

The majority of refugees arrive with skills, qualifications and experience – all of which could be of benefit to UK employers at a time of nation-wide skills shortages. Contrary to public perception, few of those who arrive in Britain have any enthusiasm for relying on benefits. And yet, because of the many obstacles to finding work, refugees remain an untapped resource. A mere fraction are successful in the search for work, and those who do find jobs are more likely than not to be relegated into unskilled, low-paid employment.

CONTENTS

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Gill Sargeant

Gill Sargeant joined the Industrial Society from the Law Centres Federation, following an MSc in Social Policy from LSE. She has published *Turning Refugees into Employees* with Fairplay London and is currently involved with Home Office consultation on the integration of refugees and establishing a new employment network for refugees.

She co-authored *A Good Deal Better: Reforming the New Deal* (see www.indsoc.co.uk/trg_resources/books/new_deal/refnewdeal.htm). She has also prepared a report on the role of the personal adviser within the New Deal for The Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Gill is a member of the Home Office Advisory Group on the rehabilitation of offenders.

Aminatta Forna

Aminatta Forna is an associate of The Industrial Society. She has worked for the BBC, reporting for political and current affairs programmes, and most recently as Work & Family Correspondent for BBC News. She has been the recipient of a Harkness Fellowship in Public Policy at UC Berkeley, is currently a member of the Fawcett Society's Executive Committee and is a regular contributor to broadcast and print media.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank the following individuals for their help and advice in the preparation of this Policy Paper:

Deng Yai	Refugee Council
Steve Hill	Refugee Council
Patrick Wintour	Employability
Beryl Randall	Employability
Ian Barton	The Home Office
Tony Fitzgerald	Barnet College
Natalie Ross	Renaissi
Rossana Lear	Renaissi
Sarah Spencer	IPPR
Sallie Nicholas	BMA
Martin Ayton	Independent Consultant
Ayfer Orham	FairPlay/London North Learning and Skills Council
Simin Azimi	Refugee Women's Association
Azer Sheibani	University of North London

First published in 2001 by The Industrial Society, Robert Hyde House
48 Bryanston Square, London W1H 2EA

© The Industrial Society, 2001

ISBN 1 85835 911 2

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.

A catalogue record for this report is available from the British Library.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, and/or otherwise without the prior written permission of the publishers. This report may not be lent, resold, hired out or otherwise disposed of by way of trade in any form, binding or cover other than that in which it is published, without prior consent of the publisher.

Cover design by: Sign, London
Printed by: C.W. Print Group, Essex
Stock reference: pb12.01

The Industrial Society is a registered charity no. 290003



FOREWORD – WILL HUTTON	3
-------------------------------	----------

INTRODUCTION	3
---------------------	----------

1. REFUGEES IN BRITAIN – THE BACKGROUND	5
--	----------

2. REFUGEES AND WORK	8
-----------------------------	----------

3. BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT	11
----------------------------------	-----------

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	16
---	-----------

5. POLICY PROPOSALS	18
----------------------------	-----------

BIBLIOGRAPHY	20
---------------------	-----------

FOREWORD

A Poor Reception is The Industrial Society's latest contribution to the debate about the refugee and asylum strategy in the UK. Asylum and immigration have become increasingly important to the national debate on employment policy.

The Industrial Society has been involved with this work since we wrote *Refugees into Employees* in 1999 in association with FairPlay London, and so can bring a unique perspective to the debate. We have trained refugees and are now part of the ESF Refugee Mentoring and Employment Network with Renaisi as well as the Home Office sub-committee on the Integration of Refugees with Employability, have received Challenge funding from the Home Office, and are part of a Refugee Council consortium on the employment of refugees. Through our work for member organisations and clients we have been able to observe the practical aspects first hand.

Our research and discussions with employers and refugees show that there are a number of outstanding issues and various ways in which existing provisions need to be reformed. *A Poor Reception* explains what has worked and what has not, and goes on to outline practical steps for employers and policy makers to improve policy in this area.

We are grateful for the support of the organisations named in the paper and, in particular, for the views of refugees and asylum seekers whose voices are so often not heard.

Will Hutton

Chief Executive, The Industrial Society

INTRODUCTION

WORLDWIDE DISPLACEMENT

According to the United Nations, a staggering 13 million people worldwide are either refugees or seeking asylum in another country.

Not since the aftermath of the Second World War has the world born witness to such numbers of refugees and people seeking asylum across the world. Armed conflict, political oppression, the expansion of communications, of media and travel, the widening gulf between wealthy and poor nations – these have all been factors in the surge in numbers of people fleeing their homes in search of a safe haven and new lives.

Today, according to the United Nations, a staggering 13 million people worldwide are either refugees or seeking asylum in another country. Of those, two and a half million are in Europe and 265,000 are in the UK¹. Their story has become an international political touchstone and a global tale for the 21st century.

PERCEPTIONS

Media coverage and political debate around asylum seekers and refugees has often been conducted to arouse strong emotions, veering at times from the ill-informed to the openly hostile and xenophobic. The names Sangatte, Sighthill and Christmas Island have become familiar, as have images on the news of prospective asylum seekers arriving at the stations, ports and airports of Western nations. Asylum seekers have been alternatively stereotyped as 'bogus', as scroungers who soak up state resources with little or nothing to offer in return, or as 'economic migrants' whose true motive in coming to the British Isles is to find work.

Such perceptions are rarely accurate. Year on year the overwhelming majority of asylum seekers are drawn from those countries suffering repressive regimes or destabilised due to conflict, and not from peaceful states. Many of those arriving in this country are professionals: doctors, teachers, business people, managers, accountants, nurses. The majority come with skills, qualifications and

¹ Refugees and others of Concern to UNHCR, 1999 Statistical Overview.

