



Refugee Council

28 days later: experiences of new refugees in the UK

Lisa Doyle
May 2014



**SUPPORTING AND
EMPOWERING
REFUGEES**

Project team

The report was written by Lisa Doyle, with support from Judith Dennis and Andrew Lawton. Charles Maughan helped with the review of literature, design of the interview schedules, and conducted, transcribed and analysed the qualitative data. Andrew Lawton conducted the quantitative analysis.

Acknowledgments

The project team would like to thank the Orp Foundation for their support of this work. We are thankful to James Drennan and Neil Gerrard for conducting some of the background research. Our deepest gratitude goes to all of those who participated in the interviews. Thank you all for giving your time and sharing your experiences.

Refugee Council

28 days later: experiences of new refugees in the UK

Lisa Doyle
May 2014



SUPPORTING AND
EMPOWERING
REFUGEES

Contents

Acknowledgements	2
<hr/>	
Executive summary	5
<hr/>	
1 Introduction	8
2 Aims of research	9
3 Background and policy context	10
4 Methodology	11
5 Findings	13
6 Conclusions and recommendations	25
References	26
<hr/>	

Executive summary

Receiving refugee status can provide certainty and safety, but the period of change between being an asylum seeker and a refugee brings its own challenges. This report documents the experiences of newly-granted refugees in order to learn what issues they may face, what support they need and receive, and whether there are ways processes and policies can be changed to make the transition go more smoothly.

The report focuses on people's experiences of the first year after they have been granted refugee status so we can identify short term needs, and highlight what happens in the initial 28 day period when people have to rapidly move from one system of support to another.

This report draws on interviews conducted with eight refugees and features data collected as part of Refugee Council's day-to-day support of new refugees (consisting of 469 advice sessions provided to 127 individuals between January 1st 2013 and to 31st December 2013) in order to provide an overview of some of the issues faced in the transition period.

Findings

Interviewees described the mixture of happiness, bewilderment and isolation that accompanied their positive asylum decision. Home Office policy is that those who are in receipt of Asylum Support will cease to be entitled to accommodation and cash support 28 days after their notification of being granted refugee status. During this period, refugees who may not have been in the UK for very long, are unfamiliar with the systems, may not speak good English and will not have had access to employment and savings, have to very quickly obtain housing and a means to support and feed themselves and their families.

Biometric Residence Permits, National Insurance numbers and bank accounts

To access many services in the UK, people need to be in possession of the correct identity documents and proof of immigration status. Our dataset showed that 121 (26 per cent) of the advice sessions in the sample dealt with issues relating to an individual's status documents. This documentation is essential for refugees to be able to support themselves when Asylum Support is terminated.

Three interviewees in this research did not receive their Biometric Residence Permit (BRP) before the end of the 28 day period. One woman waited for four months for hers. Not being in possession of a National Insurance number (NINO) can result in delays in being able to access welfare benefits. Of the eight interviewees, five had received their National Insurance number before the end of the 28 day period. Two people waited for three months before being allocated a number.

Interviewees in this research encountered difficulties opening bank accounts because of problems they had providing the identity documents that were requested of them such as passports, driver's licences and utility bills. Staff at some banks did not recognise, or accept, BRPs as a form of identification. Given that this is the main identity document that refugees will have, this is a cause for concern given that proposals in the Immigration Bill currently making its way through Parliament will mean that refugees will be increasingly asked to prove their entitlements to services, and private rented accommodation, and the BRP will be their main source of identification.

As BRPs were not being recognised, refugees felt they had little choice but to spend money they can ill afford on gaining identity documents that are more readily recognisable, such as drivers licences and foreign passports/convention travel documents.

Housing

For those being accommodated by the Home Office while awaiting a decision on their asylum claim, finding alternative accommodation in 28 days can be a particular challenge. In the data set, the Refugee Council was approached 190 times (just over 40 per cent of the sample) within the 28 day move-on period for advice relating to finding accommodation.

None of the people interviewed for this research had access to their own accommodation at the end of the 28 day period. Consequently, interviewees' experiences included having to stay with friends, living in hostels or street homelessness. Two people in this sample ended up sleeping rough. In the absence of state support, friends, charities and faith groups sometimes plug the gaps.

Welfare benefits

Navigating the complex welfare system can be challenging, even for those who understand it and have always lived in the UK. For new refugees, especially those with limited identity documents to confirm eligibility, the feat is more difficult. The dataset of advice sessions shows that the Refugee Council provided 202 advice sessions on issues relating to welfare benefits. This constitutes 43 per cent of the sample.

All of the interviewees were accessing some kind of mainstream welfare benefits at the time of their interview. Those who experienced delays in receiving support sometimes turned to friends and charities to provide cash or food to help them out. One reported having no other option than to beg for money.

Due to the delays in receiving his NINO, one interviewee had faced difficulties accessing Income Support and had only received one payment of £122 despite having been a refugee for four months. Another interviewee waited for three months for her first payment of Job Seeker's Allowance. Lacking a NINO was not the only administrative error that refugees experienced as one woman described how her payment for Jobseekers' Allowance got sent to the wrong city, leaving her without financial support for three weeks.

Employment and education

Only one of the interviewees had managed to gain employment, but he had to give that job up after a few weeks due to ill health. Another reported having gone for an interview, but she had not been successful in securing the position. One woman had taken up two voluntary roles in order to gain experience and improve employability. Given that this sample had been refugees for a short period of time, it is perhaps unsurprising that they had not already gained employment.

Some interviewees expressed frustration about their interactions with job centres, where they felt the emphasis was on compliance with rules rather than assistance with finding work. For those who are unfamiliar with the UK job market, and may hold qualifications that are not readily recognised by employers, access to tailored advice can be extremely valuable. In the absence of this being offered by job centres, refugees are left to navigate the process on their own, and there is a danger that they will have difficulties finding a job, or be underemployed.

Sources of advice and support

Since the abolition of Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES), there has been no nationwide co-ordinated service available to support new refugees. Some services are provided by voluntary organisations in various locations across the UK, but, unlike RIES, refugees are not automatically referred to them by the Home Office and these services cannot operate on the same scale due to the limitations of funding. This can leave refugees with no idea of who can help them, and therefore be left to navigate a rapid and confusing process on their own.

Interviewees highlighted that it was voluntary sector organisations, including the Refugee Council, that helped them during the transition period. Several reported that these organisations provided them with very basic needs such as food or hardship payments, and others received practical assistance to help him apply for his NINO.

Conclusions and recommendations

The research findings illustrate some of the consequences of newly-granted refugees being left with no support once their asylum support has ended. Refugees can become homeless, and forced to rely on the generosity of friends and support of faith groups and charities in order to eat and find shelter. The period of 28 days is remarkably short for anybody to find accommodation and secure financial support, but for those who are often new to the country and therefore unfamiliar with the systems and language, the challenges are multiplied. Additionally, this research has shown that some of the difficulties refugees face in this period are due to errors and delays caused by the Home Office and JobCentre Plus. These systems errors have grave consequences, and it is vital that systems are improved to prevent those who are entitled to support being unable to access it.

