

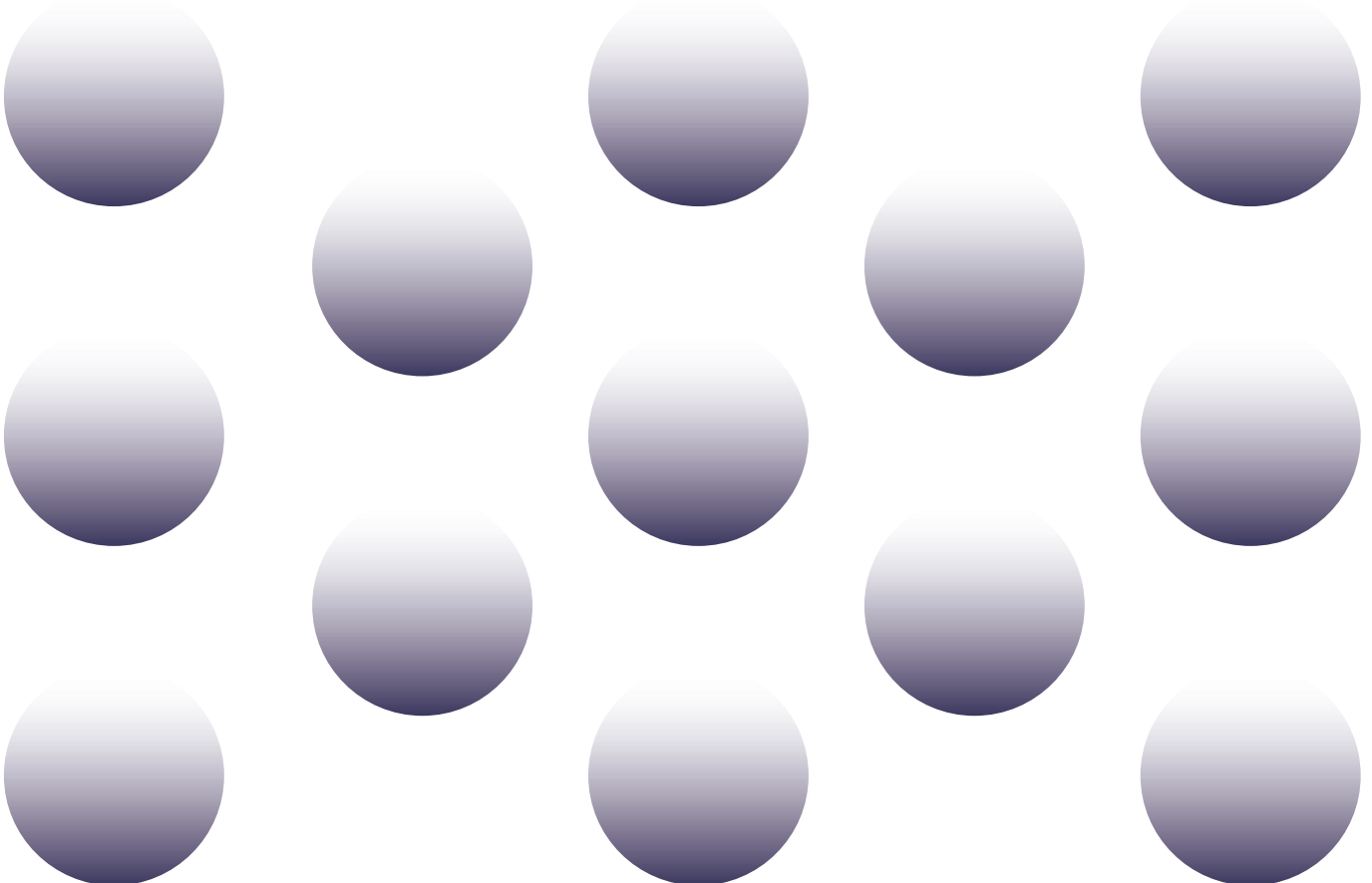


Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees

Navigation guide : Employment issues for refugees and asylum seekers in the UK

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About the author

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Introduction

The refugee employment navigation guide explores the political, policy and practical environment around work for those who have come to the UK seeking asylum. For the most part, the employment issues covered here focus on the time following a positive decision on an asylum claim, when the applicant is given a form of leave to stay in the UK.