>> INTRODUCTION

experience – all of which could be of benefit to UK employers at a time of nation-wide skills shortages. Contrary to public perception, few of those who arrive in Britain have any enthusiasm for relying on benefits. And yet, because of the many obstacles to finding work refugees remain an untapped resource. A mere fraction are successful in the search for work, and those who do find jobs are more likely than not to be relegated into unskilled, low-paid employment.

IMMIGRATION DEBATE

All of this takes place against the background of an emerging debate on immigration as a solution to skills and labour shortage in the UK economy. While governments across Europe are trying to discourage asylum seekers, employment agencies are actively recruiting from overseas to fill vacancies where skills are not being met by the local populace.

There is a lengthy tradition of migration to the UK. In the post-war period, Commonwealth workers were recruited to fulfil the needs of a rapidly expanding economy. Today many of those arriving on our shores are fleeing war, repression, extreme poverty and political persecution. Yet they are both able and willing to contribute to the economy and society. In The Industrial Society's view, employers and government can no longer afford to overlook the talents and resources offered by refugees.

The effective integration of the refugee population benefits both communities and the economy. Employment is a key element of integration. People who have lost their homes and possessions, who may suffer declining confidence and mental health, are best served by being enabled to restart their lives as soon as possible. The sooner refugees are set on the road to self-sufficiency, then the sooner host communities will cease to see new arrivals as a liability, to accept them and begin to view them as a potential asset.



The overwhelming majority of asylum seekers are drawn from those countries suffering repressive regimes or destabilised due to conflict, and not from peaceful states.



The government has made a manifesto commitment to deal with the needs of refugees. Last year the government launched the National Refugee Integration Forum, a key part of which will be encouraging employers who are willing to offer work to refugees². The Industrial Society has been part of the creation of that strategy and is a member of the sub-group on Employment and Training. We view it as a welcome first step. We believe employers are the key to overcoming the barriers and solving the problem of refugee unemployment and underemployment. Employers, properly informed and supported, can provide training, experience and encouragement to help realise the skills and experience of Britain's refugees, and enable them to compete in the job market to the benefit of all.

GUIDE TO THIS REPORT

This paper aims to give an overview of the position of refugees in the UK with regard to employment. It outlines stated government policy on the employment and integration of refugees, the legal position for refugees and asylum seekers who wish to enter employment, and the position of employers who may wish to offer work.

The paper attempts to draw an accurate picture of levels of refugee employment, and further to examine in detail the key barriers refugees in Britain face in attaining work. It poses the question: 'Whose loss?', arguing that wasting the talents of Britain's refugee community is to the detriment of the economy, the community and the taxpayer.

The Industrial Society is in favour of integrating this group of potential workers with broader economic goals of full employment, equal opportunities and social justice. In that light, this paper puts forward a number of recommendations as to how best government, refugee agencies and employers can help refugees into employment.¶

² Full & Equal Citizens. A Strategy for the Integration of Refugees into the United Kingdom, Home Office, 2000.

1. REFUGEES IN BRITAIN – THE BACKGROUND

According to the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, to which Britain is a signatory, a refugee is: 'Any person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reason of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside of his or her nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country.'

Only ten countries have annual programmes or quotas to resettle refugees in conjunction with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. They are: Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States. Working closely with the UN both before and after resettlement, governments agree to open up their communities to new members. Other countries that accept refugees, including the United Kingdom, do so on an ad hoc basis.

Under the Treaty of Amsterdam, the way in which refugees who arrive in the European Union are treated will be harmonised after a five-year period. Starting from 1 May 2004, immigration and asylum policies will be decided at an EU level.

DEFINITIONS

In the UK commentators and some politicians have had a tendency to blur the distinction between asylum seekers, refugees and economic migrants, and the terms are often synonymous in the public mind. As a result the considerable differences between these groups in terms of their ability to work and their right to remain in the United Kingdom is not properly understood or individually considered. In broad terms, the definitions of each are as follows.

Asylum seekers

Asylum seekers are people who have applied

RESTRICTED QUOTAS

Only ten countries have annual programmes or quotas to resettle refugees in conjunction with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees.

for asylum but whose application has not yet been determined by the Home Office. Once their case has been considered they may then be refused asylum, granted exceptional leave to remain or be given refugee status.

Exceptional leave to remain (ELR)

This is a discretionary grant of leave to remain in the country, made by the Home Secretary on the basis that the person cannot return to their country of origin. ELR allows a person to stay for a limited period only and does not amount to full refugee status. Exceptional leave is usually granted on compassionate or humanitarian grounds, although there is no automatic right to a family reunion. ELR may be granted for up to four years during which time the individual has the same right to employment as any EU resident. After four years a person with ELR may apply for indefinite leave to remain (ILR).

Refugees

Refugees with recognised status have been granted refugee status under the terms of the 1951 United Nations Convention. At the same time they are granted indefinite leave to remain, they are entitled to a Convention travel document and the right to a family reunion. They are also permitted to work and hold the same rights as any resident of the United Kingdom.

Economic migrants

Economic migrants are people who leave their countries of nationality in search of employment and economic opportunity.

In line with other European countries Britain has had generally restrictive attitudes to legal economic migration and policies are mainly aimed at deterrence. Today, entry to the UK is either through: the work permit system (usually highly skilled professionals), smaller work-related categories, eg vacation workers, students or family settlement.

>> 1. REFUGEES IN BRITAIN – THE BACKGROUND

migrants

UK MIGRATION POLICY

In the 1950s and 1960s migrants were welcomed into Europe to take up jobs which the local population was unable or unwilling to do because of low pay or undesirable working conditions. However, immigration controls were imposed during the 1970s as local unemployment levels began to rise. Since then attitudes to migrants have hardened.