Recommendations

- Home Office should continue to support refugees until they have full access to other means of support. Specifically their duty as defined by Asylum Support Adjudicators and acknowledged by the Home Office should be written into policy.
- Refugees seeking access to the privately rented sector should be able to access funding from government to pay for a deposit in recognition of the fact that if they have been on asylum support they will not have any savings.
- The Home Office should ensure that relevant documentation is received by refugees in a timely manner. Guidance to staff must include instructions to continue asylum support until this has been completed.
- Government guidance to banks should advise them what documents are issued to refugees and others with leave so that they are encouraged to recognise them as evidence of identity.
- The Government should re-instate RIES as refugees are in no less need of the support than when the service was first conceived.
- Service providers need a better understanding of the types of documentation refugees will have in their possession, and adjust their policies accordingly.

1 Introduction

The Refugee Council works with refugees and asylum seekers at all stages of their asylum journey from the point they have just submitted their asylum claim to supporting those who have been granted refugee status and are looking to rebuild their lives in the UK. Those who apply for asylum in the UK hope is that they will be granted protection meaning they can settle and not fear being returned to their country of origin. Receiving refugee status can provide certainty and safety, but the period of change between being an asylum seeker and a refugee brings its own challenges. At the Refugee Council, we support people during this period, and are aware of the many difficulties newly-granted refugees can face at this point in their lives. The purpose of this research is to document some of those experiences in order to learn what issues refugees may face, what support they need and receive, and whether there are ways processes and policies can be changed to make the transition go more smoothly.

In the last quarter of 2013, 20,687 asylum seekers (including dependants) were receiving accommodation and support from the Home Office under section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 (Refugee Council, 2014). A further 2,772 were in receipt of support without accommodation, known as subsistence only support (*ibid.*, 2014). To qualify for this asylum support, applicants must prove to the Home Office that they are destitute and can therefore not support themselves. To receive accommodation, asylum seekers are dispersed away from London and the South East on a no-choice basis. If people wish to remain in London or the South East, often where family and others from their communities live, they will receive subsistence only support and therefore rely on those friends and families to host them. Most asylum seekers are not permitted to work, so there is little option for people to 'pay their way'.¹

1.1 Issues of notification and access to the necessary documentation

When someone is granted refugee status, the financial support being provided by the Home Office ceases within 28 days from the date when the individual is notified of this decision. This period is known as the grace period. Indeed, the power to provide support to an asylum seeker ceases after a timescale set in law.² It is therefore of utmost importance that the Home Office ensures that a refugee has all the necessary documents to ensure a seamless transition to mainstream support, including employment and/or welfare benefits. The Home Office policy and process guidance states that "as soon as a person is granted leave as a refugee, they have immediate access to the labour market and to all key mainstream benefits" but does not address the issue faced by many refugees at this time.³ These issues include what is to be done if, due to lack of timely action by a Home Office official, they do not have the requisite evidence of their status to access any other kind of support. This key problem has been raised with the Home Office by the Refugee Council and others and has been considered in more than one case considered by the Asylum Support Tribunal.⁴ In response, lead officials in the Home Office have confirmed that new guidance is required to reflect the duty of the Home Office to begin the grace period only once the refugee has all the necessary documents, including the Biometric Residence Permit, which is commonly seen as the key document outlining someone's leave and entitlements.⁵

The date at which the grace period starts is crucial as this is a very limited period of time in which to deal with a substantial change in circumstances, where people have to apply and receive a National Insurance number (NINO), sign up for mainstream benefits or find employment in a country that is relatively unfamiliar and where they may not be able to speak or understand the English language, and find suitable housing for themselves and their family. This is a fast and often bewildering process that can result in distress and periods of time where people are unsupported.

2 Aims of research

The aims of this research were to:

- Examine the experiences of refugees in their first year of transition after gaining status.
- Identify the support needs of newly-granted refugees.
- Make recommendations to improve policy and practice.

We have focused our research on people's experiences of the first year after they have been granted refugee status so we can see what the needs are in the short term. Where possible, we have made a distinction between the initial 28 day period when people have to rapidly move from one system of support to another, and what happened subsequently to identify on-going issues beyond that.

This report draws on interviews conducted with refugees exploring what happened to them during the first few months after they gained refugee status, and features data collected as part of Refugee Council's day-to-day support of new refugees in order to provide an overview of some of the issues faced in the transition period and the issues they needed help with.

3 Background and policy context

Much of the research on integration has focused on the key areas such as housing, employment, education, health and acquiring language skills and what facilitates refugees to become integrated (see for example Ager and Strang, 2008; Atfield, Brahmabhatt and O'Toole, 2007; Cebulla, Daniel and Zurawan, 2010; Cheung and Phillimore, 2013; Mulvey, 2013; Spencer, 2006; Zetter, Griffiths and Sigona, 2005). This research focuses on the transition period immediately after refugee status has been granted, so some of the longer term integration issues, such as language acquisition, education and employment, will not be of as prime importance as meeting very basic needs, such as shelter and food. For many, the first step towards being able to start to rebuild their lives after protracted periods of instability will be finding a place to live where they can establish some roots, and secure income. The sooner these things are in place, the sooner refugees can start to live their lives in safety in the UK.

The last Labour Government published three refugee integration strategies (Home Office, 2000; Home Office, 2005; Home Office 2009). These strategies related to the point when a refugee gained status, rather than facilitating integration from the point somebody applies for asylum in the UK. This position is in contrast to that of the Refugee Council, where the emphasis has long been placed on starting the integration process from day one (Refugee Council, 2004). Following publication of the first Home Office strategy for the integration of refugees (Home Office, 2000), the government established the National Refugee Integration Forum, a multi agency forum chaired by the Minister of State for Citizenship, Immigration and Nationality, which brought together other central government departments, regional and local government and non-governmental organisations. The National Refugee Integration Forum existed between 2001 and 2007, some of its work is described in the integration strategy published in 2005 (Home Office, 2005). This strategy recognised the need for intensive support during the grace period and announced the piloting of a new service – the Strategic Upgrade of National Refugee Integration Services (Sunrise). This service, designed to support refugees in the early period of transition, was later rolled out as the Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES).

RIES was funded by the government and was delivered between October 2008 and Sept 2011 by voluntary sector agencies across the UK, including the Refugee Council. The UK Border Agency offered newly-granted refugees the opportunity to be referred directly to RIES for a package of support.⁶ Refugees that took advantage of RIES were able to access: an integration advice service for 6 months; an employment support service for up to 12 months; a mentoring scheme which lasted between 6 and 12 months. The RIES service had targets relating to securing sustainable housing and accessing employment reflecting the major challenges refugees face in these areas. In London alone, the RIES service received a total of 2,423 client referrals from the Home Office. A total of 22,292 integration and employment advice sessions were provided to this group with approximately two-thirds of these sessions (14,397) focusing on issues relating integration (such as access to welfare support, housing and health) and the remainder (7,995) focusing on employment advice. In addition, it was recognised that 1,304 of the 2,423 (54 per cent) who accessed the RIES service in London were defined as homeless with the majority of cases not being able to access welfare or housing support within the allocated 28 day grace period. As a result of the current Government's austerity measures, RIES was abolished in September 2011 leaving people with fewer sources of support at this key time.

