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MOVING ON? DISPERSAL POLICY, ONWARD MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES IN THE UK

Employment
Briefing

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Moving on? Dispersal policy, onward migration and integration of refugees in the UK

Employment briefing

Since 2000, the UK has operated a policy of compulsory dispersal, designed to 'spread the burden' of housing asylum seekers across the UK and to discourage long-term settlement in London and the South East. This research enhances understanding of refugee integration in the UK by focusing on the onward migration after dispersal of those who were granted refugee or humanitarian protection status.

This two-year (2012–14), ESRC-funded project:

- mapped the geography of onward migration among refugees dispersed across the UK as asylum seekers;
- explored the main factors that influence refugees' decision to move or stay in a town or city and how this affects the process of integration; and
- considered the policy implications for the different levels of government, service providers and the voluntary sector of the impact of UK dispersal upon refugee onward migration and integration.

The results are based on quantitative and qualitative research data from four different sites across the UK: Glasgow, Cardiff, Manchester and London. The data included 83 in-depth interviews with refugees, analysis of Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES) client data (2008–11) and Home Office Survey of New Refugees (SNR) data (2005–09).

The key findings of the study are:

- Dispersal policy has diversified the ethnic composition of UK cities, with evidence of growing numbers of refugees staying in the areas to which they were dispersed.
- Nevertheless, refugees who are dispersed as asylum seekers still have higher levels of onward migration than other new refugees.
- Multiple factors influence refugees' decisions to stay or move on from dispersal locations including co-ethnic and local communities, employment, education, life course, housing, place of dispersal, racism and health.
- Refugees may onward migrate or decide to stay after being dispersed, but neither of the two options can be regarded as always being the best for integration.

This briefing focuses on employment as a factor influencing decisions to onward migrate or stay, as well as an indicator of refugee integration.

Policy context

UK dispersal policy began in 2000, a result of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. Asylum applicants can opt to be 'fully supported' (i.e. receive housing and subsistence) or 'subsistence only'. If individuals require housing while awaiting their asylum decision (fully supported), they are dispersed across the country on a no-choice basis. Alternatively, they can choose to live with friends or family in any location (subsistence only). Once an individual is granted refugee status, those fully supported must leave their dispersal accommodation within 28 days. Section 11 of the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants etc.) Act 2004 provided that asylum seekers establish a local connection to the dispersal site where they are provided accommodation. This means that refugees who require local authority housing must apply in the same area to which they were dispersed and is known as the 'local connection rule'. Local authorities can refer individuals to the original dispersal area for housing claims with the aim of reducing onward movement.¹

Asylum seekers are not allowed to work while their claim is being processed. Those who have been waiting for a decision for longer than 12 months may be granted permission to work, but this only entitles them to take up jobs on the shortage occupation list. Once granted status, refugees have unlimited access to the labour market.

Employment is a key factor enabling refugees to rebuild their lives, encouraging self-reliance and facilitating integration to the benefit of both the individual and the local community and economy. However, research shows that refugees tend to be under-employed, in poor employment conditions or face structural barriers to accessing the labour market.²

The need to support refugees to develop their potential and overcome barriers to employment has been recognised in a number of refugee-specific integration strategies at the national,³ regional and local⁴ levels. Until 2011, RIES provided assistance to refugees with housing, education and benefits, with particular focus on employment as the key driver to successful integration. In 2005, the DWP published its refugee employment strategy⁵ which aimed to introduce measures to ensure that refugees access Jobcentre Plus support quickly after being granted status and receive the necessary help to find sustainable work. Despite certain positive steps, overall there has been a de-prioritisation of refugee integration in the UK, with potentially adverse impact on refugees' employment prospects.

¹ Different rules apply in Scotland where asylum seekers are not deemed to have established a local connection as a result of being provided with dispersal accommodation there.

² Bloch A. 2004. Making it work: refugee employment in the UK. *Asylum and Migration Working Paper 2*: Institute for Public Policy Research, London.

³ Home Office. 2000. *Full and Equal Citizens: A Strategy for the Integration of Refugees into the United Kingdom*; Home Office. 2005. *Integration Matters: A National Strategy for Refugee Integration*; Home Office. 2009. *Moving On Together: Government's Recommitment to Supporting Refugees*.

⁴ Scottish Government. 2013. *New Scots: Integrating Refugees In Scotland's Communities*; Welsh Assembly Government. 2008. *Refugee Inclusion Strategy*; Yorkshire and Humber Regional Migration Partnership. 2009. *Finding Sanctuary, Enriching Yorkshire and Humber – the Regional Integration Strategy for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (2009-2011)*; Greater London Authority. 2009. *London Enriched: The Mayor's Strategy for Refugee Integration in London*.