In contrast to most European states, countries such as the United States and Australia have a more open attitude to migration. Legal migration into the United States stands at around one million people a year and includes the Green Card scheme as well as an annual lottery draw. Australia's 2000 – 2001 migration programme places the emphasis on attracting new migrants who have education or work skills which will contribute to Australia's economic growth. More than half of the 76,000 available places were allocated to skilled migrants.

Policy shift

There are clear indications that British government policy on migration is set to shift in order to streamline policy and to open up opportunities for migration of skilled workers into the United Kingdom. A Home Office occasional paper on the subject of migration highlighted the need for positive action, a clearer agenda and better information on both illegal migrants and asylum seekers, stating: 'Migration is an integral part of globalisation. However, much of the focus on globalisation concentrates on trade investment flows, and ignores the movement of people.'³

In September 2000 the government announced that it was time to find ways to meet the legitimate desire to migrate and to think imaginatively about how migration can meet emerging social and economic need.

At the Labour Party Conference in October 2001, Home Secretary David Blunkett

announced that his department was to consider expanding the work permits system as part of an overhaul of the asylum and immigration system, saying the government planned to: 'start discussions with employers and trade unions on ways in which we can allow skilled migrants into the country; deal with pressures in sectors of the economy where there are labour shortages, and allow temporary workers into the country for seasonal employment.' A White Paper is now due which will tackle issues of immigration and nationality, as well as asylum.

Pressures

A full and open debate on migration is both overdue and to be welcomed, and should take place in the broadest possible context. It must also be remembered that refugees and asylum seekers are a category distinct from migrants, with needs that may require separate consideration. Although Australia has an open attitude to migration, in recent months the rejection of several boatloads of asylum seekers by the authorities in that country has attracted international criticism. Policies that allow controlled migration should not replace Britain's ongoing obligations to asylum seekers, who may continue to arrive in this country by land and air, seeking a safe haven.

Encouraging early economic self-sufficiency for refugees is the first crucial step towards integration, but to be effective any measures require a co-ordinated strategy. The answer lies in a systematic settlement programme. The Home Office have indicated that they are now willing to consider Britain's future participation in the United Nations resettlement programme for refugees. This could provide a long-term solution in keeping with the government's manifesto pledge and integration policy on refugees, as well as the United Kingdom's obligations under the Geneva Convention.

³ *Migration: an Economic and Social Analysis*, Home Office, RDS Occasional Paper No.67.

PROFILE OF UK'S REFUGEE POPULATION

Statistics and information on Britain's refugee population are remarkably scant. Facts and figures collated by the Home Office relate to asylum seekers only and do not include refugees who have full status.

- In the year 2000 there were 80,315 applications for asylum in the United Kingdom.
- The top nationality applications were: Iraq, Iran, Sri Lanka, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Iran and Afghanistan.
- People who seek asylum are young. The average age of applicants in 2000 was 27. Less than 5% of applicants were over the age of 50.
- Most principal applicants are male (over 80%).
- Around a third of applications in 2000 resulted in a grant of asylum or exceptional leave to remain.⁴

The 1999 Immigration & Asylum Act removed asylum seekers from the benefits system. The Act also established a support system co-ordinated by the new Home Office National Asylum Support Service (NASS). In line with policies in place in most European countries, one of the responsibilities of NASS has been to disperse asylum seekers to other parts of the country in order to ease the burden on London and the south-east, mainly to Yorkshire and Humberside, the north-west and the north-east.

Benefits

The Immigration and Asylum Act also removed asylum seekers from the welfare benefits system, which was replaced by a scheme whereby vouchers are exchanged for goods. The scheme received widespread criticism, particularly by refugee agencies for stigmatising asylum seekers and preventing them from participation in regular economic activity.

Asylum service

Before the House of Commons in October 2001, the Home Secretary announced an overhaul of the existing asylum system to be replaced by a 'seamless asylum service' to track and support asylum seekers. The proposals include the introduction of new-style induction, reporting and accommodation centres which will eventually replace the existing dispersal and voucher schemes. Arrivals will be housed in induction centres immediately after their applications have been received.

Following the induction process, asylum seekers will continue to be dispersed around the country, this time to new accommodation centres which will provide full board as well as on-site education and health services. Vouchers will be phased out over one or two years to be replaced by smart cards which will operate as both ID cards and cash cards.⁵ The government has confirmed that they will detail the changes in detail in their coming White Paper, which will also include plans for citizenship classes for refugees and new migrants.⁶

YOUNG ASYLUM SEEKERS

People who seek asylum are young. The average age of applicants in 2000 was 27. Less than 5% of applicants were over the age of 50.

⁴ Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 2000, Home Office.

⁵ Report of the Operational Reviews of the Voucher and Dispersal Schemes of the National Asylum Support Service, 29 October 2001.

2. REFUGEES AND WORK

Refugees with full refugee status under the Geneva Convention (1951) have an automatic right to work. Individuals granted ELR are also automatically permitted to work. Asylum seekers have no automatic right to work, but in practice permission to work is usually granted after six months from the date of their application provided they are still waiting for a decision on status. Permission to work is generally granted only to principal asylum seekers, not to their families and dependants.

Until recently, asylum seekers in their first six months were forbidden from volunteering. Documentation issued to asylum seekers stated that the individual was not allowed to work in 'paid or unpaid' employment. Agencies working with refugees and asylum seekers have lobbied the government and there is now new guidance allowing asylum seekers to volunteer, provided the nature of the work they undertake 'is genuinely voluntary' and subject to conditions on the payment of expenses.