Since coming to power in 2010, the UK Government has not published an integration strategy aimed at refugees. In February 2012, the Department for Communities and Local Government published *Creating the conditions for integration* which set out the Government's approach to integration in England (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012). The words 'refugee' or 'asylum' do not feature in the document.

4 Methodology

At the outset of this research, a modest review of previous research was conducted focusing on literature that highlighted integration issues during the first year after gaining refugee status. This review, along with the issues raised by Refugee Council client advisers helped to inform the areas this research would focus on, and the design of the interview questions. Alongside the analysis of previous research, the research team also reviewed the policy context and service statements developed by statutory agencies to ascertain who is responsible for which parts of the transition process.

4.1 Qualitative interviews with refugees

The research team captured qualitative data in order to explore people's overall experiences of the transition period and gain an in-depth understanding of how issues are inter-related and over-lapping. This qualitative data also enables people to describe how they felt at this key point in their lives and what support they received or felt they needed.

The research team worked with colleagues at the Refugee Council that support newly-granted refugees in relation to destitution, employment and housing to identify individuals willing to take part in a semi-structured interview about their experiences of transition. It may be the case that, given the interviewees had contacted Refugee Council for support, that they had faced particular difficulties. That said, our previous experience of delivering the RIES programme has shown that the issues identified in this research are not unusual, and all newly-granted refugees were offered a referral to RIES, not just those facing particular difficulties. Interview questions were devised to cover the key areas of integration identified by Refugee Council staff and previous research literature in this field.⁷

Interviews were undertaken with eight people and these were recorded, transcribed and analysed to identify key themes and experiences.

4.1.1 Profile of interviewees

Interviews were conducted with four men and four women who had been granted refugee status within the preceding year. Two were in their 20s, 30s, 40s and 50s. They came from seven different countries of origin: Afghanistan; Bangladesh; Cameroon; Colombia; Eritrea; Iran; and Sri Lanka. All of the participants had been granted refugee status since March 2013, and had waited between a few weeks and one year to receive a positive asylum decision. All participants were living in London at the time they were interviewed, but six had been based in other areas while awaiting decisions on their claims (the North West, Scotland, Wales, and Yorkshire and Humberside) and moved to London once they had received a positive decision. Those who discussed their reasons for moving identified the presence of support network (friends, communities and faith groups) and medical services in London that did not exist in their dispersal area.

4.2 Refugee Council service user data

Evidence is also presented that has been drawn from information gathered on a day-to-day basis from Refugee Council clients based in the East of England, London, the West Midlands and Yorkshire and Humberside as part of the adult support services. These services were primarily focused upon helping asylum seekers access accommodation and support while awaiting a decision on their claim for asylum, and therefore did not primarily support people who are the focus of this research. This service did provide some limited support to refugees during the initial 28 days, and advisers recorded the types of issues about which people sought advice. These were recorded on the Refugee Council's client database. While there are limitations to the database as it was not designed specifically for research purposes, it does contain consistent categories used by advisers across the country, and therefore

provides the most comprehensive information available. Therefore, some of this data has been used in this report to provide a quantitative overview of the issues that service users have raised recently.

Data was extracted from the database relating to clients with refugee status who sought advice between January 1st 2013 and to 31st December 2013. This data was cleaned to ensure that records were correctly coded, and some additional categorisation was undertaken on the basis of the case notes within the record. Cases relating to separated children were removed, as this research focuses on adults and there are different systems of support for those who arrive in the UK as unaccompanied children. We also excluded those who came for help in applying for Travel Documents within this period even though many will apply for these on the basis that it provides them with an official identity document which can support them with areas such as opening bank accounts. These were excluded as it can take up to six months for a Travel Document application to be processed so they fell outside of the 28 day move-on period. Only sessions where individual advice was provided have been counted.

We were left with a dataset of 469 advice sessions provided to 127 individuals which related to advice and support being sought within the 28 day move-on period. In terms of geographical spread, 118 of these sessions were provided to clients in London, 202 in West Midlands, 141 in Yorkshire and Humberside and 7 in East of England.

5 Findings

“The most important thing was every place that I went I didn’t know anyone and most important thing was I was searching for a job and I couldn’t find a job. Not yet. So that was the most important thing. And of course being far from your family. I was in my country, I had everything I needed, my home, my car, my possessions I was a university lecturer, I had my own institute. I came here... I didn’t have anything...I was stressed, my family was away. I remember I walked a lot because I didn’t have money to pay for a bus even.” Nahal⁸

This chapter focuses on key areas on integration identified through previous research and Refugee Council advisers’ experiences which related to documentation; housing; benefits; and employment and education. The qualitative and quantitative data collected is used to illustrate key issues experienced by Refugee Council clients in these areas. The qualitative interviews also provide data to allow for a discussion of sources of support during the transition time.

5.1 28 days

As discussed previously, Home Office policy is that those who are in receipt of Asylum Support will cease to be entitled to accommodation and cash support 28 days after their notification of being granted refugee status i.e. the grace period. This represents a rapid change in circumstances and people who may not have been in the UK for very long, are unfamiliar with the systems, may not speak good English and will not have had access to employment and savings, have to very quickly obtain housing and a means to support and feed themselves and their families (where applicable). Interviewees expressed how they felt during the time just after they received positive news on their asylum claim:

Interviewer – “Is there anything you would like to tell me about your first month as a refugee?
Different. Positive, nice. I don’t know my life, all these new systems. That’s why it’s different. UK and [my country’s] culture is different.” – Henock

“People think only about our refugee case, after granted, they are left alone and they don’t know anything.” – Ahamed

“I mean...if they give you 28 days...you don’t know where you are going to go....what you are going to eat. A little bit confusing as well as chaotic.” – Manuel

“The 28 days is hard on refugees...all of a sudden in a country you don’t know and then it stops and you don’t know what you are going to do. It was such a surprise when I ended up without a bed to sleep in.” – Bibi

These refugees describe the mixture of happiness, bewilderment and isolation that accompanied their positive asylum decision. The changes in circumstances are perplexing, and our data shows that 158 sessions (a third of the sample) related to Refugee Council notifying people of their status and providing support relating to next steps. Advice relating to specific issues was also sought which will be highlighted in the discussion below.

5.2 Biometric Residence Permits, National Insurance numbers and bank accounts

To access many services in the UK, people need to be in possession of the correct identity documents and proof of immigration status. Of primary importance is the receipt of the Biometric Residence Permit (BRP). In order to receive mainstream benefits, a person also has to have received (or attended an interview and applied for) their National Insurance Number (NINO). Applications for mainstream benefits can be made and processed but payments will not be made until the original BRP has been

presented and the NINO has been allocated. For many years it has been noted by Refugee Council staff and other agencies that many refugees experience significant delays in receiving their NINO after a grant of refugee status, leaving them unable to smoothly access employment or mainstream benefits when their Asylum Support was terminated (see for example, Freedom from Torture, 2013: 62). Delays in allocating NINOs were highlighted within the RIES service as an issue affecting the progression of refugees. There are instances where individuals do not have their NINO before they leave their Home Office accommodation, and the consequences are serious. They are left with no access to mainstream welfare support which will have a major impact on their ability to feed and house themselves once their Asylum Support ceases.

