

Finding a Home in the UK: Refugee Onward Migration and Experiences of Place in UK Cities

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Abstract

One of the key reforms introduced in the UK's 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act was compulsory dispersal, a policy implemented from 2000 onward that was designed to 'spread the burden' of housing asylum seekers across the UK on a no-choice basis and to discourage long-term settlement in London and South East England. Little research has explored the abiding outcomes of a policy regime that determines the geography of refugees' movements. Instead, much of the academic literature has critiqued the policy as part of restrictive, deterrent UK asylum apparatus and focused on the negative consequences for individuals who are removed from their kinship networks, social networks and community organisations, realities which may lead to onward migration and destitution. Drawing upon in-depth interviews with refugees who were dispersed across the UK as asylum seekers, we examine the lived experiences of refugees residing in four cities – Glasgow, Cardiff, Manchester, and London – to better understand how experiences of place influence migration decisions and settlement outcomes. Examination of refugee onward migration patterns provides detailed insights into personal journeys and local community interactions. Research results help to explain the appeal of specific places and people's experiences in those locations which can guide policy responses and improve services for refugees.