WHAT HAPPENS IN PRACTICE?

In general, data on how refugees fare once they arrive in Britain is lacking. This is true of information on how refugees fare in the seeking and retaining jobs as well as other issues relating to their resettlement. There has only been one national study (carried out by the Home Office in 1995).⁶

Most government agencies do not keep separate statistics on refugees and asylum seekers. Other available research is regional and typically small scale – it is hard to draw a detailed national picture. Nevertheless, the sum of the evidence is beyond dispute. Refugees are people with qualifications, skills and experience who nevertheless struggle to find any kind of employment after they arrive in Britain



A 1999 study for the European Commission of both refugees and asylum seekers found high levels of unemployment, despite the fact that the overwhelming majority (87%) had jobs before they came to the UK.



Unemployment

The 1995 Home Office study of 263 refugees or people granted ELR who arrived during the 1980s put the level of unemployment among refugees at 57%. Despite a drop in national levels of unemployment, today most refugee agencies now estimate the figure amongst the most recent influx of asylum seekers and refugees to be much higher, anywhere between 60% and 80%.

A 1999 study for the European Commission of both refugees and asylum seekers found high levels of unemployment, despite the fact that the overwhelming majority (87%) had jobs before they came to the UK⁷. A 2001 audit of asylum seekers' skills in Leicester by the National Organisation for Adult Learning found that 80% of the group had been in paid employment before they came to the UK⁸.

The scale of unemployment is equally matched by problems of underemployment. Of the few refugees and asylum seekers who do find jobs, most are unlikely to do so at their previous level of experience or training. Almost half of the refugees who took part in the EC-funded study were professionals, managers and employers, although only 15% found jobs in equivalent positions in Britain.

Skills

There is also an absence of detailed information on the qualifications, skills, experience and training of refugees. There is no national database; the skills of people entering the country or awarded refugee status are not recorded by any agency.

The existing evidence indicates that refugees and asylum seekers are highly qualified people. The Home Office's survey found that a third of refugees had degree, postgraduate or professional qualifications. Two-thirds of those who had held jobs in their own countries had worked as professionals, managers or in business. 85% of the Leicester sample had

⁶ Home Office Research Study 141, The Resettlement of Refugees in Britain, 1995.

⁷ Refugee Skills-Net, June 1999, Peabody Trust.

⁸ Asylum Seekers' Skills and qualifications Pilot Project, 2001, National Organisation for Adult Learning.

education or training qualifications, from school certificates to professional qualifications. The group included people who had worked as accountants, surveyors and bankers. Amongst those with practical skills were electricians, carpenters and catering staff.

WHOSE LOSS?

'There is little evidence that native workers are harmed by migration. There is considerable support for the view that migrants create new businesses and jobs and fill labour market gaps, improving productivity and reducing inflationary pressures. Continued skills shortages in some areas and sectors suggests that legal migration is, at present, insufficient to meet demand across a range of skill levels' – so said a recent government report on migration.

Skill shortages

Throughout the country there are organisations facing skills shortages, and all demographic forecasts predict the problem is likely to intensify in the decades ahead. In 2001 Reed Recruitment reported three-quarters of companies trying to cope with skills shortages⁹. In a period of six months the proportion of employers unable to recruit essential staff had risen by a quarter.

A CBI survey reported one in four firms where skills shortages were having a significant impact on the company's performance¹⁰. Skills deficits are affecting employers across the board. The most highly publicised deficits are in finding teaching staff for schools, and doctors and nurses, especially in the NHS.

But firms are also having trouble recruiting in areas such as IT and there are reported shortages of skilled workers – of electricians, bricklayers, welders, agricultural workers and workers in the construction industry.



There is little evidence that native workers are harmed by migration. There is considerable support for the view that migrants create new businesses and jobs and fill labour market gaps, improving productivity and reducing inflationary pressures.



Various surveys show that refugees have skills across all these areas and more. Coming to Britain from abroad, refugees who are skilled and professional workers can bring a privileged insight into overseas markets which can be immensely valuable in a global era. They may have contacts abroad and bring language skills. 85% of refugees and asylum seekers are fluent in more than one language.

Added value

Some firms are beginning to see the value in employing refugees. Everest Double Glazing has launched a recruitment drive targeted at refugees to help overcome its shortage of double glazing installers.

Employers who took part in The Industrial Society/Fairplay programme praised the enthusiasm and flexibility of workers who were refugees. Several took the step of offering longer contracts to the women, whom they had initially offered a period of work experience.

In particular, employers thought the workforce benefited in terms of diversity; specifically it was felt that people who were refugees brought a different and uncommon outlook. The added value that community diversity in the workforce brings to a company is now widely understood and recognised in employment terms, and refugees are a vital part of the community.

INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY/FAIRPLAY TRAINING PROGRAMME

'I feel isolated. I don't feel there is any connection with each new thing that I do. London is a big place. If you are unemployed your income is limited, and there is no time for anything. It is better to talk to people than being alone with your thoughts. When you only see people in a similar situation it makes you feel worse because everybody is in the same situation.'

Woman refugee, Industrial Society/Fairplay Training Programme.

⁹ Reed Business Services 2001.

¹⁰ CBI Annual Human Resources Survey, May 2000.

>> 2. REFUGEES AND WORK

The Industrial Society has been involved in a number of projects examining the difficulties refugees face in securing employment. Our particular area of concern has been helping to find work for refugees suitable for employment in the professional sector.

In association with Fairplay London, an Equal Opportunities Commission/government partnership, The Industrial Society undertook qualitative research into key issues affecting on women refugees in London, specifically the obstacles to achieving their full participation in the labour market. The research was based on informal interviews and focus groups with women identified through 117 refugee organisations in London.