Our dataset from adult services showed that 121 (26 per cent) of the sessions dealt with issues relating to an individual's status documents. Unpublished research by Home Office into their own processes in 2013 found that London had the longest delay in issuing the BRP with an average of 14 days leaving only a further 14 days to get a NINO allocated, apply and receive welfare support and secure accommodation. Three interviewees in this research did not receive their BRP before the end of the 28 day period. Puni had to wait for four months for hers.

What happens when an asylum seeker receives a positive decision on their asylum claim?

The Home Office writes to the person stating which type of status they have been granted: Refugee Status, Humanitarian Protection, Discretionary Leave or Indefinite Leave to Remain and the date on which the decision was made. The letter also states that the BRP will be sent out separately and should be received within a few days.

If a person has already registered their biometrics as part of their asylum application, they should then receive their BRP in the post either directly or through their representative/solicitor. If they have not previously registered their biometrics, they will be sent a letter inviting them to enrol their biometrics at one of the participating Post Offices. The individual must present themselves (and family members) to the Post Office to have their finger prints registered and photograph taken. This information will be returned to the Home Office who will then process the request for a BRP. Once ready, the BRP will be sent to the individual or the representative.

If the person is receiving Asylum Support and accommodation from the Home Office, they should receive a *NASS 35/Section 4 support* termination letter within days of getting their status letter. This letter states when support will stop, when a final payment will be received and when the person has to leave their accommodation (if applicable). For those receiving section 98 support, support ends after 28 days. For those receiving Section 4 support, support ends after 21 days.

Of the eight interviewees, five had received their NINO before the end of the 28 day period. Of those who had not received a NINO, two waited for three months before being allocated a number. For those three people, not being in possession of a NINO resulted in delays in being able to access welfare benefits. This made it very difficult for them to be able to find ways to support themselves.

"I just got my National Insurance number about 3 weeks ago...When I claimed asylum, I did some paper work, they told me, if my asylum is granted, they will send me the National Insurance number directly. So I was hoping that after my claim has been determined they are going to issue me a National Insurance number, but, we had to ring the Home Office over and over and over again. They sent my file was sent to Glasgow, it was not filled properly. The rules were not respected by the person who did the application. So they had to send it back to the Home Office, we had to start another process. I was already out of [Asylum] Support, which means that the subsistence I was getting it was stopped. I needed a National Insurance number to get any support." – Charles

"When I arrived I applied for my National Insurance [number]. But I had to keep ringing and ringing the Department of Work and Pensions. I finally got it in June [granted in March] I think. There was a problem that said I didn't apply for it, but, I did. Then they got my name wrong. I couldn't access money without it." – Bibi

Due to the delay in receiving his NINO, at the time of the interview, Charles had faced difficulties accessing Income Support and had only received one payment of £122 despite having been a refugee for four months. Bibi waited for three months for her first payment of Job Seeker's Allowance.

Obtaining a National Insurance number

When a person applies for asylum, they have an opportunity to complete a National Insurance number application form with their Home Office case worker.⁹ This should be forwarded to the Department for Work and Pensions by their Home Office case worker at the point that refugee status is granted using a fast track process available between Home Office and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).¹⁰

If the case worker has not completed or submitted an application, used a now out of date application form, or not completed the form correctly, the new refugee will have to apply for a National Insurance number as part of an application for mainstream benefits or to obtain employment. This will involve attending an interview at JobCentre Plus which typically occur within one week after making an appointment, although can take up to four weeks in some circumstances. The National Insurance number should be allocated within two weeks of the appointment. An additional issue can be that there is no process for knowing whether the Home Office/DWP fast track process has been used as the refugee will not be informed. This can often lead to a duplication application for NINO being made (by Home Office and the individual) which can cause issues further down the line.

Once an interview has taken place, applications for welfare support can proceed by using a temporary reference number that is provided to the individual until the NINO is allocated. Allocation of a NINO by DWP can take several weeks.

It has been documented elsewhere that refugees can experience difficulties when trying to confirm their identity, residency and eligibility for access to public services (see for example Doyle and O'Toole, 2013; Refugee Council, 2013). Once granted status, refugees are keen to open bank accounts quickly in order to receive payments through benefits or employment, and to be able to set themselves up to be able to pay bills and so on. Asylum seekers are permitted to hold UK bank accounts but are rarely able to do so as banks will generally request identity documentation and proof of income evidence which they will not possess.

Staff in statutory services and private companies such as banks tend to request a list of documents that newly-granted refugees will not necessarily have access to. These include: passport; driver's licence; tenancy agreement; and utility bills. Banks are under no obligation to help open accounts and do not have to give reasons for not opening one. Interviewees in this research encountered difficulties opening bank accounts because of problems they had providing the identity documents that were requested of them.

"...I even applied for a driving licence. So little by little I am getting more proof of address more proof of identification.

Interviewer – You are building up your identity, but, it's taking time?

Yes, it's taking time. It's like when you are granted refugee, little by little you are building up a new you, a new person. A new identity." – Manuel

"I tried to open a bank account with the BRP, every bank says no, they need the passport. The Home Office takes about six months to produce a passport. So I have been waiting 6 months before having a bank account." Charles

"...it was really a disaster to get a bank account...Because I moved from Glasgow to London and then I came here they told me that I need two proof of address, one proof of address and one proof of ID. And the most important thing was that when I took...I gave them my [Biometric] Residence Permit they said it was not acceptable. They said 'Wow. What's that?' it is not accepted. They didn't even know what was it. I've got one letter from my Job Centre I got the letter of my National Insurance Number, so that should be enough. But they said no because they are not the same address, from Glasgow they are not from London, you must have them from London. I didn't have a permanent address in London at that time...I was living with a friend and I said 'I don't have it'. The Job Centre was going to pay me the money, but, I didn't have a bank account...[The Bank] told me that they must have provisional drivers' licence. Maybe it helps for having a bank account. So I paid £50 and that time it was a lot of money for me because I didn't receive any money, but, I borrowed from my friends and I got my provisional licence. After that...they opened the bank account for me. It was really, really, difficult...they said that this [Biometric Residence] permit is some kind of ID for us, but, no place on earth knew that. They look at it and go 'wow what's that?' they didn't know." – Nahal

"I've been to so many banks and they all tell me the same thing 'we do not accept this'...and we need proof of where you live. HSBC, Barclays...all the same. I don't know how I cannot have the right ID. My post office helps with storing my money...but it's not that good really.

Interviewer – What do they not accept?

The permit. They have not seen it before. They say I need a passport. And also there was a problem showing them where I live. I didn't have bills or anything when I first came to London." – Bibi

It is extremely worrying that banks were not recognising, or accepting, BRPs given that this is the main identity document that refugees will have. This should be a cause for concern given that the Immigration Bill currently making its way through Parliament will mean that refugees will be increasingly asked to prove their entitlements to services, and private rented accommodation, and the BRP will be their main source of identification. As BRPs were not being recognised, refugees felt they had little choice but to spend money they can ill afford on gaining ID documents that are more readily identifiable, such as driver's licences and foreign passports/convention travel documents.

