems as the top reason why employers are disinclined to hire refugees. Many refugees themselves are sensitive to cultural difference and identify their lack of experience of British work culture as a hindrance in securing work (Sargeant, 2001). The DWP has recommended that refugees should be offered work placement opportunities to enable them to use their skills and experiences to gain UK work experience and to thereby strengthen job applications and self confidence (IES/Employability Forum 2003, Bloch 2002).

Refugees and asylum seekers with professional qualifications who wish to continue working in their professions in the UK can experience difficulty gaining entry to professional bodies as a consequence of their refugee status. This is often because they are unable to provide the required documentation in support of their qualifications as it has been left behind or is not obtainable from the country of origin (Waddington 2005).

A further barrier to employment identified in some research is discrimination based on race and immigration status (IES/Employability Forum 2003). This has led to calls for organisations to be required to monitor and review the implementation of equal opportunities policies at all levels and in all areas of work (Dumper 2002).

Some research has suggested that the domestic circumstances of refugees and asylum seekers can also act as a barrier to both finding and advancing within employment (Castles et al. 2004) and this has been demonstrated in numerous studies on the experience of refugee women. In her research into the barriers to employment perceived by women refugees in London, Gill Sargeant found that the main barriers experienced by the women were: lack of English language; awareness of cultural behaviour expected in the work place; lack of childcare; confidence and self esteem; lack of acceptance of overseas qualifications; racial prejudice. In later research (Sargeant 2003), she concluded that barriers to employment faced by women, whilst largely the same as those faced by men, are exacerbated by familial responsibilities, domestic arrangements and a lack of support in coping with these familial responsibilities and the bureaucratic systems in the UK (also Dumper 2002). The separation from family and friends experienced by so many refugee and asylum seeking women has an additional impact on women with children who might otherwise rely on these support systems for the provision of informal childcare and help with domestic arrangements (Atkinson 2003, Sargeant 1999, Sargeant 2001, Dumper 2002).

2.1.3 Impact of employment on integration

A number of recent studies have suggested that asylum seekers and refugees have higher than average educational skills and qualification levels and high levels of motivation (ICAR 2003, NIACE 2001). There is evidence that the majority of asylum seekers are willing to work whilst awaiting a final decision on their asylum claims, and that finding work is the main priority for refugees just granted status (Bloch 2002). The reasons for this are varied, from a desire for economic self sufficiency to improving English language skills, but all stem from the recognition that finding a job is crucial to rebuilding their lives and self esteem and to integration into UK society (Waddington 2005).

Employment has been identified as a primary factor in the integration of migrants into UK society (Phillimore et al 2006, Coussey 2000, Bloch 1999), by increasing

opportunities to improve English language skills and enabling adjustment to the host society through a degree of economic independence (Phillimore et al 2006). Some studies have emphasised the psychosocial benefits of employment for refugees and asylum seekers, particularly women (Phillimore et al. 2006). Respondents to surveys investigating the link between employment, integration and mental wellbeing have often stated that employment is *the main mechanism by which they would be able to “fit in” in UK society* (Phillimore et al. 2006). Ineligibility to work has been shown to have a detrimental effect on the motivation to work in the long term, volunteer, study or undertake vocational training (Refugee Council 2005).

There is no doubt, in all the research reviewed, that permission to work and the right support in accessing and gaining employment has a positive impact on refugees and asylum seekers, and the benefits it would have on UK society, in particular community cohesion and the labour market, are yet to be fully realised.

2.2 ESOL

With the recent changes in funding affecting refugees and asylum seekers, which will be outlined later, and the long established link between English language and literacy skills and under- or unemployment, there is an increasing amount of literature on English for Speakers of Other Languages, particularly focusing on ESOL provision for refugees and asylum seekers. Recent changes to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) policy and funding priorities for the 2007/08 financial year have impacted on refugees and asylum seekers, and the consequences of this are yet to be researched and examined.

2.2.1 Access to ESOL classes

As with employment, the importance of social and community networks in finding out about English language courses cannot be underestimated. Over half of those surveyed for the Department of Work of Pensions stated that they had found out about their courses through a friend. Community groups featured as the next highest provider of information, far ahead of Jobcentre Plus and social services (Bloch 2002). These findings are echoed in Phillimore et al's recent report which found that refugees' main sources of information regarding ESOL courses were informal networks which included family, friends and community members. Other sources of information about ESOL included statutory sources, the National Asylum Support Service (now the Asylum Resources Directorate of the Border and Immigration Agency), Jobcentre Plus and Learn Direct centres (Phillimore et al 2007).

2.2.2 Barriers to ESOL

Studies have shown that some refugees have been dissatisfied by the content and availability of ESOL courses. Having enrolled, a student may be placed on a waiting list due to a shortage of classes (Phillimore et al 2007, Schreiber 2006, Waddington 2005, Griffiths 2003, Bloch 2002). Shortage of ESOL classes, and consequently refugees' experiences of access, can vary according to region. The impact of dispersal has created barriers to refugees and asylum seekers who find themselves living in an area not yet equipped for English language provision. (Basic Skills Agency/ A Survey of Practice, 2007)

Regarding the content of the courses, a number of the studies echoed refugees' concerns that the levels of English taught at ESOL classes are insufficient for use in accessing training and employment. There is evidence to show that the levels of English offered are not appropriate for the student who wishes to gain entry to the UK labour market or for professional or vocational development, focussing instead on equipping them with conversational English (Phillimore et al 2007, Waddington 2005, Griffiths 2003). In addition to this ESOL courses that cater to people wanting to attain a higher level of English, or English that meets their employment needs, are scarce considering the demand for such courses.

Prior to the recent changes to the funding of ESOL, few refugees and asylum seekers experienced funding as a barrier to accessing English language classes, although cost of travel has been found to be a concern (Griffiths 2003). Some course providers will help with travel costs, but this varies according to the provider. Additionally, some refugees have been unable to prioritise learning English over the need to work (Phillimore 2007).

The refugee experience itself, and associated emotional and physical scars, can be a barrier to learning. This can be exacerbated by the varied skills and experience of ESOL tutors, some of whom may not be equipped to deal with and support the learning needs of such vulnerable people (Phillimore et al 2007).

Women are shown to face difficulties presented by childcare and a lack of free or subsidised childcare provision offered by course providers (Phillimore et al 2007, Hek 2005, Basford 2005, Bloch 2002, Brophy et al. 1998). In addition women can be particularly affected by a shortage of classes which take place at 'child friendly' times (Basford 2005, Griffiths 2003), a lack of time to devote to ESOL classes due to

conflicts with domestic duties, and anxiety caused by a lack of knowledge of the geographical area and feelings of isolation (Schrieber 2006, Dumper 2002).

2.2.3 Impact of ESOL on integration

Throughout the literature on the benefits of ESOL, it is clear that English language skills enhance employability, social interaction and cultural knowledge, which promotes social participation (Dimitriadou, 2004). The key motivation for those learning English is to be able to communicate better with others and to find a job (Bloch 2002) which, as we have established, is seen as a way to key to “fitting in” to life and society in the UK. Women are particularly motivated to learn English in order to benefit from the social aspects of integration. It is believed that this is because women suffer more from the loss of familial and friendship support structures left behind at home. The significantly lower number of female refugees can only add to this feeling of isolation as women do not have access to the same networks as men (Dumper 2002, Schreiber 2006).

Proficiency in the language of the host country is an undeniable indicator of integration: the ability to speak, write and read English and to understand the ways in which society and institutions operate is the fundamental building block to integration (Phillimore et al 2007 citing ABNI 2006). As reported by the Working Group on English for Speakers of Other Languages, a lack of fluency in English will impact on the individuals’ ability to gain employment or advancement in the workplace, benefit from further education, access community and social services, participate in community life and limit their ability to be involved with and support their children’s education (2000). The impact that a lack of fluency in English has on the dependants of refugees and asylum seekers is currently being explored by the Children’s Society.