The findings of that research were contained in a 1999 report *Turning Refugees into Employees*¹¹, and later used to inform a six-week training programme for refugee women run by The Industrial Society

Building on skills

The report showed that there are multiple barriers to employment: difficulty in the recognition of academic or vocational qualifications, lack of references, little relevant UK work experience, often inadequate language skills, problems with cultural understanding, limited knowledge of the job market, and difficulties with housing and family circumstances.

The training programme which followed consisted of a course conducted for three days a week over a period of six weeks. The programme focused on developing awareness of the cultural issues behind communication and interpersonal skills, engaged the women in practical exercises to develop these skills and finally provided each participant with a work experience placement linked to a period of job search.

There were ten participants on the course, all



There are multiple barriers to employment: difficulty in the recognition of academic or vocational qualifications, lack of references, little relevant UK work experience, often inadequate language skills, problems with cultural understanding, limited knowledge of the job market, and difficulties with housing and family circumstances.



of whom had already completed a period of study in Britain, were educated to at least secondary school level and had intermediate level English language skills.

Participants were followed up and interviewed six months after the conclusion of the course. Some of the findings of this research inform the background to this policy paper.

¹¹ *Turning Refugees into Employees*, The Industrial Society, 1999.

3. BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

The Industrial Society's research is consistent with the findings of other studies on the main impediments to employment for refugees. The government, in announcing their commitment to helping refugees into employment in the Home Office refugee integration strategy 'Full & Equal Citizens', also recognised the multiplicity of barriers facing refugees and the consequent difficulties many have in returning to their former employment.

In addition to practical problems associated in settling and orientating in a new country, refugees face real and perceived prejudice in their efforts to attain employment. Employers too are often confused about their rights and obligations in offering work to asylum seekers and refugees.

EMPLOYER CONCERNS

Many employers that may be able to offer positions to refugees and asylum seekers with permission to work are unaware that they may do so. The media perception of many asylum seekers as 'bogus' may make employers nervous of taking on an applicant who is a refugee, particularly as employers may be fined up to £2,000 if they are found employing an individual who does not have permission to work.

The problem is severely exacerbated by the fact that no standard permission to work document is issued to refugees and asylum seekers, which creates confusion and uncertainty. As a result some companies avoid employing any refugees or asylum seekers at all. In a Refugee Council survey, one major employer with 8,000 staff admitted to a policy of not employing refugees for fears the company would be liable if any were found to be illegal immigrants¹².

Employers have frequently commented that the wording on immigration papers is ambiguous and unclear, in particular regarding



Immigrants contribute more in taxes and national insurance than they consume, and people born outside the UK contribute an estimated £2.6 billion to the economy.



the individual's entitlement to work. There have also been complaints about the efficiency and attitude of immigration authorities when contacted to clarify an applicant's status.

The onus is on employers to demonstrate that an employee has legal status to work; so the amount of bureaucracy involved can deter potential employers. Some employers will not take on workers who do not have a National Insurance number. When an asylum seeker receives permission to work or refugee status allowing him or her to work, no National Insurance number is issued. Employers must apply for NI numbers on behalf of their employee and there have been reported delays in issuing National Insurance numbers to refugees.

DISCRIMINATION

A report by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) on discrimination against migrant workers in Europe highlighted persistent xenophobia, often fed by restrictive immigration policies¹³. This is supported by the existing research into refugee and asylum seekers and employment in the UK.

There is little doubt that refugees themselves are aware of their reputation as scroungers and feel they are the subject of discrimination. Yet immigrants contribute more in taxes and national insurance than they consume, and people born outside the UK contribute an estimated £2.6 billion to the economy. This is contrary to popular perception and neither apparently widely known or acknowledged. Immigrants in general and asylum seekers and refugees in particular continue to be seen as a drain on the British taxpayer.

LANGUAGE

Studies have consistently pinpointed lack of English language skills as a major inhibitor to finding work for new arrivals to the UK. Lack of language skills, both written and spoken, as well as the ability to communicate effectively

¹² *Creating Conditions for Refugees to Find Work*, the Refugee Council, March 1999.

¹³ *Documenting Discrimination against Migrant Workers in the Labour Market, A Comparative Study of Four European Countries*, International Labour Organisation, 2000.

>> 3. BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

with other staff members, are also cited as a major obstacle by both employers and refugees and asylum seekers.

A study for the then Department of Education and Employment on language as a barrier to employment measured employers' expectations of communication skills against the language profiles of participants. The minimum required was generally held to be at NVQ 3. The English language skills of more than two-thirds of the participants reached only NVQ Level 2¹⁴. Unsurprisingly, employment rates among migrants rise quite dramatically – by up to a quarter – if they are fluent in English. Low language skills are also a major cause of underemployment, confining many refugees to manual or low skill jobs for which they are often overqualified.

A poor command of English can limit the chances of finding work in numerous ways: at the initial approach to the Employment Service (which may have difficulties with interpretation); at interview where applicants who struggle with language are at an obvious disadvantage; command of technical vocabulary; even the ability to accomplish simple tasks such as answering the telephone in an office become problematic.

Anecdotal evidence points to a huge and growing demand for places on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses and a need for more places. The government, through the Department of Employment and Skills, has committed to analysing current research to improve government-funded language services to refugees. In addition, the Basic Skills Agency has been working with the DfES to ensure language support on vocational and academic courses for refugees.

RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS

'I taught for all those years back home. I am not used to having a different career. I applied for graduate teaching but I didn't have the right

MARGINALISED MEDICS

It is estimated that there are up to 2,000 doctors who have come to the UK as refugees at a time when Britain urgently needs doctors in the NHS¹⁵. Yet refugee doctors, though fully qualified in their own countries, are generally unable to practice medicine in this country because their qualifications are not automatically recognised by the General Medical Council.

qualifications in Britain. How can I get into teaching? The application form is far too complex.'

Woman refugee, Industrial Society/Fairplay Training Programme.

The non-recognition of qualifications by professional bodies and particularly on the part of employers that struggle to correctly assess overseas qualifications, is an oft-cited problem. Difficulties are frequently compounded by the manner of departure of so many refugees from their countries of origin: without warning, in haste, with little or no personal belongings. Documents and certificates are left behind or may be lost or stolen during the journey. For many refugees and asylum seekers, obtaining employer's references or proof of past experience is virtually impossible.

Overcoming these obstacles may require years of expensive re-qualification or settling for a lower status job. It is a main reason why a significant number of refugees seek work outside their previous occupation. For all these reasons, combined with other difficulties such as language, the process of integration often leads to downward professional mobility in the host country.

Medicine

It is estimated that there are up to 2,000 doctors who have come to the UK as refugees at a time when Britain urgently needs doctors in the NHS¹⁵. Yet refugee doctors, though fully qualified in their own countries, are generally unable to practice medicine in this country because their qualifications are not automatically recognised by the General Medical Council.

In order to be eligible for registration they may be obliged to:

- pass the English Language Testing System (approximate course cost: £1,000)
- undertake a further two-stage clinical

¹⁴ *English Language as a Barrier to Employment, Education and Training*, Dr. Phillida Schellekens; The Schellekens Consultancy for the DfEE.

¹⁵ *Dispersal or Disposal? Retrieving Refugee Skills for our Society*, A European Conference on Refugee Integration Policy, Midland Refugee Council.

examination with the Professional Linguistic Assessment Board (approximate cost: £3–400)

- undertake clinical attachments (variable cost from free to £600)
- examination (cost: £600)
- registration with the GMC (£170).

The British Medical Association (BMA), in association with the Refugee Council, has started a database of refugee doctors. Once registered on the database, doctors will be sent information and put in touch with sources of further help and advice. The BMA sends out a quarterly newsletter and mails doctors individually about events happening in their areas. The General Medical Council (GMC) has undertaken to waive examination fees for the first two attempts at the PLAB (Part I) and differ payment of registration fees where possible. The BMA and other member organisations in the Refugee Doctors Liaison Group are working together to help refugee doctors access IELTS and PLAB courses, careers advice and counselling, mentoring schemes and secure clinical attachments.

It costs £200,000 to graduate a doctor from medical school. Refugee doctors already have most of the skills the NHS needs. The BMA initiative is one of the few that set out to overcome barriers to employing refugee doctors, prompted undoubtedly by severe shortages of medical staff in the health service. If successful, the scheme could provide a model for helping suitable refugee candidates into other regulated professions. The Postgraduate Centre for Refugee Doctors was also established in 2000 to support doctors.

Nursing

Shortages of nursing staff are so acute that in recent years the NHS has been obliged to recruit from Spain, the Philippines, and the West Indies.

The number of refugees who are trained as nursing staff is not known. The United Kingdom Central Council provides registration for nurses, midwives and health visitors and asylum seekers and refugees are eligible for registration if they supply copies of nursing diplomas and registration documents. Unless training was previously undertaken in English, they may be required to undergo the English Language Testing System.

Teaching

Teaching is one of the key skills shortages areas. Courses established to encourage more people into the profession are aimed generally at Britain's ethnic minority population and none are specifically aimed at refugees. There is anecdotal evidence that schools favour native English speakers, and refugees and asylum seekers who are successful in attaining employment are usually only taken on as teaching assistants. Hertfordshire University has established a course to enable refugee teachers to retrain.

WORK CULTURE

'The people I worked with were very nice but I didn't know them and I felt nervous. I was shocked with what I was asked to do. I felt disabled by this. I felt there was a barrier. I couldn't even pick up the telephone and I didn't know what to say.'

Woman refugee, Industrial Society/Fairplay Training Programme.

For refugees, arriving in Britain after an often traumatic exit and journey from their homelands, the culture shock can be tremendous. In the context of the working environment, surrounded by strangers, away from their own community and families, cultural differences can feel even more acute.

This works both ways. The European Union Good Practice Guide on the integration of refugees placed fear of cultural clashes above language problems as the top reason why



There is anecdotal evidence that schools favour native English speakers, and refugees and asylum seekers who are successful in attaining employment are usually only taken on as teaching assistants.



>> 3. BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT



In Western countries job search is itself a discipline not practised in most developing countries. Many refugees may never have prepared a CV, completed an application form or attended an interview.



employers are disinclined to hire refugees¹⁶. Many refugees themselves are sensitive to cultural differences and identify their lack of experience of British work culture as a hindrance in securing work.

Beyond the differences between cultures, there is also the work culture itself which is likely to be very different. The task of searching for a job alone can present a daunting challenge. In Western countries job search is itself a discipline not practised in most developing countries but essential in the complex markets of industrialised nations. Many refugees may never have prepared a CV, completed an application form or attended an interview.

ACCESS TO JOBS, WORK EXPERIENCE AND TRAINING

Refugees continually express their desire to undergo training, especially in areas like IT and office or business skills, and attendance on courses is high. Vocational training and work experience are key ways to meet the needs of refugees to update or transfer skills and to acquire confidence in the workplace.