Bank accounts

In the absence of a bank account, short-term payments can be made by the Department for Work and Pensions through an allocated Simple Payment Card.

Getting a bank account can be difficult. Some banks will not accept the use of Biometric Residence Permits or Immigration Status Documents to prove identity, despite these be listed as valid supporting documents in guidance notes.

Post Office Accounts can be used in lieu of a basic bank account, though a letter in support must be provided by the Department for Work and Pensions. There are sometimes delays in acquiring this letter, and thereby setting up an account.

5.3 Housing

For those being accommodated by the Home Office while awaiting for a decision on their asylum claim, finding alternative accommodation in 28 days can be a particular challenge. The prospect of homelessness is very real, and people are less likely to have broad support networks of family and friends that may exist for those who were born in the UK due to them being new to the country. This

situation may be exacerbated by the policy of dispersing asylum seekers away from London and the South East where communities may exist that can be of assistance. This may in part explain why some of the interviewees for this research chose to return to London from other regions once they had a positive decision. The Home Office's *Survey of New Refugees* found that almost a third of the refugees that participated in their research lived in London (Cebulla, Daniel and Zurawan, 2010: 2) which implies that many of those who were dispersed while awaiting a decision on their claim will have moved to London once they gained refugee status.

Moving from one area to another can have a negative impact on people's access to social housing due to rules around having a local connection, which refugees may not be aware of at the point they make the move. Access to the private rented sector will be limited by a lack of money for a deposit and rent in advance. Where some people may take out loans or use their credit cards to be able to pay the upfront cost, these are options that most asylum seekers are not going to have available to them due to a lack of bank account, employment and savings, so they may be even more disadvantaged than much of the population.

Housing

Local authority Housing Departments have a duty to provide accommodation for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, are in *priority need*, and can demonstrate a local connection to the area.

People who have just been granted refugee status and their termination letter, giving the date they have to leave their accommodation can approach their local authority to see if they qualify for assistance. The local authority will assess the person's vulnerability and if that constitutes being in priority need, and if they have a local connection which will include having lived in Home Office accommodation in the area, having family ties or employment, or have lived in the area for at least a year. Only those with children or with significant health needs will be considered priority need by local authorities.

If a local authority does not have a duty to house, the person will have to find accommodation elsewhere, such as in the private rented sector, hostels and friends and family.

Before April 2013, newly recognised refugee could apply for Crisis Loan support through DWP to help with deposits and rent in advance costs but changes in the Social Fund have now removed the availability of these loans and have created difficulties for those seeking to secure privately rented accommodation. In addition Community Care Grants also ceased to exist. These were often used by people to purchase essential items for newly secured homes such as beds, cookers and so on. Many people will rely on applying for an Integration Loan available through the Home Office but this is generally limited to a maximum of £400 which is not usually enough to be used as a deposit. Although these problems do not only affect refugees, the fact that they are moving from Asylum Support means they will have no savings. In order to receive Asylum Support a person must have no cash or assets; if they do they are expected to use those funds to support themselves. It is therefore extremely unlikely that a refugee will be able to fund a deposit in the privately rented sector without borrowing money.

In the data set, the Refugee Council was approached 190 times for advice about housing by refugees within the 28 day move-on period. Given the consequences of not having a place to live when support ceases, it is perhaps not surprising that just over 40 per cent of the advice session related to advice offered in this area. The high proportion may also be indicative of a lack of knowledge of the housing options available to refugees.

None of the people interviewed for this research had access to their own accommodation at the end of the 28 day period. Their experiences are summarised below:

Lived with friend for 3 weeks. Moved into private rented sector. Refugee Council helped him to find accommodation and through a specialist project was able to access a deposit bond.
Slept rough for approximately 10 days. Told by local authority that he was not in priority need. Lived in a hostel for 2-3 weeks and then moved to another hostel. Now lives in a privately rented studio flat.
Left asylum accommodation in London and was placed in a Bed and Breakfast for two weeks by the local authority. He then moved to a hostel where he was living at the time of the interview.
Stayed in Church Hall for two nights and then moved into a hostel in a northern city for a month. Moved to London for medical treatment. Lives in shared accommodation but it is overcrowded and he has to sleep in a bath. Receives Housing Benefit.
Lived with friends for over a month. Was found in priority need by the local authority who accommodated her in a hotel for a month. She was then moved to temporary accommodation for six months, before being allocated permanent local authority housing. This is a one-bedroom flat, and her daughter has now been reunited with her, so they have to share a bedroom.
Slept rough for three days. Moved into hostel where she lived at time of interview.
Stayed in friend's flat. Was reunited with son and lived there for two and a half months in the same room. Now accommodated by the local authority.

The frequency of homelessness in the accommodation histories above is disturbing, and it is an issue that has been identified by others (see for example Homeless Link and Refugee Action, 2013 and Mulvey, 2013). The Home Office's *Survey of New Refugees* found that four per cent of their sample were street homeless, but acknowledges that this is likely to be an underestimate as the survey was conducted through a postal survey therefore requiring an address (Cebulla, Daniel and Zurawan, 2010: 2). Those in families were less likely to experience homelessness than single people (*ibid.*, 3). As highlighted previously, the Refugee Council found that 1,304 of the 2,423 who accessed the RIES service in London between Sept 2008 and Oct 2011 were recognised as homeless.

Homelessness takes different forms, with street homelessness being the acute end of the spectrum, and new refugees can find themselves in different homeless situations. As none of the interviewees were able to access secure accommodation at the point their Asylum Support ceased, street homelessness, hostels and stays with friends were common experiences.

Two people in this sample ended up sleeping rough. Manuel described what it was like for him during that time:

"Interviewer – How long did you live on the streets?

Almost a week and a half....it was shocking because I never slept rough in my life. It was very, very difficult. I went to talk to the housing officers and explained my situation. They say OK, you are a man and your case is not vulnerable and so we can't help you. On one hand Home Office allow you to stay here, it's like I invite you to my house and you're tired and you want to go to sleep and they say you want to go to sleep, but, I am sorry we don't have a bed for you... for somebody who is not from here it is very confusing. At the same time, it is very traumatic. Because you have to face a city, but, at the same time in the middle of the struggle, you feel very grateful for everything. For this government, for everything...If you never slept on the streets before...never in your life... and that first night you are thinking 'what I am going to do?' And while I was on the streets, people I remember once, three or four guys were drunk and tried to jump on me and it hurt. I feel very insecure and lonely." – Manuel

The experience of becoming homeless and having to rely on the generosity of friends was surprising and very difficult, as one might expect.