2.3 Vocational Training

2.3.1 Access to vocational training

Research has shown a link between the length of time spent in Britain and the methods of accessing information about training. The Department for Work and Pensions discovered, in their survey of 400 refugees across the country, that those who had been living in Britain for the shortest time and were less proficient in English were more likely to receive information from friends and community networks and from Jobcentre Plus than those who had been in the country for five years or more (Bloch 2002).

This was echoed in research conducted by Phillimore et al (2003). Respondents found out about their courses from a variety of sources: family, friends and colleagues, educational establishments, refugee centres and Jobcentre Plus. Interestingly, Jobcentre Plus and other statutory bodies seemed to factor low on the list. It is not uncommon in the research for Jobcentre Plus staff to be described as insensitive and unapproachable towards refugee clients (Humphries et al 2006, Rosencrantz 2006).

The main sources of funding for refugee specific training courses were Jobcentre Plus and employers; other main sources of funding are community organisations and local authorities (Bloch 2002).

2.3.2 Barriers to vocational training

The barriers faced in accessing and attending ESOL classes have been found to be similar to those faced in accessing further education and vocational training, and these two subjects are often studied together. Common barriers in accessing vocational training and ESOL are: the availability of advice and guidance about learning; issues of self confidence; funding and finance; and health and domestic responsibilities (Phillimore et al, 2003). The most common difficulties faced by refugees and asylum seekers in completing training courses have been financial difficulties, a loss of interest (in some cases the course not meeting expectations), struggles to juggle family commitments and ill health (Charlaff et al, 2004, Bloch 2002).

A lack of information about free training and a lack of awareness regarding eligibility for such training has been frequently cited by refugees as a barrier (Charlaff et al, 2004, Bloch 2002), particularly by women as they can be more isolated than men and less likely to have access to support systems from community networks (Basford 2005, Dumper 2002).

Financial barriers to education and training include course and examination fees and the cost of travel, books, equipment and childcare (Phillimore et al 2007, Waddington/NIACE/ASSET UK 2005). Some refugees and asylum seekers have also been unaware of their eligibility to state funded support (Basford 2005). The Border and Immigration Agency introduced, in June 2007, a Refugee Integration loan scheme to assist new refugees and their dependents to purchase goods and services to assist their integration into UK society. Such loans may help with the financial and time commitments required by some training programmes (Schreiber 2006). As asylum seekers in the UK (not Scotland) are not eligible for certain

learner support funds, those who wish to enrol for vocational training courses have experienced difficulty as further and higher education colleges are reluctant to take on student with no means of supporting themselves (Waddington 2005). The inability to access employment exacerbates this.

As with employment, similar difficulties are faced by those refugees and asylum seekers who require documentation detailing their academic or vocational courses and qualifications (Garry et al, Schreiber 2006).

Other barriers identified were those created by anxiety, a lack of confidence and a lack of geographical and/or systemic knowledge (Bloch 2002). Such anxiety is particularly prevalent amongst women who also suffer from the additional responsibilities of raising children and looking after a family (Dumper 2002). Furthermore, research has shown that many refugees are unable or unwilling to travel outside the immediate locality to access training (Phillimore et al. 2007, Schreiber 2006).

2.3.3 Impact of vocational training on integration

Phillimore et al (2003) found it difficult to ascertain the learning aspirations of some of their interviewees for a number of reasons, including: a focus on the needs of dependents; depression caused by their asylum claim which does not allow them to focus on anything else; alien concept of aspirations; and an impression that they were not allowed to learn.

Refugees would like a wider choice of training options especially in areas like IT and office or business skills (Sargeant 2001, Kofman and Lukes, 2007). Training options with refugee agencies in the past have been found to be focused on areas such as language skills, the provision of care, hairdressing and basic office skills rather than in areas such as retail, catering or skilled crafts (Shiferaw and Hagos, 2001).

Motivations for undertaking training were discovered by Phillimore et al (2003) to be: improving English; getting a job; improving long term career prospects; pleasure or social interaction; and developing self esteem. Some younger refugees and asylum seekers have been motivated to increase their chances of self sufficiency having witnessed their guardians fail to re-enter their careers in this country and/or enter a low skilled job which in turn leads to a lack of motivation and self esteem (Phillimore et al 2003). There is a link between the motivation to work and study and the residential aspirations of the refugee or asylum seeker, with those who saw Britain as a permanent home

being slightly more likely to be enrolled on higher or further education (Bloch 2002).

Both employers and refugees acknowledge the advantage that UK qualifications and references have in accessing employment (Tomlinson et al, 2002). Refugees and asylum seekers have been motivated to take part in training courses by a desire to gain skills, qualifications and employment (Charlaff 2004, Bloch 2002, Kofman and Lukes 2007). For younger refugees, the importance of qualifications to success in employment and integration can not be underestimated and the main reason for studying is to enhance job prospects (Chapman, Princes Trust/Diana Fund 2002). However, few of the young refugees interviewed by Chapman (2002) stated that they wanted to be doing vocational training in five years time. Chapman believes this could be indicative of a lack of awareness of vocational training routes.

For refugees who are unemployed, training is often preferable to unstructured and demotivating unemployment (Bloch 2002, 2004). Training offers a promise that the unemployment might be temporary, and the structure and activity can boost confidence and offer a sense of normality to an otherwise disrupted life.

3 Overview of current policy related to ESOL, vocational training and employment

The following section outlines the current policy provisions in the UK relating to work entitlements, ESOL and vocational training provision.

Each section looks at how policy in these areas affects both refugees and asylum seekers and, where relevant, individuals with other types of leave to remain. The final sections of this policy review look at cross cutting issues of community cohesion and race equality in so far as these relate to refugees' access to the areas of service provision outlined above.

3.1 Current policy on Employment

3.1.1 Asylum seekers

Prior to 23 July 2002, asylum seekers who had been waiting for more than six months for an initial decision from the Home Office were allowed to apply for permission to work. This concession was for the main applicant only and did not extend to dependants of working age. According to the Home Office, it was introduced at a time when there was a lengthy backlog of claims on which the Government could give initial decisions.¹

The Home Office removed the employment concession for two main reasons. Firstly, they stated that a vast majority of asylum seekers were receiving decisions within six months and the Government expected to make decisions on new asylum claims within two months. Therefore, the Home Office believed that the concession was no longer appropriate. Secondly, they wanted to protect the asylum process from abuse by ensuring that it was not open to those who only wanted to come to work.² Those asylum seekers who had been granted permission under the concession could continue to work.

The Minister of State (Citizenship and Immigration) retained the discretion to grant permission to work for asylum seekers in exceptional circumstances.³ In February 2005, the UK implemented the European

Council Directive 2003/9/EC of 27 January 2003. This allows asylum seekers to apply for permission to work if they have not received an initial decision on their asylum claim from the Home Office after twelve months. In general, the Home Office will grant permission to work if the main applicant was not responsible for the delay in making a decision.⁴ There is no right of appeal if the application is refused. Like the previous concession, if granted permission only applies to main applicants.

An asylum seeker with permission to work will have 'employment permitted' stated on their application registration card (ARC).

3.1.2 Refugees

Asylum seekers granted refugee status, humanitarian protection or discretionary leave to remain have full employment rights and are legally protected from discrimination. Permission to work is given from the date of the Home Office letter confirming leave to remain. If they are receiving asylum support, then 28 days are given from the date of the Home Office letter before it finishes. During this time refugees are able to start work but must inform the Borders and Immigration Agency if they get a job.