⁵ Department for Work and Pensions. 2005. *Working to Rebuild Lives*.

Dispersal, employment and refugee integration: findings and policy implications

The research investigated how employment opportunities influence onward migration decisions, as well as how mobility impacts on employment prospects and refugee integration.

Key findings

Onward migration decisions are informed by:

- refugees' desire to access employment opportunities and perceptions of job availability; and
- level of English language skills.

Dispersal and mobility have an impact on employment and integration:

- dispersal negatively affects the chances of finding employment and its type: permanent or temporary; and
- mobility can improve job prospects for new refugees.

Discussion

Concerning the impact of employment on refugees' desire to move or stay at their initial dispersal location, the research found that:

- **The desire to access employment opportunities and perceptions of job availability affect refugees' onward migration decisions.**

The desire to find employment was an important factor influencing refugees' decision to move from their initial dispersal location, suggesting that if refugees are to be encouraged to stay, they need information and support to find employment, especially in the initial period following grant of status. Many refugees obtain information about job prospects from friends and family, rather than relying on personal experience or advice from statutory agencies or service providers. As one refugee dispersed to Glasgow stated:

'There are no jobs here. All the people that are leaving, they couldn't find a job. Because there were friends here, they looked for a job and couldn't find and they left. Three, four months [they searched] ... [There are jobs in] Sheffield, Newcastle, Manchester. If I find job, I'm going to stay here. If I not find, what can I do? They say Glasgow is beautiful and nice place, but just there is no job.' [Sara, F, Eritrea, Glasgow].

Given the lack of targeted refugee integration support services, it is essential that the Department for Work and Pensions takes a leading role in ensuring that the services provided by Jobcentre Plus and providers of the Work Programme meet the needs of refugees. Staff at Jobcentre Plus should be familiar with the barriers faced by refugees in accessing employment, including a lack of UK job market experience, recognition of qualifications and English language skills. This should be reflected in the Claimant Commitment, which should be adapted to the particular needs and circum-

stances of refugees. Jobcentre Plus should also provide reliable information about job opportunities in the local area. It would also be beneficial to recognise refugees as an early access priority group for employability support under the Work Programme and ensure that providers are aware and capable of addressing the needs of refugees.

English language skills are essential for finding employment. The research found that:

- **Being dispersed has a positive impact on English language skills: refugees who are dispersed are more likely (59 per cent) to speak English very/fairly well at 21 months after grant of status compared to refugees living with family and friends (28 per cent).**
- **Good English language skills may decrease the tendency of refugees to migrate from their initial dispersal location towards ethnic communities as a result of self-sufficiency.**

One refugee spoke of how English language ability was linked to his employment and migration plans:

'If I can speak the language, it's not important to live with my community. Once I speak English I can live anywhere.' (Birhane, M, Eritrea, Glasgow).

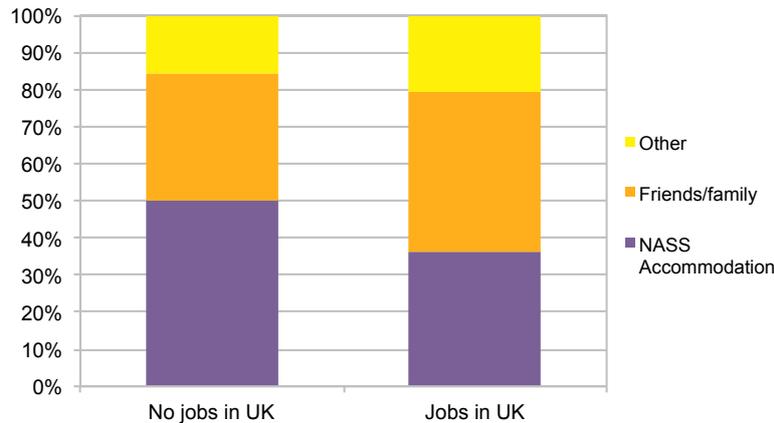
These results suggest that allowing asylum seekers to access ESOL courses immediately, as is the case in Scotland and Wales, instead of only after a waiting period of six months, as in England, could encourage refugees to stay at their initial dispersal location, improve their job prospects and foster integration.

In order to facilitate access to employment for parents and guardians, and women in particular, ESOL provision should also take into account childcare responsibilities. While ESOL provision should be targeted towards finding employment, it should also ensure that refugees are not underemployed due to a lack of English language skills. Advanced English courses would enable refugees to reach their full potential and find employment commensurate with their qualifications.