"I did not know that after the period of 28 days I would become homeless. My belief, my thinking was after the 28 days they are going to give me accommodation. So I thought I was going to move to another accommodation as simple as that. In the end I discovered it was not the case, it became hard after that period, I became homeless and until now it has been a lot of stress on me. The accommodation issue, the integration issue, it is really hard on refugees." – Charles

"[Describing living with her friend] There was not much room especially when my son came to live with me. We both shared the living room and I slept on the floor. I am forever grateful to my friend she is also a refugee from [my home country]. And we became very close – she is like a second mother to my son." – Fatima

It is not unusual for refugees in this situation to rely on their refugee friends for help, even though they may be poor themselves. In the absence of state support, friends and faith groups sometimes plug the gaps.

Some of the barriers that refugees may face accessing the private rented sector were described by Nahal. She was fortunate to be able to borrow the money for a deposit from a friend.

"I had to rent a studio flat. I couldn't just rent a room. The rent of the flat was £700 a month, but, housing benefit just paid me £320 a month...After my husband came here and after that housing benefit paid us £700 a month. The studio flat was actually £800 a month I am sorry...you need to have a guarantor and deposit. For a person like me who is new in this country and doesn't know anyone, how to find a guarantor? That was the most important thing for me. When you don't have a guarantor here you must go to some specific agencies that they don't use guarantor, but, they say we will give you the flats in a higher rent. For example, the flat that I was renting, the cost without housing benefit was £600, but, because I didn't have any guarantor it took to £800 for me. Mostly when you don't have a person here as a guarantor there are some agencies – they just want their own profit you know. They say we will give you in a higher price.

Interviewer – How did you find this out?

Because there was an agency near my friend's place. I went there they said, they didn't say as frankly as what I am telling you. When I asked them what's the reason [they were charging a higher rent, they said] because you don't have any guarantor. That's what we give you, we get more money. You don't need a guarantor, but, you must pay more monthly." – Nahal

In these circumstances it seems that refugees are being financially penalised by unscrupulous agents which will further disadvantage them in the private rented sector.

For some of those who managed to secure accommodation, some reservations were expressed about the places in which they were living. Some expressed concern about the neighbourhood and their neighbours, and they feared crime. Overcrowding was also reported, both by Puni who was sharing a one-bedroom flat with her son, and Henock who was sharing accommodation in the private rented sector, but was forced to sleep in the bath as that was the only available space.

"Not safe area. Very busy. I can't sleep anywhere but the bath, I have no choice. But I have back problem. I need to change." – Henock

For those who have fled horrifying experiences in their own countries and have lost everything, and have been granted refugee status, a stable home enables them to begin rebuilding their lives here. Unfortunately the evidence here suggests this may not be easily attainable.

5.4 Welfare benefits

When somebody is granted refugee status, they are entitled to apply for mainstream benefits. During the short window of time between receiving a positive decision and Asylum Support ceasing, it seems extremely unlikely that a refugee will be able to gain employment, so accessing welfare benefits is key. As stated previously, new refugees are unlikely to have any savings that they can fall back on.

Navigating the complex welfare system can be challenging, even for those who understand it and have always lived in the UK. For new refugees, especially those with limited identity documents to confirm eligibility, the feat is more difficult.

The dataset of advice sessions shows that the Refugee Council provided 202 advice sessions on issues relating to welfare benefits. This constitutes 43 per cent of the sample. An overview of the research interviewees' experiences of accessing mainstream benefits is below:

Waited 20 days for Jobseeker's Allowance appointment after end of 28 days. Found work within 3 weeks, but had to leave the job because of a medical condition. Now receiving Income Support and has applied for Personal Independence Payment. His benefits were stopped several times, but he does not understand why. Refugee Council gave him payments of £25 when his benefits were stopped. Received a Crisis Loan.
Homelessness and lack of NINO caused delay in claiming Jobseeker's Allowance. Received first payment 3 months after asylum decision.
The delay in receiving NINO prevented him from claiming Income Support. At time of interview, had only received £122 despite being a refugee for 4 months. Local authority rejected Crisis Loan application saying had not lived in the area for long enough.
Receives Jobseeker's Allowance. Has been sanctioned twice by JobCentre Plus who say she has not applied for jobs, although she insists she has. Receives Child Benefit.
Waited 1 week for Jobseeker's Allowance (it was backdated when he received it). Told Job Centre staff that he was going to apply for a Crisis Loan but was advised to not do so as his money would be sorted out quickly.
Receives Employment and Support Allowance due to long term injury two months after status granted. Received a Crisis Loan of £48. Receives Child Benefit.
Receives Jobseeker's Allowance after some delay as he found it difficult to access benefits when he was homeless as could not afford travel money to the job centre, and felt he could not apply for jobs when he had no home. Also receives Housing Benefit.
Experienced a delay of three weeks for Jobseeker's Allowance as JobCentre Plus sent giro to the city she used to live in even though her application had been made in London. Also receiving Housing Benefit.

All of the interviewees were accessing some kind of mainstream welfare benefits at the time of their interview. Those who experienced delays sometimes turned to friends and charities to provide cash or food to help them out. One reported begging for money.

"My friend gave me food sometimes... I asked for money outside in Hackney. That wasn't very nice. Trying to get Job Seekers is hard because of the lack of documents. They said I could apply, but, would have to wait for money. It was National Insurance [number] that I needed but didn't have." – Puni

"When my [Asylum Support] stopped....I could not access money...it was because of the NI number first and I came to the Refugee Council, I explained my situation to them. The Refugee Council helped me with some money...to attend my appointment for food...They gave me £25, twice. That was £50. And when I gained access to the hostel, I hadn't any support from the job centre for the first two weeks. I got another support from Red Cross that was food parcels." – Charles

Lacking a National Insurance number was not the only administrative error experienced by refugees. Nahal described how her payments for Jobseekers' Allowance got sent to the wrong city.

"At the beginning I received two Giro cheques, since I came to London. I had £140 that went to [city], my previous address. I couldn't find it and I don't know who took it.

You applied in London, but, they send it up to [city]?

I told them that I changed my address. It was to [city] post office, I said to them I am living in London – why did you issue it to a post office in [city]? They said we didn't know that you are moving here. I have my Jobseekers' Allowance here, I transferred everything here. They said maybe Belfast doesn't know about that, because Belfast was the place that deals with it. So they changed the cheque for me, I could say about...it took me about 3 weeks. That I could have my first money from Jobseekers Allowance." – Nahal

These examples illustrate what can happen to people when mistakes are made by people processing benefit claims. Friends, charities and passers by helped to support Bibi and Charles when the state failed. These types of delays have been documented in other research (see for example Freedom from Torture, 2013) The same two people reported having unsuccessfully applied for Crisis Loans, with the reason of not having been in the local authority area for long enough being given as a reason in one instance.

In many cases JobCentre Plus advisers are not fully aware of the entitlements of refugees. For example, many refugees who were on subsistence only support through the Home Office are asked for NASS 35 forms in order to progress their claims for welfare benefits. However, those who were not in NASS accommodation will not receive a NASS 35 form. Similarly, many refugees are asked to complete the Habitual Residency Test form provided by JobCentre Plus. Refugees are exempt from this test but this is often not understood by those who are dealing with welfare benefit applications. Newly recognised refugees (within 12 months of status) are also entitled to claim Income Support whilst they study English full-time for a period of up to nine months. Again, this regulation is little known about and is difficult to access. There are a number of welfare regulations that specifically apply only to refugees which are not always known by all advisers within JobCentre Plus.