3.1.3 Volunteering and purposeful activities

At the time of removing the work concession, the Home Office affirmed its commitment to asylum seekers volunteering and engaging in purposeful activities. This policy aims to give people the opportunity to be actively involved in their own and wider communities. In doing so, the Home Office has made it clear that this should not count as employment, paid or unpaid.⁵

3.2 Current policy on vocational training and higher education

3.2.1 Asylum seekers

Training opportunities are restricted to those that do not involve paid or unpaid employment (the same criteria used for volunteering). The government has stated that asylum seekers can do vocational training where it is part of a college course. It cannot be work-based where the training is part of a job. Therefore, asylum seekers are unable to access public funds for initiatives such as New Deal or Modern Apprenticeships. Any work placement that is part of a college course must be unpaid. If it carries a training allowance, the person may need to have the conditions attached to their temporary admission amended.⁶

In higher education, asylum seekers are classified as overseas students for funding purposes. Therefore, it is up to the university whether or not to charge home student fees or waive them. Asylum seekers studying in higher education can apply for bursaries or hardship funds, but are not entitled to local authority support.

3.2.2 Refugees

Refugees receiving benefits can access Government funded training. The main schemes are Work Based Learning for Adults and Modern Apprenticeships. Other training courses are supported by Jobcentre Plus.⁷

Refugees are granted home fee status⁸ and are eligible to apply for student support,⁹ including loans for tuition fees. Asylum seekers granted humanitarian protection or discretionary leave to remain are also considered as home students for funding purposes. However, they need to have been in the UK for three years, including length of time spent claiming asylum, before the start of the course in order to be eligible for student support.

3.3 Current policy relating to ESOL and Further Education

3.3.1 Asylum seekers

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC), the government body responsible for planning and funding further education and training for young people and adults, issued its annual statement of priorities, called 'Raising our Game' on 18 October 2006.¹⁰ This statement outlines key policy and funding priorities for the coming year (2007/08).¹¹

Two proposed changes to fees and eligibility criteria that impact significantly on refugees and asylum seekers were as follows:

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learning will no longer attract automatic fee remission.

ESOL is no longer free, except to priority groups, which will include people who are unemployed or are receiving income-based benefits. This means asylum seekers will not be automatically eligible for free tuition. Refugees who are unemployed or in receipt of income-based benefits will still be eligible for free ESOL tuition.

From 2007/08 asylum seekers aged 19+ will no longer be automatically eligible for publicly funded FE provision. Asylum seekers aged 16-18¹² will be eligible for funding if they are

- an unaccompanied child seeking asylum and in the care of social services
- minor dependants on National Asylum Support Service (NASS) support
- the main NASS applicant aged 18

Asylum seekers who turn 19 while on a course will remain eligible for funding until the end of that course.

However, the Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education has since announced important changes to the funding eligibility proposals announced in *Raising our Game*.¹³

The following groups are eligible for LSC funding in Further Education¹⁴

- asylum seekers who after six months are still waiting for a decision on their claim or appeal
- people who have been refused asylum, are unable to return because of circumstances beyond their control and are receiving Section 4 support

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) remains eligible for LSC funding during 2007/08 at levels 6/6.5. This is through the Cambridge ESOL Level 2 Certificate in English (IELTS 6/6.5).

3.3.2 Refugees

Refugees are eligible for LSC funding if they are part of priority groups. This usually means that someone is unemployed or in receipt of income based benefits.¹⁵ However, the Government is committed to increasing the number of people achieving Level 2 and 3.¹⁶ LSC funding is available to refugees if they are

- studying their first full Level 2 qualification, or
- aged 19-25 and studying their first full Level 3 qualification

The Leitch Review of Skills has sharpened this focus on Level 2 and 3 in further recommending objectives for 2020. This includes a minimum of 90 per cent of adults qualified to at least Level 2. It also highlights the need for stronger employer engagement with training. The LSC has already increased its budget for Train to Gain which supports work based learning and training.

3.3.3 Policy relating to applications for further leave to remain

Asylum seekers granted discretionary leave to remain (or previously exceptional leave to remain (ELR)) are able to apply before it expires for further leave to remain. Refugees and those granted humanitarian protection will be in a similar situation from 2009/10. They are now granted limited leave to remain for five years before their status is reviewed. If successful, they will be eligible to apply for indefinite leave to remain (ILR).

When applications for further leave have been made, individuals will not have their original documentation with them. However, the rights and entitlements for employment, education and training remain while the application is being considered.¹⁷

Asylum seekers granted refugee status or humanitarian protection who receive a positive review after five years can then apply for ILR. However, applicants will need to satisfy English language requirements and Life in the UK test. If they do not, the leave to remain is likely to be extended for another two years to allow them to meet ILR/Settlement conditions.

3.4 Current policy relating to Race Equality

Although asylum seekers and refugees are not explicitly covered by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, they are recognised as falling under its remit. For example, the Audit Commission monitors the spending of public money and advises on good practice and they include refugees and asylum seekers as specific groups under race equality.¹⁸ The Commission for Equality and Human Rights needs to ensure that this is firmly embedded in future work.

It is important that the status of refugees and asylum seekers is protected. Not only will it allow someone to have redress if discriminated against on the basis of their status. It also means that employers can engage in positive action measures if refugees and asylum seekers are underrepresented in the workforce.

3.5 Current policy relating to Community Cohesion

From 2007, schools have a duty to promote community cohesion.¹⁹ This is part of a wider drive by Government to develop processes which ensure that different groups of people get on well together. The Department for Communities and Local Government defines a cohesive community as one where

- there is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities
- the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and positively value
- those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities
- strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods.²⁰

The Commission on Integration and Cohesion's report, *Our Shared Future*, published in June 2007 develops this further. It argues for the fostering of a shared national vision; a clearly defined and widely shared sense of the contribution of different individuals and communities to this vision; and, a strong sense of an individual's rights and responsibilities.

The policy agenda on cohesion needs to be developed in a way that takes account of the needs and experiences of refugees.

- 1 As explained by Lord Filkin (Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Home Office) on 24 July 2002. For full details, see www.theyworkforyou.com/lords/?id=2002-07-24a.366.3&s=1986%2Bemployment+concession#g368.0
- 2 As outlined by Beverley Hughes, the then Minister of State (Citizenship and Immigration). For full details, see <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2002-07-23.72779.h&s=work+concession+speaker%3A10296#g72779.r0>
- 3 *ibid*
- 4 http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/downloads/permission_to_work.pdf
- 5 For example, see ICAR (2004) Media Image, Community Impact: assessing the impact of media images of refugees and asylum seekers on community relations in London www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/lawandpolicy/refugeeintegration/volunteeringandmentoring
- 6 For the fuller clarification given by NASS CIAU, Policy (28.4.06), see www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/infocentre/entit/sentit006.htm

7 The Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit (RAGU) based at London Metropolitan University has published detailed guidelines designed for refugees and asylum seekers on their entitlements to further and higher education

(http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/londonmet/library/c25318_3.pdf)

8 Education (Fees and Awards) Regulations 1997, Schedule 2-3(a), <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si1997/19971972.htm>

9 Student support includes grants and loans accessed through the local authority. For further details see

http://www.studentsupportdirect.co.uk/portal/page?_pageid=1647,468683&_dad=portal&_schema=PROTOCOL

10 Raising Our Game: Our Annual Statement of Priorities. The Learning and Skills Council sets out its priorities, including key actions for 2007/08 (October 2006). See <http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/nat-annualstatementofpriorities-re-oct2006.pdf>

11 Changes commenced on 1 August 2007

12 For further details on the impact on asylum seeking children and young adults, please see guidance issued by the Children's Legal Centre: <http://www.childrenslegalcentre.com/Templates/Topic.asp?NodeID=90129>, last searched 28 November 2006, and the briefing from the Children's Society, 'Speechless':

<http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/NR/ronlyres/92E63104-F892-4FA6-BEBD-AA2EEB6CF036/0/speechless.pdf>

13 The changes were announced in a speech delivered by Bill Rammell MP, Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education on 7 March 2007. For the full text of the speech, see http://www.dfes.gov.uk/speeches/search_detail.cfm?ID=540

14 This is for all Further Education, and not only ESOL courses (Personal correspondence, DfES Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit, 14 March 2007). Some courses in FE may require permission to work. See the Refugee Council's briefing on access to vocational training at http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/NR/ronlyres/CEB597B9-9EB6-4340-861C-CAB7183CF294/0/right_to_work.pdf

15 <http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/FEFundingGuidance0708.pdf>, 131, p21

16 Level 2 qualifications are equivalent to five or more GCSEs at grades A-C or NVQ Level 2. Level 3 qualifications are equivalent to two A levels or NVQ level 3

17 Section 3c of the Immigration Act 1971. See

<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/SI/si2006/20062226.htm>

18 The Audit Commission (2004) The Journey to Race Equality p.2.

19 The Education and Inspections Act 2006, s 154 (b)

20 See <http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1503278>

4 Research findings

This section looks at findings from the *Refugees' Experiences of Integration* project to examine the impact that law, policy and practice in relation to employment, ESOL and vocational training have on the lives of refugees and asylum seekers.