Training options

There is potentially a wide variety of training provision. The Pan London Training & Employment Network (PLRTEN) run by the Refugee Council and the Refugee Training Partnership (RTP), who work in communities with the Employment Service. Colleges of further education also provide training, and some (for example, Barnet College in London) have set up units to cater specifically to refugees. The Industrial Society in partnership with Renaisi is running a series of seminars to enable refugees to network with employers. Universities such as the University of North London have provided courses to help professionals back into work. Employability is working with employers to encourage the recruitment of refugees.

The lack of a national policy in the past has meant that refugees and asylum seekers can struggle to access information on training, work experience. Beyond London and the south-east, specialist help can be patchy.

Targeted help

Most refugees prefer to use agencies targeted at their needs, rather than relying on the Employment Service where staff do not have as great an understanding of issues specific to refugees and asylum seekers. Only 6% of the refugees who took part in the Skills Net survey had found a job through the Employment Service. A 2001 study in Wolverhampton reported that Employment Service staff were aware they lacked necessary skills to give full support to asylum seekers and refugees, including languages and familiarity with different qualifications¹⁷.

The government does seem to be aware of the problem. As part of the refugee integration drive, the government aims to raise awareness of the needs of refugee job seekers among New Deal advisers and within the Employment Service.

New initiatives

The last two years have seen the launch of a number of innovative schemes run by refugee agencies and some local authorities. The European Union Good Practice Guide has singled out several agencies advising refugees including: the Haringey Refugee Consortium, Pan London Refugee Training, and the Midland Refugee Council's Skills Match programme launched in June 2000 to put local employers in touch with professionally qualified and suitably skilled refugees. Working Links in Plymouth targets refugees on its Action Team for Jobs programme.

Glasgow City Council is carrying out a skills audit of refugees and asylum seekers in the city. Yorkshire and Humberside Asylum Consortium is helping to provide skilled

¹⁷ Exploring Mechanisms for the Integration of Asylum Seekers and Refugees into the Labour Market in Wolverhampton, Wolverhampton Connects, October 2001.

refugees with an employment file to help them into work, while Camden Borough Council is running a placement scheme to help refugees acquire work experience.

The first step into the job market for most refugees is training. Women refugees who took part in the Industrial Society/Fairplay programme said they acquired information in a piecemeal fashion and found negotiating their own way through the system extremely challenging. Costs of training including fees, transport and books for both refugees and asylum seekers often place courses beyond reach.

Although refugees may receive grants and apply for training programmes, asylum seekers are ineligible for grants for training and are obliged to pay overseas students fees. After six months asylum seekers may be given leave to work but, as of April 2000, they are no longer eligible for government-funded vocational training schemes.

Work experience

The Industrial Society/Fairplay programme found quality work experience a crucial part of the transfer into paid work, and volunteering a useful alternative. One of the main reasons refugees undertake voluntary work, in addition to wanting to help their communities, is to gain valuable work experience which would help access jobs.

But refugees and asylum seekers in particular may effectively be excluded by the need to provide their own transportation and meals or by childcare costs. NIACE's own audit reported confusion among employers over whether asylum seekers could engage in unpaid work, and evidence that different agencies were operating under different interpretations on this score.



Although refugees may receive grants and apply for training programmes, asylum seekers are ineligible for grants for training and are obliged to pay overseas students fees.



The gender factor

'My husband has permission to work, but as his wife I don't.'

Woman refugee, Industrial Society Fairplay Training Programme.

Permission to work, when it is granted, is generally only given to the principal applicant and does not include wives and other dependants. The need to sort out domestic matters, for example housing, often falls to women. Lack of support can limit refugee women's access to English classes, education and training. There may also be cultural barriers which prevent women from accessing classes, training and jobs.

In addition, for refugee women, often isolated and away from their networks of friends and relatives, problems that affect all women such as childcare become exacerbated. It is probably illustrative of the scale of the difficulties refugee women face that those who took part in the Industrial Society/Fairplay Training Programme – despite the fact that several were limited by the need for childcare – often failed to mention it as a specific issue. It was almost as though other difficulties dwarfed the childcare issue.¶

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While a significant number of initiatives exist to help refugees find employment, including some good local and regional responses, there is a lack of coherence in the current system overall. A lot of work needs to be done, firstly to provide the missing data and information on the employment of refugees; secondly to draw together policy and existing practice.

AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING

A major initiative is required to shift public opinion and to educate employers about the skills and experience of many asylum seekers and refugees. Employers should be encouraged to recognise refugees as a potential resource.

Such an initiative will require extensive collaboration and co-ordination across relevant government bodies and agencies, including the Employment Service, DTI, Home Office, the Refugee Integration Forum and employer organisations.

Employers are confused about immigration law. There is a need for clear Home Office and DTI guidelines on the legal obligations of firms wishing to employ asylum seekers and refugees and easy access to advice and information.

Partnerships between employers, refugee agencies and organisations working with refugees have proved effective and should be viewed as a way forward. The Employment Service, working with employer organisations, can take a lead in making such partnerships happen.

INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES

Migration policy should be a continuum from entry, through settlement to integration. The Home Office, working with the Employment Service and DTLR/Check should ensure that any new government policy should extend to refugees and not just asylum seekers. At the moment, once people have refugee status,



A lot of work needs to be done, firstly to provide the missing data and information on the employment of refugees; secondly to draw together policy and existing practice.



they cease to be tracked.

It is vital that a standard permission to work document be issued to those asylum seekers and refugees with permission to work. This could include a helpline number for employers with queries about immigration rules and refugee status. Such a document could also double as an ID card. Indeed the new 'smart card' for asylum seekers might easily be used as a permission to work document.

A National Insurance number should be issued at the same time as permission to work is granted. Permission to work should be granted not just to the principal applicant but also partners.