Although the sample of interviewees were all receiving welfare benefits, this does not equate to them not wishing to gain employment. Manuel and Fatima specifically note their discomfort at claiming Jobseekers' Allowance.

"...to get organised is the main priority now. To get settled, to get work. I am not the type of person who feels comfortable with government support. I mean I feel grateful, but, I am young I can do things, I can work. I can speak the language. I just need to find myself a better condition and to get work." – Manuel

*"Interviewer – Did you claim Job Seekers Allowance? What was that like?
It is not good. I hate it really, but, it's what you have to do."* – Fatima

The desire to find employment does not equate to being able to find work, particularly during a time of such rapid transition as is experienced by new refugees. Given that refugees are entitled to apply for and receive mainstream benefits, the processing of applications needs to happen quickly so people can be caught in the safety net that is in place, rather than allowing people to fall into destitution.

5.5 Employment and education

Gaining employment or continuing education can help refugees to support themselves, become more employable and more integrated through contact with colleagues and fellow students. Much has been written about problems that refugees can face when trying to enter the employment market, such as the erosion of skills for those who have waited a long time for a decision on their asylum claim (Mulvey, 2013; Doyle, 2009), and problems such as English language skills, recognition of qualifications

and unfamiliarity with the UK job market (Bloch, 2002; Freedom from Torture, 2013; Mulvey, 2013; Community Links and Refugee Council, 2011). Difficulties in accessing post-16 education have also been highlighted, with colleges not recognising the identification the refugees and asylum seekers carry (Doyle and O'Toole, 2013), much like the banks discussed earlier.

Given the timescale that the data set from advice sessions in this research covers (28 days) and the necessity of finding accommodation and a means of support in that time, it is perhaps not surprising that only 34 advice sessions related to employment, education or training. The sample interviewed for this report had been refugees for a short period of time, so for them their path to integration had just begun, with entitlement to work commencing and the certainty that they were not going to be removed allowing people to make plans for their future life in the UK. Only one of the eight had managed to gain employment, but he had to give that job up after a few weeks due to ill health. Another reported having gone for an interview, but she had not been successful in securing the position. Nahal had taken up two voluntary roles in order to gain experience and improve employability.

Some interviewees expressed frustration about their interactions with the job centre, where they felt the emphasis was on compliance with rules rather than assistance with finding work.

*"Interviewer – What was your impression of the job centre's service after your first meeting?
Not very much. They don't offer me advice. I think that as a refugee, JobCentre Plus is for job seekers. We are not only job seekers also we are refugees. They press every time 'do six job applications every week, you can't do that like this, you need to do more, do this do that' it is not a peaceful, easy place." – Ahamed*

*"Interviewer – What do you not like about it?
It is too interfering and they want to know what I am doing all the time. I am a graduate and I worked as a journalist. The level of my English is strong. I studied in the US. I don't think they know what to do with somebody like me really. The jobs that they suggest I apply for are too low for my skills. When I talk to them about gaining experience as a journalist in the UK, they don't really have any advice and say that they are there to help me look for paid work only. Not courses or experience." – Fatima*

Both Ahamed and Fatima felt that they could have benefitted from advice on how to approach their job search, but this was not forthcoming. For those who are unfamiliar with the UK job market, and may hold qualifications that are not readily recognised by employers, access to tailored advice can be extremely valuable. In the absence of this being offered by job centres, refugees are left to navigate the process on their own, and there is a danger that they will have difficulties finding a job, or be underemployed. Puni recognised that she will not be able to re-enter the profession she had in her country of origin.

*"Interviewer – What sort of field do you hope to work in?
Anything really. I am not the fussy. Mostly I apply for cleaning, restaurant work, caring, things like that. At home I was a nurse, but, it's a long way to that again in England. I have started thinking about what I would need to do to train as a nurse here. But it's just....one stage at a time you know? I just want any job first." – Puni*

There is a clear gap between what Puni is qualified to do and the type of work she is applying for, which illustrates the desire to be earning while exploring her re-training options. It is common for those who have vocational (and other) qualifications from overseas institutions to have to either re-qualify in the UK in order to enter their profession, or to have their existing qualifications assessed by the specialist, government recognised organisation UK NARIC for their UK equivalency. The latter does not necessarily guarantee understanding from employers, as Nahal describes.

"I have got my BA in English translation. And my MA in journalism and I brought them here and with the NARIC system – I don't know if you know that, but the Refugee Council....helped me for comparison for my degrees – but something funnier is that no-one, knows it. When I say NARIC they say 'what's NARIC?' And they take a look at my degrees and say 'wow you got your BA that's good, you have your MA that's good, but we need UK qualifications'." – Nahal

Henock had successfully enrolled for a vocational course at a local college, and was thankful for the flexibility that the learning provider showed in terms of assessing his suitability and education history.

*"Interviewer – What was it like applying for the course?
It was easy. The level of qualification....I attended an interview...face-to-face and he assessed me from there. I came to this country running, I could not get all my certificates from back home to support my application to get into college. I was assessed face to face." – Henock*

The experiences of these interviewees illustrates that the path to employment for refugees is not necessarily going to be straightforward. While people can be willing to take work that does not reflect their skills and experience in order to pay the bills, the goal of resuming former careers can be a long way off. The difficulties in re-qualifying or getting employers to understand overseas qualifications and experience can result in stagnating talent and missed opportunities for refugees to contribute their full potential.

5.6 Sources of advice and support

Since the abolition of RIES, there has been no nationwide co-ordinated service available to support new refugees. Some services are provided by voluntary organisations in various locations across the UK, but, unlike RIES, refugees are not automatically referred to them by the Home Office and these services cannot operate on the same scale due to the limitations of funding. This can leave refugees with no idea of who can help them, and therefore be left to navigate a rapid and confusing process on their own.

RIES advisors supported and advocated for refugees to help them access the services they were entitled to as merely being eligible for support does not always equate to being given it. Some refugees still benefit from this type of advocacy in some areas, and interviewees highlighted that it was voluntary sector organisations including the Refugee Council, that helped them during the transition period. Several reported that these organisations provided them with very basic needs such as food or hardship payments, and others, such as Charles, received practical assistance to help him apply for his NINO.

"Well all I can say is the only people who helped me were the Refugee Council because it's very difficult, you know? It's like you get blind in the middle of the desert and you just don't know what do to, where to go...I think most asylum seekers, when they are protected by the Home Office or the government, they think the transition when you are granted everything is going to come fast and easy. It's not... I think maybe people need to be more careful and they need more advice" – Manuel

There is a now a gap in support services that can make refugees more vulnerable to falling into destitution and homelessness. Mainstream advice agencies may not have the specialist knowledge of refugee issues and their entitlements, preventing them from advocating effectively. As the Home Office's summary of the *Survey of New Refugees* acknowledged:

"Support covering the transition from [asylum] accommodation to more permanent housing may provide a more stable environment and reduce the risk of homelessness among refugees." – (Cebulla, Daniel and Zurawan, 2010: 2)

Welfare reform changes and the implementation of Universal Credit along with welfare conditionality mean that there are a lot of developments for advice agencies to keep pace with. This is often difficult for small advice services with limited capacity and funding and poor access to information and training.