The section is broken down into five parts. The first looks at how respondents accessed employment, ESOL and vocational training courses and the second focuses on the barriers to accessing these. The third and fourth parts look at the impact that participation in and exclusion from employment, ESOL and vocational training has on respondents' lives. The final section looks at aspirations for the future and how employment, ESOL and training feature in refugees' plans to cope and integrate in the UK.

4.1 Access to employment, ESOL and vocational training

Just under half (43) of the 90 respondents interviewed for this project were attending ESOL courses, however numbers for those in employment and vocational training were much lower. Only 25 respondents were in employment and an even smaller number, 16 out of the 90, were taking part in vocational training. In the case of access to ESOL classes, restrictions related to immigration status did not present as significant a barrier to access as they did in the case of both employment and vocational training. This goes some way to explaining the higher numbers of respondents participating in ESOL courses.

Those who were attending ESOL courses and vocational training had relatively unproblematic experiences of accessing their courses however those accessing employment cited a variety of problems. Mirroring the findings of the literature review, those in employment had experienced difficulties in finding a job, including perceived discrimination, poor English, lack of qualifications and lack of knowledge of the UK job environment. The following sections outline the access strategies used by those respondents who were taking part in employment, ESOL classes or training.

4.1.1 Friends and family

The data reveals that friends are of key importance in accessing ESOL, employment and vocational training opportunities, and whilst evidence shows that these friends come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, friends from the respondent's own ethnic and national group are seen to be most important and reliable in signposting people to jobs and education. In particular, it was revealed that friends from co-ethnic groups were important in finding employment, especially in low wage labour and volunteering jobs, particularly within RCOs.

Interviewer: Ok. And when you were cleaning, how did you find this job?

Respondent: One friend talk to her boss and after the boss said want one person and my friend talk to me and I then start to work.

I: Ok, cool, so you had no problems finding a job then?

R: No, no.

For new arrivals in both Dudley and Haringey, friendship networks were particularly important as a first point of contact for people who were not familiar with their localities, especially in Dudley where the infrastructure of support services for asylum seekers is still being developed. These first points of contact were helpful in signposting respondents to ESOL providers and crucial in providing them with a route into employment, particularly in ethnic enterprise.

An overview of the data showed the importance of friends in access to education, training and employment, however in the case of ESOL, friendship networks were less important because of the presence of Home Office asylum support staff (then

called the National Asylum Support Service – NASS), particularly in Dudley, who were agents in signposting respondents to ESOL courses on arrival in the area.

Families were mentioned less than friends in terms of their usefulness in accessing ESOL, employment and vocational training. This is possibly because many families that were interviewed migrated at the same time and therefore no member had previous experience of life in the UK to draw upon. Reliance on families was more evident in Haringey than in Dudley

4.1.2 NASS/ Statutory and voluntary agencies

As mentioned above, in Dudley NASS played an important role in signposting asylum seekers to ESOL courses. NASS caseworkers in Dudley were seen to be particularly helpful and supportive in providing information on English language learning especially as other avenues of advice, such as RCOs and the voluntary sector, were limited. Some asylum seekers felt that the role of NASS in this regard was somewhat hindered by the resources available and the policy environment in which individual case-workers were operating, and the withdrawal of certain entitlements had resulted in a less positive impression of NASS in recent years.

R: They welcome any exhausted and dispirit asylum seeker who arrives according to the facilities they have. They try to help within their power. It just depends on the asylum seeker's expectation. We do not expect much but they welcomed us everywhere which is a very positive thing.

In Haringey, the absence of asylum support provision was filled by other forms of mainstream statutory support such as social services, Connexions and Jobcentre Plus, all of whom played important roles in enabling refugees and asylum seekers to access employment, ESOL and training.

A factor that may account for the high incidences of access-related support given to respondents in Haringey by social workers and key workers is that many of these respondents are either young unaccompanied asylum seeking children or older disabled people. Asylum seekers who fall into these categories but live in London are entitled to support through the local council. This contact with mainstream social support will therefore have an impact on how respondents find out about and access ESOL courses, colleges and voluntary organisations.

4.1.3 ESOL colleges and teachers

A significant number of people talked about the role of ESOL colleges and teachers as important sources of information and advice for accessing additional educational opportunities and vocational training. This was the case in both Dudley and Haringey.

I: So how did you find your education then, how did you find your business and IT course?

R: It was easy. It was easy because when I first in 2005, September when I finished ESOL entry 3, my teacher helped me for that. Helped me with the form, everything she helping me out. So it was easy.

A few respondents also received ad hoc advice from teachers about getting jobs and help with informal careers advice.

4.1.4 Voluntary sector organisations

Voluntary organisations and refugee community organisations were important in signposting people to employment, both paid and unpaid. In Haringey in particular where there are higher numbers of RCOs and voluntary organisations who have a history of providing this sort of information, respondents benefited from their knowledge and expertise. Here one respondent talks about how they used a charitable initiative to help refugees to find work in order to get a job.

I: Did you have any difficulties with finding these jobs?

R: To be honest it is really, really difficult but I had someone to help me, Fresh Start helped me, I had to do a course training to get that job, I had to do one weeks training.

I: So you had to have a weeks training before...

R: ...yeah, they help you to get a job and when they get a job for you, so its only a luckiness, you get an interview and if you pass the interview then you get the job.

In addition to this, RCOs provided opportunities for asylum seekers and refugees to undertake voluntary work, which is something that only respondents from Haringey reported having done.

4.1.5 Self-sufficiency, independence and initiative

In both areas there were respondents who relied on their own initiative to find employment and educational opportunities:

I: And how did you find the job?

R: I was looking for a job and I asked the security guy and I asked him if I could see the manager please

and he said yeah and when I see the manager, I ask him, I'm looking for a job and he says like 'you really want a job or are you just saying it?' I say 'Yes, I really want a job' and then he said come back next week. And then the time I go back.

Respondents who found employment, ESOL and vocational training independently of agencies and services were generally those who had been in the UK for longer periods of time and had developed better knowledge of how to access certain opportunities. Respondents reported going to libraries, looking on signboards in supermarkets and using the internet as a way of finding jobs. More respondents from Haringey reported using their own initiative to access work and education. This could be explained by low numbers of refugees in Dudley, which meant few people were actively seeking employment, and the also the high levels of support provided to asylum seekers by NASS particularly in accessing ESOL courses.

4.2 Barriers to accessing employment, ESOL and vocational training

Although a high number of respondents reported that English language courses were relatively easy to access, accessing employment and vocational training was much harder. As the previous section showed, numbers of respondents in employment and training were low and besides issues to do with eligibility, for example respondents who were at school and therefore could not work, there were a number of other barriers that prevented respondents from accessing employment and educational opportunities.