The broad picture of refugee employment is one of hurdles, barriers and skills mismatches. Structured policies to tackle employment are both relatively new and relatively limited, and fall under the banner of 'integration' policies that are only activated after a positive decision on the asylum claim has been received. It is therefore usual for refugees to experience a period of dislocation from the labour market resulting both from their causes and experiences of flight; and from entry to an asylum system that is designed to discourage settlement until the case for asylum has been proven.

Integration policies deal primarily with the transition from asylum-specific to mainstream welfare support. As such, they are dominated by securing access to the basics of housing and benefits following the change of status from asylum seeker to refugee. Tackling refugee employment usually follows a little later, by which time specific refugee issues have often become a category of 'need' at the fringes of mainstream public welfare policies and are most often tackled by the voluntary and community sector (VCS). Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) - organisations led by those with a refugee background - form part of the sector and provide much of the support to help refugees overcome hurdles and find work. As such they have become an important source of refugee employment that also provides opportunities for development. However, the VCS - and RCOs in particular - suffer from precarious and often poor funding. Whilst there has recently been much more focus and resources on refugee employment, there remain serious gaps in provision and information.

The lack of quantitative refugee-specific information related to labour market entry and outcomes, which is covered in greater detail in the [statistics section](#), hinders a more detailed understanding of refugee employment. There are no robust statistical data to present either an overview for refugees as a generic group, or a more detailed quantitative analysis that compares different labour market experiences and outcomes with other factors such as the skills and experiences people have gained before seeking asylum. Neither is there data which measures the impact of enforced work breaks of varying lengths. One of the consequences of this lack of specific data is a blurring of the distinction between refugees and other categories of migrant worker within a policy climate that is seeking to balance the economic requirement for migrant workers with concerns about high levels of migration and the subsequent impact on community cohesion. To a large degree, therefore, the guide relies on compiling a composite picture from qualitative sources and 'grey' literature.

Any navigation guide will be subject to certain limitations, being a snapshot of an issue at a given time. In this case there are two important limitations to note. Firstly, the extremely rapidly changing policy environment means that there are references to fundamental policies and structures which are in the process of being established following a long period of gestation. Secondly, the guide acts as an overview of policy and practice: in different regions and counties within the UK, separate policies and initiatives may have been set up. The guide does not attempt to provide comprehensive coverage across all regions but does refer to certain documents where relevant. Wherever possible, these limitations are dealt with through references and links included throughout the guide.

Legal and policy aspects

There is a wide range of legislative and policy instruments that determine or impact upon refugee employment issues. It is a complex policy area that combines international, European and UK legislation, directives and policy initiatives, and which cuts across migration, asylum and integration, and into mainstream employment and social security.

As refugee employment is not a discipline within itself and does not have the benefit of a single Government department as a focus of responsibilities, the multiplicity of policy strands are seldom joined-up. It begins with UK and international legal frameworks that have a direct relationship with refugee employment and then moves on to other policy initiatives including non refugee-specific legislation and policy.

Useful resources

General resources on legal and policy aspects of refugee employment issues include:

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees

The European Council on Refugees and Exiles

The Border and Immigration Agency / Home Office

The Refugee Council

Working in the UK: Newcomer's Handbook

International standards

The relevant international standards remain rooted in the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights and 1951 Refugee Convention that resulted from World War II. The 1951 Convention is complemented by successive Human Rights legislation.¹

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948
 - Article 23 states that:

'Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment
Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.
Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented if necessary, by other means of social protection.
Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.'
- Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951
 - Article 17 of the Convention deals with wage-earning employment and requires that States give sympathetic consideration to granting all refugees equal treatment with nationals and the 'most favourable treatment' accorded to nationals of any other country (referred to as 'aliens'). This is justified on the grounds that refugees would not be able to rely on their governments to negotiate favourable conditions through a Convention as other 'aliens' might expect.
 - Article 18 refers to self-employment and requires that refugees be treated no less favourably than nationals from other countries (and as such is a slightly lower standard than the 'most favourable treatment' for wage-earners).

¹ Adapted from the UNHCR document Rights of Refugees in the Context of Integration: Legal Standards and Recommendations (2006) which is part of their Legal and Protection Policy Research Series.