Some pro-active work has been carried out on the integration of refugees has been conducted by some administrations, such as the strategy developed by the Scottish Government in partnership with COSLA and the Scottish Refugee Council (2013) and the Welsh Government's *Refugee Inclusion Strategy Action Plan* (2013). The Greater London Authority's Transition Service Statement attempts to clarify the obligation of statutory funded agencies in relation to newly recognised refugees. The Scottish Government's New Scots document defines a set of key principles as well as practical ways for refugees' needs to be met through statutory and voluntary sector services. The same country-wide approach has not been developed across England and statements issued about the importance of integration are not being met by the provision of specialist services.

6 Conclusions and recommendations

This research has illustrated some of the consequences of newly-granted refugees being left with no support once their asylum support has ended. Refugees can become homeless, and forced to rely on the generosity of friends and support of faith groups and charities in order to eat and find shelter. The period of 28 days is remarkably short for anybody to find accommodation and secure financial support, but for those who are often new to the country and therefore unfamiliar with the systems and language, the challenges are multiplied. Additionally, this research has shown that some of the difficulties refugees face in this period are due to errors and delays caused by the Home Office and JobCentre Plus. These systems errors have grave consequences, and it is vital that systems are improved to prevent those who are entitled to support being unable to access it.

Recommendations

- Home Office should continue to support refugees until they have full access to other means of support. Specifically their duty as defined by Asylum Support Adjudicators and acknowledged by the Home Office should be written into policy.
- Refugees seeking access to the privately rented sector should be able to access funding from government to pay for a deposit in recognition of the fact that if they have been on asylum support they will not have any savings.
- The Home Office should ensure that relevant documentation is received by refugees in a timely manner. Guidance to staff must include instructions to continue asylum support until this has been completed.
- Government guidance to banks should advise them what documents are issued to refugees and others with leave so that they are encouraged to recognise them as evidence of identity.
- The Government should re-instate RIES as refugees are in no less need of the support than when the service was first conceived.
- Service providers need a better understanding of the types of documentation refugees will have in their possession, and adjust their policies accordingly.

- 1 Asylum seekers are allowed to apply for permission to work if they have not received a decision on their asylum applications within 12 months. Employment is restricted to roles identified on the Government's 'Shortage occupation list', and therefore cuts off access to employment for most.
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/257430/handlingapplicationsforperm.pdf
- 2 See section 94(3)(B) of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 'ceasing asylum support' instruction
- 3 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/257395/refugeeleave.pdf
- 4 The Refugee Council is aware of more than one case where an Asylum Support Adjudicator has ruled that the grace period must not begin until the refugee has received the necessary documents and that asylum support must continue beyond the strict timescales if the Home Office is at fault for the delay.
- 5 More information about the Biometric Residence Permit can be found at:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/261497/brp-information-leaflet.pdf
- 6 The UK Border Agency has been abolished since this time, and its functions have been transferred to the Home Office.
- 7 Interview questions are available on request
- 8 The names of interviewees are pseudonyms to maintain their confidentiality
- 9 Home Office case workers are sometimes referred to as case owners.
- 10 Guidance telling case worker on how to do this can be found at:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/257444/ninoguidance.pdf

References

- Ager, A. and Strang, A. (2008) *Understanding integration: a conceptual framework*, Journal of Refugee Studies, 21(2), 166–191
- Atfield, G., Brahmabhatt, K. and O'Toole, T. (2007) *Refugees' Experiences of Integration*. London: University of Birmingham and the Refugee Council
- Bloch, A. (2002) *Refugees Opportunities and Barriers to Training and Employment*. Department for Work and Pensions
- Cebulla, A., Daniel, M. and Zurawan, A. (2010) *Spotlight on refugee integration: findings of the Survey of New Refugees in the United Kingdom*, Summary, Research Report 37, London: Home Office
- Cheung, Sin Yi and Phillimore, J. (2013) *Social networks, social capital and refugee integration*, Cardiff University and University of Birmingham
- Community Links and Refugee Council (2011) *Understanding the informal economic activity of refugees in London*, London: Community Links
- Department for Communities and Local Government (2012) *Creating the conditions for integration*, London: Department for Communities and Local Government
- Doyle, L. and O'Toole, G. (2013) *A lot to learn: refugees, asylum seekers and post-16 learning*, London: Refugee Council
- Doyle, L. (2009) *"I hate being idle": Wasted skills and enforced dependence among Zimbabwean asylum seekers in the UK*, London: Refugee Council
- Freedom from Torture (2013) *The Poverty Barrier: The right to rehabilitation for survivors of torture in the UK*, London: Freedom from Torture
- Homeless Link and Refugee Action (2013) *London migrant homelessness conference: conference report*, London: Refugee Action
- Home Office (2009) *Moving on together: Government's recommitment to supporting refugees*, London: Home Office
- Home Office (2005) *Integration matters: a national strategy for refugee integration*, London: Home Office
- Home Office (2000) *Full and equal citizens: A strategy for the integration of refugees into the United Kingdom*, London: Home Office
- Mulvey, G. (2013) *In search of normality: Refugee integration in Scotland*, Final report Glasgow: Scottish Refugee Council
- Refugee Council (2014) *Asylum statistics*. February 2014, London: Refugee Council
- Refugee Council (2013) *Refugee Council response to Home Office consultation Tackling illegal immigration in privately rented accommodation*, Policy response, London: Refugee Council
- Refugee Council (2010) *The impact of limited leave on refugees in the UK*, London: Refugee Council
- Refugee Council (2004) *Agenda for integration*, London: Refugee Council
- Scottish Government (2013) *New Scots: Integrating Refugees in Scotland's Communities, 2014-2017*, December 2013
- Spencer, S. [ed] (2006) *Refugees and other new migrants: a review of the evidence on successful approaches to integration*, Oxford: Centre on Migration, Policy and Society
- Welsh Government (2013) *Refugee inclusion strategy: action plan*, June 2013 update. Welsh Government: Cardiff
- Zetter, R., Griffiths, D. and Sigona, N. (2005) *Refugee Community Based Organisations in the UK: A Social Capital Analysis*, Research Report, ESRC and Development and Forced Migration Research Unit, Oxford Brookes University

The Refugee Council is the leading charity in the UK working with asylum seekers and refugees. As a human rights charity, independent of government, we work to ensure that refugees are given the protection they need, that they are treated with respect and understanding, and that they have the same rights, opportunities and responsibilities as other members of our society.

This report can be downloaded at www.refugeecouncil.org.uk



**SUPPORTING AND
EMPOWERING
REFUGEES**

www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

British Refugee Council, (commonly called the Refugee Council) is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales [No 2727514] and a registered charity [No 1014576]. Registered office: Gredley House, 11 Broadway, Stratford, E15 4BQ, United Kingdom
VAT registration no: 936 519 988
Copyright 2014 British Refugee Council (known as Refugee Council).