The following section outlines these, looking first at structural and situational barriers such as immigration status and location, and then at individual barriers, such as lack of English language.

4.2.1 Immigration status

Lack of legal status was the most significant barrier to the participation of asylum seekers in employment and vocational training. Being an asylum seeker brings with it numerous restrictions and for our respondents, the most significant was the lack of right to work whilst their status was being determined. Other restrictions included limited access to vocational training, further and higher education and, with the onset of new rules imposed by the Learning and Skills Council (2007), asylum seekers' access to ESOL will be restricted by having to fund their own English language courses.

R: When you are a British citizen, you are allowed to do more things, I think. Like going to university. I would have a new decision for asylum seeker now, they can go to ESOL class for next year [referring to the cuts in ESOL funding]. Yes, I start worrying about that from now. But if I am a British citizen, I can go to university, everything I like to.

Unresolved immigration claims were also seen to have a psychological effect upon refugees and asylum seekers. Asylum seekers and refugees with leave to remain for five years (subject to active review) noted that not knowing what would happen next or when they would have to leave the UK had a profound effect on their feelings of safety and belonging and therefore affected their confidence and ability to look for employment and educational opportunities.

4.2.2 Discrimination

Refugees looking to access employment in particular cited discrimination as a major reason both for not being able to access employment and for not being able to find a job that met their aspirations. Some respondents felt that they were unfairly discriminated against, not only because of their status, but because of other differences such as race or nationality. Since most refugees are likely to be of an ethnic minority, it is likely that as a group of people, they experience disproportionate amounts of discrimination:

I: Did you have any problem in finding a job?

R: Yes, I've got some fields I must prepare in the application form, when they send you application form they say your ethnic. Black Africa? Asian? blah blah blah. That's no good because some people some British while you send your application form they can see this, it's not British they threw it away.

I: So you think that is a big barrier to get a job?

R: Yes. By the way I can change the name to get British names they allow me to change the name, because some time when you send application form they say "ahh" his name is not British name they can check this out is not British name. if I change that one day I got two forms that two forms I write my name my African name and I write British name. I send one Monday and a week after I send the British one. The one I sent Monday they reply say no, there is no vacancies. The one I send week after they call me.

Actual or perceived discrimination was not limited to race and nationality. Some respondents felt that they were subject to other forms of prejudice based on religion and gender, particularly Muslim women

who were particularly sensitive to the threat of being discriminated against based on the clothing they wore.

R: No, I don't have a job. In the future, I would like to have a job, but at this time I am looking after my children but I think that it is very difficult for someone like me to find a job.

I: Why do you think that?

R: It is discrimination. For a woman and because [gesture]

I: Because of your religion, yes?

R: Because of my religion and clothes, yes. I have heard many bad things about this.

Although perceived discrimination was revealed as a significant barrier to respondents accessing employment, it was not mentioned as a problem in terms of accessing education and training.

4.2.3 Childcare

Female respondents reported a lack of childcare and support in paying childcare costs as a barrier to attending ESOL, training courses and employment. Some respondents who had refugee status and wanted to study or work said that they were unaware of their entitlements to childcare provision and that they had no way of obtaining information on this. Assistance with childcare costs for asylum seekers is often unclear and determined on a case by case basis, but unless individual asylum seekers are attending a course that is part of a specifically funded initiative then there is no guarantee that they qualify for childcare costs. As a result, issues of childcare disproportionately affected the asylum seeking women that were interviewed:

R: I must have a good level of English, that is what they say, so I can understand the teaching. So first I must take an ESOL course, go to college. But as I have said, that is very difficult for me because I have no time and no-one to care for my children. I think this would be a very useful thing for Somali people to do but at this time we are not. Perhaps in the future.

In cases where respondents were living with their spouses or partners, the childcare responsibility rested with the female partner and there did not seem to be much burden sharing in the arrangement even in situations where male partners were not working. Childcare barriers were even more apparent for single mothers and widows, who make up a high proportion of asylum claimants, particularly from countries such as Somalia, and respondents within this category spoke of the difficulties they experienced in finding

the support they needed in order to access education and employment. For many women, the only option for childcare was provided by informal means, for example through a family member or friend, however this only applied to respondents in Haringey who had better access to community members through local organisations and networks.

4.2.4 Lack of appropriate advice

Lack of advice about where and how to attend sites of language and training provision seemed to be a concern amongst some respondents. In Dudley, respondents talked about lack of advice on accessing ESOL courses as a particular reason why they were not at school learning English, despite wanting to learn the language.

R: yes, we don't know where they are. I think first I will start with the English course. Other people in x Hotel go to different courses, like cooking, health courses, and computer courses but we don't even know where they are. I had a job back home, I started working in 1993 and I worked for 13 years. In the last one month I have been really bored.

Lack of information on funding for asylum seekers to access vocational training was cited as a barrier for attending further education colleges and obtaining job placement opportunities. Few respondents we interviewed were taking part in vocational training and all of these were refugees. Asylum seekers, predominantly men, who did want to embark on vocational training either did not know how to go about doing this or were prevented from doing so because of their status.

4.2.5 Distance and availability

Situational and location-related barriers were evident when comparing the two case study areas. These centred on a lack of adequate services in the area of settlement and consequently, the distance respondents needed to travel to access what they felt to be appropriate services. Situational barriers were most apparent in Dudley. As a relatively new dispersal area, in Dudley, services geared towards supporting and providing services to refugees were limited especially when compared to Haringey or to some of the dispersal areas that have a longer history of refugee migration such as Birmingham or Wolverhampton. Respondents in Dudley felt that distance was a significant barrier in accessing employment and training because the lack of opportunities in Dudley meant that they had to travel to Birmingham or other places in the West Midlands

to find ethnic enterprises and a larger range and choice of courses. Some respondents in Dudley even commented on the lack of spaces in ESOL classes, a problem that is growing due to higher numbers of non-English speaking new arrivals being dispersed to Dudley. Particular groups that suffered from the lack of services in the area they were living were older people and disabled people.

4.2.6 Lack of English

At an individual level, the inability of respondents to speak or understand English was the principal barrier to accessing employment, ESOL and vocational training. Over 75% of respondents we spoke to arrived in the UK with little or no English and despite most having improved their levels of English, it remained a barrier even for those who had been in the country for longer periods of time. In the case of schools and vocational training courses, insufficient English prevented young people in particular from getting into college and gaining qualifications. Perhaps more obvious was the difficulty that non-English speakers had accessing work.

I: And why haven't you found a job yet? Why do you think you haven't found a job yet?

R: Because of my English. You have to know English, you know, and because what I want is course you cant find even if you want to clean or something else you cant find it, it doesn't matter. But I want to do something else I want to move up you know, that's why I am studying. Because I like children I know how to...

I: communicate

R: To communicate to do job, by team. Because you know children, they learn from others, that's why I like them to work with children So if I study and if I learn and if I do everything so I have to have another job like childcare or child assistant or assistant children

Some respondents had found work through community networks and within a co-ethnic setting therefore English was not as serious an issue. However the reality for those who had limited social networks and who were in areas such as Dudley with limited choice to work in ethnic enterprise, was that English was essential. Finally, English was also considered to be important for respondents who wanted to work in a mainstream environment especially for those who are just embarking on finding employment in the UK.

4.2.7 Disability and illness

Problems related to mental health which are brought about as a result of torture, flight and life in exile, posed

significant barriers to some respondents' ability to participate in employment and education. In terms of employment in particular, a number of respondents felt that even though they would like to work, their physical or mental state prevented them from doing so.

R: I have been under treatment for my mental health problem; I sometimes faint and cannot possibly take up any employment at the moment. I have a wish which is to learn English language as soon as I am fit enough to do so. I am not very young anymore, but I have a passion to work. Maybe if I am better in the future, I want to continue with my original profession which I had in Afghanistan: I was a children's psychologist and I would love to pursue a career in this line in the future.