- Article 19 singles out 'liberal professions' for treatment that is 'as favourable as possible' and in any event, 'no less favourable' than for other aliens. 'Liberal profession', whilst not defined in the Convention, is generally understood to mean lawyers, physicians, architects, dentists, pharmacists, engineers, veterinarians, artists, accountants, interpreters and scientists who work on their own rather than as salaried employees or State agents.
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 1965
 - Article 5 compels signatories to 'prohibit and to eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms and to guarantee the right of everyone, without distinction as to race, colour or national or ethnic origin, to equality before the law, notably in the enjoyment of the following rights:
[...]
(e) Economic, social and cultural rights, in particular:
(i) The rights to work, to free choice employment, to just and favourable conditions of work, to protection against unemployment, to equal pay for equal work, to just and favourable remuneration.
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966
 - Article 6 of the Covenant recognises 'the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment'. The steps to be taken to achieve this right 'shall include: technical and vocational guidance and training programmes; policies and techniques to achieve steady economic, social and cultural development; and, full and productive employment under conditions safeguarding fundamental political and economic freedoms to the individual'.
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979
 - Articles 11 and 14 tackle discrimination against women in the field of employment and argue for equality of rights between men and women, particularly to ensure that women are not discriminated against on the grounds of marriage and maternity. Article 14 focuses on the particular problems faced by 'rural women'.

UK legislation and strategy

References to refugee employment or clauses that impact upon refugee employment are contained within most of the numerous pieces of immigration-related legislation passed within the last ten years:

- Section 8 of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 which aims to ensure that employment is offered only to those entitled to live and work in the UK. Guidance was also issued in 1996 to remind employers of their obligations not to discriminate in recruitment or employment under the Race Relations Act 1976. In May 2004 amendments to Section 8 of the Act were introduced through an order: The Immigration (Restrictions on Employment) Order 2004. See also Preventing Illegal Working webpage
- Section 22 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 provides that in seeking to avoid conviction under Section 8 employers do not unlawfully discriminate.
- The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 does not contain direct changes to the employment of refugees and asylum seekers. However, it does include a range of measures to combat illegal working, such as extending the obligation of employers to show proof of eligibility to work to business partnerships (Section 147), and increasing the power of immigration officers and police to enter and search business premises without a warrant (Section 153).

- The Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants, etc.) Act 2004 – the fifth major piece of legislation in 11 years - removes the back-dated benefits payable to refugees following a positive decision and in recognition of their retrospective entitlement to full levels of income support whilst the claim was being determined (Section 12). For refugees with full status only, these lump-sum payments are replaced with a new integration loan which must be repaid (Section 13).²The Act also establishes a ‘local connection’ rule for those who are housed through the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) such that if they seek emergency housing by the local authority after receiving a positive decision, they will be housed in that dispersal area rather than having the opportunity to be relocated.
- The Gangmasters (Licensing) Act 2004 – a Private Members Bill introduced in response to the drowning of twenty-one Chinese cockle-pickers in Morecambe Bay the previous year – was enacted to reduce exploitation of workers and tax evasion by tightening the law on operators, labour providers and gangmasters. A regulatory body, the Gangmasters Licensing Authority was set up to establish a UK-wide Licensing Scheme and create a register for gangmasters operating in agriculture, horticulture and shellfish-gathering and associated processing and packaging industries. Failing to have a licence can incur a maximum prison sentence of 10 years and using an unlicensed gangmaster can result in a prison sentence of up to 51 weeks. Offences were introduced between October 2006 and April 2007.
- In 1997 the Labour government published a five-year strategy for immigration and asylum in 2005, Controlling our borders: Making migration work for Britain, which preceded the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006 (see below).³ Key elements include:
 - a commitment that there will be no quota for admitting refugees to the UK
 - and that the government will not withdraw from the 1951 UN Convention
 - A five year temporary status for refugees with permanent status only being awarded if they are still considered at risk at the end of this period
 - a new procedure for processing asylum claims known as the New Asylum Model⁴
 - a new Points-Based System (PBS) linked to skills and sector labour shortage to determine who should be allowed to come to work in the UK⁵
 - making permanent settlement rights contingent upon English language proficiency and passing a ‘life in the UK’ test
- The Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006 contains employment clauses reinforcing existing government powers to penalise employers of illegal workers. These powers include civil penalties for employers for each illegal worker employed (Section 15). Section 19 allows for a code of practice for employers to avoid race discrimination in recruitment practice. Section 45 amends the 2004 Act to enable integration loans to be given to refugees who have been given limited leave to enter or remain.
- *Fair, effective, transparent and trusted: Rebuilding confidence in our immigration system* is a further reform strategy published in July 2006 following new Home Secretary John Reid’s assertion that the Home Office was ‘not fit for purpose’. This paved the way for the next piece of legislation, the UK Borders Act 2007(see below). It also led to the division of the Home Office into two separate ministries (Home Office and Ministry of Justice) in March 2007. The strategy immediately created a new ‘shadow’ agency, the Border and Immigration Agency (BIA), to replace the Immigration and Nationality Directorate from April 2007. In April 2008 this was relaunched as the UK Border Agency (see below under *Security in a Global Hub*). The strategy