As an indicator of integration, several key findings were evident from SNR data analysis of level and type of employment gained by refugees post-status. These include:

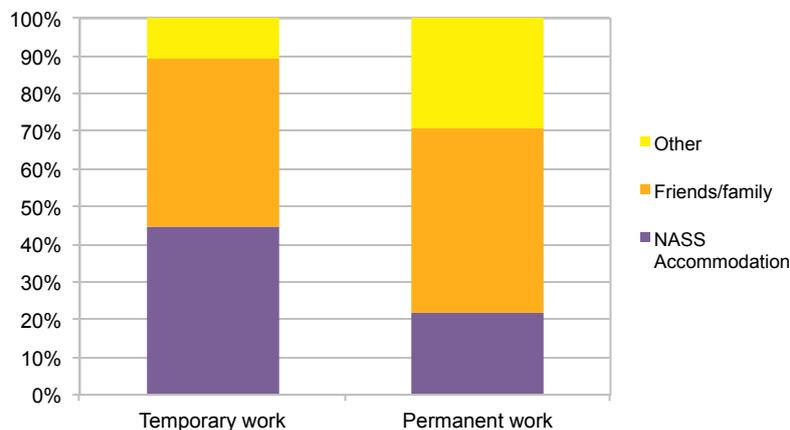
- **Dispersal has a negative impact on finding employment; refugees dispersed as asylum seekers are less likely to be in employment compared with those living with friends/family or in other accommodation (Figure 1).**
- **Dispersal affects type of employment; refugees dispersed as asylum seekers are less likely to be in permanent employment compared to those living with family or friends (Figure 2).**

Figure 1: Employment outcomes 8 months after being granted status [N=1321]



Source: SNR [2005-09]

Figure 2: Type of work refugees engage in 8 months after being granted status [N=534]



Source: SNR [2005-09]

These findings indicate that refugees who are part of the dispersal process require additional support in finding employment if they are to remain in dispersal sites.

Finally, the research found that mobility itself, regardless of dispersal, can improve job prospects for new refugees:

- Employment outcomes are better for those who have moved town/city when compared with refugees who are stayers.
- Refugee stayers (i.e. those who do not move at all) have decreased odds of being in employment at 21 months after grant of status.
- Although refugees who move are more likely to be in a job, they are less likely to be in a permanent job.

While moving town/city was found to improve job prospects, the rigid application of the 'local connection' rule may discourage refugees from moving and exert a negative impact on their ability to find employment. It should be noted that, in addition to residence during dispersal, 'local connection' can

also be acquired through employment or family association, and hence refugees could apply for housing to the local authority where they are working. The application of the local connection rule is discretionary, and local authorities could develop policies aimed at harnessing the benefits of mobility by exercising flexibility in cases where refugees are moving to seek employment or access training.

Recommendations

The UK Government should:

- allow asylum seekers to choose their dispersal location, subject to availability of adequate housing;
- ensure all asylum seekers are eligible to access ESOL courses immediately after claiming asylum; and
- include refugees as early access participants in employment programmes.

The Department for Work and Pensions should:

- ensure Jobcentre Plus staff have sufficient knowledge of the barriers to employment facing refugees and adequate skills to address them by providing training, including through partnership with specialist refugee providers;
- revise the 'Refugee Customer Journey' guidance on how DWP procedures should be applied to refugees, in partnership with specialist refugee providers;
- ensure Work Programme providers have sufficient knowledge of the barriers to employment facing refugees and adequate skills to address them; and
- work with NGOs and other stakeholders to increase the volunteer opportunities available for refugees.

Local authorities should:

- develop, coordinate and monitor a local refugee integration strategy, promoting a multi-agency approach;
- form partnerships with other local authorities to coordinate policies and improve services for refugees;
- develop clear guidance on the application of the 'local connection rule' to refugees and consider introducing flexibility for refugees who move to seek employment or access training; and
- in partnership with specialist refugee NGOs, develop information packages for refugees specific to the local context.

The Scottish Government should:

- ensure that, once support for unemployed people through employment programmes is devolved, the services are operated in a way that addresses the specific needs of refugees, helping them overcome barriers to employment.

The Welsh Government should:

- revise the Refugee Integration Strategy in relation to employment, in partnership with local authorities, DWP, refugee-assisting NGOs and other relevant stakeholders with a view to agreeing on concrete actions and the time-frame for their implementation.

The results presented are drawn from the project report: Stewart, E. and Shaffer, M. [2015] *Moving on? Dispersal Policy, Onward Migration and Integration of Refugees in the UK*, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow.

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