Not only did this have an impact on individuals, but also on their families who often act as informal carers where mainstream support is unavailable, which prevents them from pursuing their own educational and employment opportunities.

R: I also have a personal problem which is my wife's illness.

I: Are you looking after her?

R: Yes, I am. But she's also under constant treatment-process and I regularly take her to the doctors. Last month she was hospitalized for four nights and I had to be with her; so that's my main problem at the moment. It has kind of prevented me from getting into any permanent employment at all.

Mobility problems related to disability disproportionately affected older refugees, this was more acute in Dudley where respondents had to travel further distances to meet friends, work and learn English.

4.2.8 Lack of qualifications

Respondents who talked about barriers to accessing employment said that the lack of appropriate qualifications put them in an unfavourable position compared to other applicants. For some refugees who already possessed qualifications the problem was a lack of knowledge about how to transfer these to English qualifications or find an English equivalent in order to be recognised by future employers.

I: So you don't have a job yet because you are at college learning some skills for a job?

R: Yes, because in my country, I was a teacher, but in this country, I can't do this, so I must learn something new for this country, so I can have a good job here. I would like to work in an office, because

that is a quiet place, a clean place, and I think you can earn for yourself more money in this office.

Furthermore, the need to start working immediately after obtaining status meant that many respondents opted to take the first job they found rather than wait to transfer their overseas qualifications and find appropriate employment.

4.3 Benefits of accessing ESOL, employment and training

As we explain in the project's main report on research findings, the attainment of education and employment is seen by respondents to be a crucial functional element of integration. Chapter 7 of the research findings report looks at how social networks help individuals in order to meet their aspirations for integration, and whilst this is the main focus of the research report, the focus of the policy paper is to look more generally at how work and education have contributed to lives of respondents. Therefore the following sections outline the benefits respondents identified from working, learning English and participating in vocational training.

4.3.1 Making friends and meeting people

Respondents found that making friends and meeting people was one of the most important benefits to working and being in education. The project's main report found that whilst social networks were beneficial to refugees and asylum seekers in terms of meeting their immediate, emotional and capacity building needs, certain types of networks, particularly informal bonded social networks, were more important than others. When looking at the types of relationships built in ESOL and vocational training courses, they tended to be made up of people consisting of multiple nationalities and ethnicities rather than being exclusively from a single ethnic group or nationality. The same was the case for social networks formed at work, apart from for individuals working in ethnic enterprise. Therefore certain benefits arising from social networks that were identified in chapter 7 of the main report do not necessarily apply to the networks built in the workplace and on educational courses. For example, respondents rarely mentioned receiving material or financial support from colleagues or students in their class and this was a benefit more associated to networks formed in single ethnicity groups.

Relationships developed in schools and the workplace generated loose bonds and more limited friendships, however the benefits were still

considerable. Friends made in schools, colleges and the workplace were important in providing information to respondents on their surroundings and living in the UK, which was particularly important to new arrivals. In terms of meeting their emotional needs, respondents said that having friends and even knowing people to say hello to at school and at work made them happy, secure and accepted. Another important element of inclusive friendships was the exposure it gave respondents to other cultural influences and norms. Respondents in both Dudley and Haringey noted that they had to overcome their preconceptions in order to form such relationships, but for many this resulted in more open minded and tolerant views of diversity.

R: If like today I meet you, for me is very interesting because I learn from you new words, new things that I don't know before. Now I know it in a college like this because when you meet people you learn something else you learn something different, you learn like everybody not same, everybody has got like different opinion, everybody has got like bad things and good things, its good to learn different things that's why I like to meet the people.

Finally, although some respondents did not have very positive experiences in the workplace, with instances of discrimination and racism being mentioned on occasions, a small number did mention positive experiences. Amongst these were examples of meeting people who made them feel like they were equals through treating them with respect and showing them kindness without singling them out for being different. Respondents who had worked with and met British people and who reported positive experiences of this contact also mentioned how this heightened their feelings of acceptance and belonging.

4.3.2 Learning English and acquiring new skills

ESOL courses were seen as being crucial for integration in the UK as English was considered to be the key to coping upon arrival, especially in obtaining information on surroundings, improving knowledge of transport systems and undertaking day to day chores like shopping and going to the Post Office.

I: Do you think that learning English has helped you to make your life in Dudley? Has it made a difference?

R: Yes because I must speak English, and listening, for the environment. Because I want to speak to people, example, in the shop, in the supermarket.

Most respondents deeply valued the opportunity to learn English in a formal setting because of the support they received from teachers, the quality of English teaching and the opportunity that this gave them to meet other people. Indeed most respondents regarded networking with people from other nationalities, in the workplace and college, as well as in ESOL classes, as important for developing their own English skills. These types of social networks, even very weak ones, were seen as being instrumental in learning English. Strongly bonded social networks formed with co-nationals were regarded by some respondents as being detrimental to the development of English language skills, since there was no impetus within them to learn English.

R: If you meet a Somali people you can't learn the language because all the day you are speaking in Somali. It's bad for me.

Respondents who were in vocational training or in employment said that the opportunity to gain new skills and improve their English was a benefit especially in terms of making them more employable and improving their career prospects.

I: So do you think it has been helpful to you to take these courses?

R: Yes, I think yes, because it is important to have skills and also to have English, to speak and write English, because then you can get a job and have all your own money and your own life and not always take things from other people.

Obtaining new skills was not restricted to formal teaching environment with some respondents talking about the opportunities that they had received as part of their employment conditions to improve their skills and help them gain promotion.

4.3.3 Increased confidence and happiness

As section 3.1 explains, forming friendship networks was seen as playing a vital role in making people happy and increasing their personal wellbeing. Not only did having networks of friends make people feel happy, they also alleviated boredom and depression, and made people feel hopeful about their future in the UK. However, respondents also reported personal benefits related to taking part in education and employment that went beyond meeting people. The achievements related to learning and being in education, such as developing new skills or speaking better English, were sources of pleasure and happiness for many respondents.

I: Anything special about the college that you enjoy?

R: You see I couldn't use the computer but now I can. I really like it. I think it's really helped me. I think it's the main reason for my integration. I love it and I enjoy it too.

The benefits of working and studying are not always necessarily related to meeting certain aspirations or needs, but sometimes about preventing sadness and distress. Some respondents saw the value of going to college or work in the way that it reduced depression as it stopped them from thinking about their problems.

R: And do you think that having this course at college, do you think that it has helped you?

I: Yeah, too much. And, you know, I learn too many things. For example, if you just sit at home, you get crazy, you know, twenty-four hour a day without nothing.

I: And finally, did you think that meeting those people at college has helped you settle in

R: Sometimes you know it is a psychological issue. At least is a change of mood. Getting people out of the house. All is positive and that is what I am telling you.

4.3.4 Earning an income

Employment was seen to be an important contributing factor to integration because it allowed respondents to earn their own money and be self sufficient instead of having to rely on housing and jobseekers allowance, which for many was a source of humiliation. Being able to pay for housing, bills and travel was considered by many to be an important benefit of having a job.

I: So do you think that having a job was good for you?

R: Yes, it is important the job, because if you not have a job, if you have Job Seekers Allowance, how much you take? Just £15 I think, but when you work, if you work overtime, you take, you can save money, if you like buy car, buy clothes, buy anything if you like.

Respondents in Dudley in particular felt that increased income allowed them to travel more frequently which gave them more contact with co-ethnic friends and community organisations based in elsewhere in the West Midlands.

For all respondents, earning an income gave them an element of independence and choice that was not evident with people in receipt of state support. This was partly because of restrictions related to these

payments, but mostly because the low amount given made it difficult for respondents to live their lives in a way they wanted to.