Permission to work after six months should be given automatically, other than in exceptional cases. Temporary work permits may be issued earlier in areas of particular shortages.

SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS

It is imperative to obtain a comprehensive picture of the occupations and skills of asylum seekers and refugees. The Department for Education and Skills could take the lead in creating a national skills database of refugees and asylum seekers, the data to be communicated to Employment Service and relevant agencies.

Assessment of the qualifications of asylum seekers should begin while a decision on status is awaited. The length of time asylum seekers are out of the job market while applications are being processed means many become effectively deskilled.

Early assessment of qualifications and skills would, at the very least, speed up the process of employment and integration in the event a positive decision is reached. However, qualifications and skills, or the lack thereof, must never influence an individual's right to asylum.

A national scheme for recognising qualifications is needed. Where possible, bridging training should be developed by relevant professional bodies. Following the example of the British Medical Association, professional bodies can also help develop schemes to provide work placements, re-qualification and to help find alternatives to the need to provide references, such as independent sponsors.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

With more effective co-ordination between DfES, the Employment Service and the Learning and Skills Councils, ESOL courses could act as a focal point for the employment process. Many refugees join them with a desire to integrate into the community and find employment, and there is a demand for more and longer courses. Language tuition should include technical and business English.

Basic skills testing is being developed by the Employment Service. All English language testing should be standardised so that employers can easily recognise the level of language skill of an applicant.¶



Language tuition should include technical and business English.



5. POLICY PROPOSALS

SUMMARY OF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Main recommendation	Description	Responsibility
National awareness campaign	<p>A major initiative to shift public opinion and to educate employers about the skills and experience of many asylum seekers and refugees.</p> <p>Campaign to increase employer awareness and understanding of immigration law affecting asylum seekers and refugees.</p>	Home Office, collaborating with Employment Service, DTI, and employer organisations
New standard work permit and procedures	<p>New permit to be issued to asylum seekers and refugees with permission to work, to include employer helpline and possible smart ID card.</p> <p>National Insurance number issued with permission to work.</p> <p>Permission to work extendable to partner as well as applicant.</p> <p>Automatic permission to work granted after 6 months in non-exceptional cases.</p> <p>Option to issue temporary work permits early in cases of particular skill shortages.</p>	Home Office
New occupational and skills data	<p>Comprehensive research and data on occupations and skills of asylum seekers and refugees.</p> <p>Consideration of new national skills database.</p>	Home Office in collaboration with DfES and Employment Service

SUMMARY OF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Main recommendation	Description	Responsibility
Individual skills assessment	Assess qualifications of asylum seekers and refugees while decision on status is under consideration.	Home Office in collaboration with DfES and Employment Service
Recognition scheme for non-UK qualifications	<p>New national system for recognising qualifications that are non-standard for UK.</p> <p>Consideration of bridging training provided by relevant professional bodies and accrediting institutions.</p>	DfES in collaboration with Home Office and professional institutions
Standardisation of English language tuition	National initiative to increase standardisation of English language tuition and testing.	DfES in collaboration Employment Service and Learning and Skills Council

BIBLIOGRAPHY

CBI (May 2000) 'Annual Human Resources Survey'

ECRE Task Force on Integration 'Good Practice Guide on the Integration of Refugees in the European Union'

Home Office (2000) Asylum Statistics United Kingdom

Home Office 'Migration: an Economic and Social Analysis', RDS Occasional Paper No. 67

Home Office (1995) 'Research Study 141, The Resettlement of Refugees in Britain'

International Labour Organisation (2000) 'Documenting Discrimination against Migrant Workers in the Labour Market, A Comparative Study of Four European Countries'

Midland Refugee Council 'Dispersal or disposal? Retrieving Refugee Skills for our Society.' A European Conference on Refugee Integration Policy..

National Organisation for Adult Learning Asylum Seekers (2001) 'Skills and qualifications Pilot Project'

Peabody Trust (1999 June) 'Refugee Skills-Net'

Reed Business Services (2001)

Schellekens P, Dr Schellekens Consultancy for the DfEE, The, 'English Language as a Barrier to Employment, Education and Training'

Statistical Overview (1999) 'Refugees and others of Concern to UNHCR'

The Industrial Society (1999) 'Turning Refugees into Employees'

Wolverhampton Connects (2001 October) 'Exploring Mechanisms for the Integration of Asylum Seekers and Refugees into the Labour Market in Wolverhampton'

To find out more about The Industrial Society's services, membership and ideas: Call the Customer Centre on 0870 400 1000 or visit our website at www.indsoc.co.uk

£10.00

THE INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY

The Industrial Society are the UK's leading thinkers and advisers on the world of work. Everything we do – from consultancy to research, from training to advocacy, from education to advisory services – is driven by our commitment to improve working life. We are a wholly independent, not-for-profit body with over 10,000 Member organisations, and hold Royal Charter status. Our Members include companies of every size, from every sector of the economy, along with public sector organisations, charities and trade unions.

We are committed to partnership at work, based on the concept of mutual rights and responsibilities between employers and employees. We are an acknowledged authority on best practice in the management and development of people at work.

POLICY

A Poor Reception is an Industrial Society Policy Paper. The Industrial Society's Policy team articulate our views on current work issues and developments to a wide range of decision makers and opinion formers.

The Society's team of Policy specialists produce:

- Policy statements on new developments
- Responses to government and other consultations
- Commissioned research and analysis for clients
- Policy Papers and Briefs
- Media comment
- Contributions to seminars, conferences and other events.

Access Industrial Society Policy work and views at:

- www.indsoc.co.uk/policy
- or email us at policy@indsoc.co.uk