4.4 Impact of non-participation in education and employment

Whilst the focus of the main research report looked at the effects of social networks on integration, it also took into account the effect that non-participation in various types of social networks had on the lives of our respondents. In this section we look specifically at how not working, not being able to access suitable ESOL classes or obtain vocational qualifications affected respondents' integration, and whether indeed lack of participation reverses integration. The following section summarises the responses of those who were asked about the impact that not being able to work and study had on their lives.

4.4.1 Restrictions to social networking

Section 4.3.1 examined the importance that meeting people and making friends has on refugees' integration by drawing on the results of the research findings on social networks. One of the main concerns of those who were not engaged in formal networks, particularly employment, ESOL and vocational training, was the lack of opportunity they had to widen their friendship circles and meet people from outside of their own co-ethnic groups. When respondents were asked about their understanding of integration, having a social life was key to this which is perhaps why not being able to meet new people and make friends had such a negative impact on some respondents.

I: Do you think this has made you less integrated?

R: Yes yeah if you work for example if you go to a factory you will mix with every body this is very important. I don't mean working only but when you get in a factory you see all types of people you can mix with them, In my view, this is good a very good way.

In a functional sense, friends represent more than a way for respondents to keep occupied and happy, they are also important in providing informational resources and not having this had a negative impact on some respondents. Some respondents felt limited by not having links with English or other people (through work) outside of their co-ethnic groups (ie through work and college). This meant that they knew less about their area, the employment opportunities available to them and the cultural and social norms of the societies they lived in.

4.4.2 Barriers to learning English

Learning how to speak English was considered to be one of the most important benefits to making friends outside of co-ethnic networks. Respondents who were not engaged in employment and education, particularly ESOL classes, felt that not learning English was one of the most significant barriers affecting their ability to integrate. For some, not learning how to speak English had an impact on making friends outside of their communities and understanding social and cultural norms, which were considered to be important in terms of being accepted and becoming more British.

R: I would like to speak to people, even just for a few words, even if they are not my friends, but I can only say a few things and I feel embarrassed sometimes because people cannot understand what I am trying to say to them, and I cannot understand what they are saying to me, it is very difficult. I feel, I feel, when we said before, a British person, English person, I cannot feel this way if I cannot speak English, I cannot feel a part with the English people because I cannot know them. This is a big problem.

I: And does not learning English have an impact on her life?

R: Going to school is very important for me because I could learn more English and be able to understand issues, to read, to communicate with people and so on.

In a more practical sense, not speaking English prevented respondents from fulfilling day to day tasks. Being able to go shopping, pay bills, travel and ask directions were considered difficult without being able to speak English. In addition, English was deemed important to obtaining informational resources.

At the time of the research, English language provision was available to both refugees and asylum seekers, so access to these courses for most was unproblematic. Exclusion, however from these courses applied mainly to women with childcare responsibilities, older people and people with disabilities putting them at particular risk of integration.

4.4.3 Difficulties in finding employment

Respondents who were not able to participate in vocational training and ESOL classes talked about the impact that this had on them being able to find employment. Even asylum seekers without permission to work talked about the importance of learning a vocation and developing new skills, as this would be beneficial whether they were given status or whether they were sent back to their country of

origin. Vocational training and English language were deemed to be essential to developing skills that were relevant to the UK labour market and respondents who did not have recognised UK qualification felt at a disadvantage in terms of competing for jobs.

R: I think [not going to college] has had a bit of impact especially because if I had been able to go to college, get, well, either a certificate or degree and just learn a trade, it would have been much better for me for any kind of eventualities, you know, late in life. And sometimes I do feel that I haven't been able to do that, and I don't feel well about it. That's the way the things are.

One respondent, who was interviewed twice with a six month intervening period, noted the impact that vocational training had on her career. When first interviewed, the respondent was working in a newsagents but felt that the job was not helping her to integrate as there were few opportunities for career development. When she was interviewed six months later she had enrolled in a college and found a job which resulted in her feeling more positive about her future.

R: It was a two-month course. It was nice because the college would help you find a job after finishing the course. For example, as I mentioned before, they found me the job in the London Underground. So it was a good experience.

For many respondents, being unable to learn English had long-term consequences. Their lack of English language skills meant that they were unable to enrol on training courses, which in turn limited their ability to seek appropriate employment, and ultimately to achieve their aspirations for integration.

4.4.4 Limited income and self-sufficiency

Respondents who were not in employment found that one of the most difficult consequences to deal with was forced reliance on statutory forms of support and having to live on an extremely limited income. Asylum seekers were especially disadvantaged in this respect. Lacking the right to seek employment to earn their own money, they were dependent on asylum support payments for subsistence, which amounts to only 70% of the normal weekly income support allowance. This caused numerous practical problems for respondents as they attempted to live their day-to-day lives. Problems were particularly noted by respondents in Haringey, where the cost of living is high and the psychological impact of not being able to work was noted as being of key importance.

I: So do you think that not being able to have a job has had an effect on how you have settled here?

R: You know, a job is a good thing. To have your own money, to have your independence, that is all a person can ask. An asylum seeker does not have this, does not have this independence, this freedom, they are not a whole person like this, everything is stopped for them, all life is stopped. No-one can feel happy in this situation

Linked to these issues of freedom and independence was the awareness respondents felt of not being able to contribute to the country they were living in. Respondents wanted to show appreciation for the protection and help they had received, and to engage with society as equal citizens.

I: Do you think that having a job would make a big difference in your life?

R: Yes, definitely. If I work, I feel I do something, something for me, something for society, for British society, something for my, because I want to make this country my country. Something good for life, something good for my kids, because I know I want them to be a doctor in future [laughs] I do hard for my kids to be doctor in this country. I hope my kids and me do something for this country.

Finally, feelings of frustration at enforced dependency were exacerbated especially where respondents spent long periods of time in the UK awaiting a decision on their asylum claims. Whilst many respondents we spoke to were happy to wait for a decision to be made, others were frustrated by prolonged decision making procedures and felt that this had a negative impact on their integration. Others developed feelings of resentment towards the system which coloured their view of people and institutions in the UK and left them feeling victimised and excluded.

R: I am doing things like volunteer work, yeah, but you can't do something where you only get £30 when you are 38 years old and have a child who is 13! £30 is nothing to live on, you know what I am saying? You need to work and it's not because I'm lazy girl and I wanted to get that money from the government. You say to yourself 'oh I don't think that will change...' sometimes I say to myself 'I am going do no more volunteer work' because even though you are doing it, it doesn't get you nowhere, it doesn't get you status and then you have been doing volunteering work and it hasn't got you anywhere.

Respondents were particularly aware of the fact that their dependency on statutory support was exploited by certain sectors of media where asylum seekers were portrayed as lazy and a drain on Britain's resources. This made many feel humiliated about their status and impacted on their feelings of acceptance, ability to seek friends and feel safe.

4.4.5 Depression

Respondents who were not in employment or education tended to feel very isolated and depressed. Mental health issues amongst refugees can be very acute and many respondents had experienced trauma as a result of being forced into exile. Respondents spoke about the frustration and difficulties of staying at home all day thinking and worrying about the future whilst not being able to do anything to help themselves.

I: Has unemployment had an impact on you and your life?

R: Off course it will put a burden on you. You just stay home and doing nothing. Life is not in your hands... you get upset

The longitudinal interviews captured a difference in one respondent's state of mind where in the first interview she described sitting at home waiting and worrying about her future because she was not learning English and had no opportunities to meet other people in Dudley and in the second some of these issues had been addressed by her attending an ESOL class:

I: Has meeting these people helped you to settle in your area?

R: Yes, being far from home and speaking to people has helped me mentally and psychologically. Each day we go out of the house for about 5 hours and learn things. This helps us a lot about the society as well.

Feelings of isolation were felt more noticeably amongst people living in Dudley who had more limited access to informal co-ethnic friendship networks than respondents in Haringey.

4.5 Aspirations for the future

The previous sections outlined access and barriers to ESOL, employment and vocational training that respondents had experienced followed by an explanation of how participation and non-participation within these domains has affected their livelihoods and integration. This section examines the aspirations for the future that respondents have for

both themselves and their families. It looks at how ESOL, employment and vocational training feature in respondents' plans for the future and attempts to demonstrate how meeting these goals is integral to achieving a sense of integration.

4.5.1 Short term aspirations

Respondents' goals for the future were articulated on two levels, the immediate and long term. In the short term, these goals were to meet urgent needs such as finding accommodation, getting a job, making friends, finding out about the area and enrolling in college. These aims relate primarily to the functional aspects, and to a lesser extent the emotional aspects, of integration that were discussed in the first part of this report, and in more depth in the research findings report. Immediate needs focus on 'getting by' and coping rather than 'getting ahead' and developing future capacity.

The most important immediate aspiration for respondents was to learn English. Almost all respondents who expressed a desire to learn English also said that any other aspirations they had, such as getting a job or meeting friends from outside their national or linguistic group, were contingent on them learning how to speak English.

I: ok, what would you like to do in the future?

R: I hope that my English will be perfect then I will be able to decide what to do with my future. Before my English gets perfect, I cannot decide what to do in the future.

After this, both going to college to get qualifications and finding a job were amongst respondents most immediate needs. For some, going to college was expressed in terms of a continuum which ended in getting a job, but for others obtaining a good education was more to do with being seen as an equal and being able to have the same opportunities as other British people.

I: So what would you like to do in the future? You said you want to go to college after you have learnt English?

R: Yes, I would like to go to college like, the same as an English person Do these exams, A Levels, university degree...

Respondents already in college and employment talked about their immediate future in terms of completing current qualifications or working towards being given more responsibilities in their current work.

4.5.2 Long term aspirations

Longer term aspirations were more diverse and focused less on functional aspects of integration. For many respondents, the priority for their future was to be 'happy and safe', for their families to be secure and for their children to be able to have the same opportunities in life as British people. On a personal level, younger respondents talked about the importance of getting married and starting a family in the UK. Both of these examples resonate with aspirations for emotional integration and equality. In addition, a considerable number of respondents talked about future aspirations in terms of moving to a different area or country. For many this was dependent upon them having the financial means and the freedom to be able to move, as many respondents who wanted to move were asylum seekers living in NASS accommodation. The notion of choice and freedom are both crucial aspects of equal citizenship, which was expressed as crucial to integration by some, but not all respondents.

Goals made for a long-term future did not all together exclude the more functional aspirations that respondents expressed for the immediate term. In the case of employment, the emphasis was less to do with getting a job in order to survive and meet immediate needs, and more on getting the job that they wanted, embarking on a career that they had chosen and being seen to be contributing as an equal.

R: I would like to have a job, yes, a, an accountant, yes? With the money. This is the job I would like to have. In London.

R: The thing is that everybody who comes in this country, being myself or the others, they come here with hopes and dreams and they want to better themselves and at the same time give something back. But by not being able to work, by not having a work permit, there isn't a choice given to us, the choices are very limited. Even if I want to work, to be self-sufficient, I can't. I am a young person, I can work, I want to work, I don't want to get any help from the government, any handouts and stuff. And like me so many other people, and I think that by being able to work and have that choice, would be much better so that people even integrate.

Aspirations for education were articulated in a similar fashion. Respondents talked about going to University to do a degree or obtain formal vocational qualifications to get the job they wanted to do, instead of had to do. This was in contrast to the

more immediate educational goals such as finishing secondary school education or completing an ESOL course. However, in both cases having an education was very much linked to achieving a sense of normality which was linked to both assimilation and equality aspects of integration.

I: My goal now is university, but that is a long way off now, but one day, I'd like to go to university, probably not in Birmingham, because I would just stay at home then, but somewhere a bit further away, so I can see a different place. I think my family, especially my parents are getting to be quite OK with that, because it seems quite normal here, and why not have a normal life?

4.5.3 Limited aspirations for future

A small number of respondents were unclear about their future or felt that they did not have a future in the UK, which was linked to not knowing the outcome of their asylum claim or having received a negative decision on their claim. Respondents were unable to comment on their future because for most, their aspirations were focused on achievements in the UK which could not be fulfilled if they were sent to their country of origin or a third country. For respondents who had received negative decisions on their claims, the future was one of hopelessness. This is summarised in a quotation by an asylum seeking respondent who was destitute and awaiting deportation.

I: What would you like to do in the future?

R: I have no future any more actually. I don't know. People like me destitute and have nothing.

Even though some asylum seeking respondents expressed their aspirations for the future without knowing whether they would remain in the UK, for others immigration status posed such a considerable barrier that it prevented them from planning for the future and being able to articulate their hopes and dreams. For asylum seekers who had lengthy waits on their asylum claims, the inability to plan and invest in the future had the reverse effect on integration excluding them further from mainstream society as they were forced to put their life on hold.

4.6 Conclusion

This research found that employment, ESOL and vocational training was a crucial functional element to respondents' aspirations for integration as well as being important to achieving a sense of belonging and equality. Respondents' access strategies were

varied and involved reliance on friends and family as well as on more formal sources of support such as statutory agencies and teachers to broker access to employment and education. Access to these domains was also dependent on individual initiative, although this was highly dependent on the respondents' locality, status and the length of time they had been in the country.

Barriers to accessing employment and education were abundant and were a result of both external structural and situational factors as well individual level barriers such as the inability to speak English, disability and lack of qualifications. For those able to access employment and training the benefits were huge, enabling them to integrate and achieve both immediate and long term goals. However those who were not able to participate in employment, ESOL and vocational training found that integration goals were much more difficult, and in some cases impossible, to achieve.

The final section of the research findings report shows that refugees and asylum seekers' hopes for the future varied depending on immediate and long term needs and aspirations, and regardless of immigration status respondents were hopeful about their future. Only a small amount of respondents were unable to envisage a future for themselves, and where this is the case it was inevitably due to the individual not having received a decision on their claim or having been refused leave to remain.

In response to the research findings and supporting policy and literature, the following policy recommendations present potential ways forward in order to address these issues.

5 Recommendations

- Asylum seekers should be given the choice to work from the day of their claim or at the very least, six months after their arrival. This applies to applicants and dependents at any stage of their claim, including people in receipt of Section 4 support.
- Asylum seekers should be entitled to LSC funding for ESOL and other FE provisions from the day of their claim.
- Refugees should be entitled to LSC funding up to level 3, including ESOL and IELTS 6.5/7.
- The Home Office should prioritise the rights and entitlements of refugees and asylum seekers to accessing and participating in employment, training and lifelong learning into the National Refugee Integration Strategy.
- Asylum seekers with permission to work and asylum seekers eligible for LSC funding should be able to access funded childcare.
- Mainstream organisations such as Connexions, Jobcentre Plus and Further Education colleges need to work in partnership with RCOs and other refugee agencies so that information on employment and training is disseminated using the most effective means.
- DWP and Jobcentre Plus need to show greater flexibility, particularly on the 16 hour rule, in supporting refugees into appropriate employment including helping support refugees to transfer foreign qualifications to the UK equivalent.
- Refugees and asylum seekers need to be made part of an equality stream and recognised as a distinctive group by the Equality and Human Rights Commission. Refugees and asylum seekers should also be incorporated in the single equalities act so that public bodies are better informed of their needs.
- Community cohesion strategies should consider the needs of refugees as a priority group in order to tackle issues of isolation and promote cross-cultural activities between host communities and refugee groups
- Job preparation and training for refugees, including the proposed Home Office Integration and Employment Services, should, where appropriate, develop support for people with health issues, particular mental health.

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