² See Refugee Council Briefing, Asylum and Immigration Act 2004: an update

³ Home Office (2005) Controlling our borders: Making migration work for Britain

⁴ Aimed at improving decision-making times through segmenting claims and introducing case ownership so that a single case owner will have responsibility throughout an individual’s claim process. See Refugee Council Briefing (2007) The New Asylum Model

⁵ See Home Office (2005) Selective Admission: Making Migration Work for Britain consultation paper, and the resulting White Paper (2006) A Points-Based System: Making Migration Work for Britain.

also set out the timetable for implementing the Points-Based System (PBS) to manage labour migration across different skill levels.

- Securing the UK Border: Our vision and strategy for the future (March 2007) is a joint Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office policy which sets out the approach to ‘managing identity’ (largely through biometric technology and ID cards) so that admissions decisions are generally made before port of entry and simplified for business and tourist visas whilst preventing illegal working (see UK Borders Act 2007). This was followed in June 2007 by Managing Global Migration: A strategy to build stronger international alliances to manage migration, which sets out how to achieve the above policy aims.
- The UK Borders Act 2007 includes the introduction of biometric immigration documents for people here for work or study by 2008-09; police powers for immigration officers; and measures against illegal working.
- Simplifying Immigration Law: An Initial Consultation a consultation paper in June 2007 which marked the first steps in a Simplification Project to streamline primary and secondary legislation around Immigration Rules. A Green Paper, The Path to Citizenship: next steps in reforming the immigration system was circulated in February 2008 proposing that all existing immigration laws be replaced with a single piece of primary legislation due to be introduced to Parliament by the end of November 2008.
- Security in a Global Hub, a Cabinet Office document following the Prime Minister’s decision in July 2007 to establish a unified border force, set out the steps towards integrating the work of Customs, BIA and UKvisas within a single agency responsible for securing UK borders and controlling migration. In April 2008 a new shadow agency, the UK Border Agency (UKBA), was launched.
- The 2008 Prevention of Illegal Working guidelines are rooted in the 2006 Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act. They promote migration compliance and penalise those who break the rules. Biometric overseas border controls are introduced within prescribed categories, as well as tougher enforcement for non-compliance, including fines of up to £10,000 for employers who employ illegal migrant workers.

Entitlements to work and set up in business

Refugees have a right to work or set up a business in the UK on exactly the same terms as UK citizens. They can apply for Job Seekers’ Allowance (JSA) and participate in training for work programmes. They are also entitled to enter all government job preparation and training schemes.

They are not, as foreign nationals, allowed to work in government departments (Aliens Restriction (Amendment) Act 1919 and Aliens Employment Act 1955), except in rare cases where a non-reserved post (i.e. one that could not be filled by a UK national) is subject to a Minister-authorized exception certificate. A Private Members Bill, the Crown Employment (Nationality) Bill 2007-08 will allow any foreign national to work in government departments except where it is deemed in the national interest for the job to be reserved for a UK national.⁶

People with other forms of protection related status such as ELR (under the former provisions), Temporary Protection, Humanitarian Protection (HP) and Discretionary Leave (DL) status (from April 1st 2003) have a right to work or set up a business for the period they have been granted protection in the same way as UK citizens. However they are not allowed to work in government departments (see above). They can apply for JSA and participate in training for work programmes.

Asylum seekers do not have the right to work while their applications are being considered but have a concession to work after 12 months if their initial claim has not been decided and they are not responsible for the delay. They have the right to volunteer while their applications are being considered,

⁶ Crown Employment (Nationality) Bill 2007-08

and for expenses to be paid⁷. They do not have the same entitlements as refugees and those with other forms of protection to enter Government-funded training for work programmes.

Since 2007/08, asylum seekers are not automatically eligible for publicly funded FE provision or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learning. However they do have a concession for eligibility for both FE and ESOL if their asylum claim or appeal has not been decided after six months; or they have been refused asylum but are unable to their country of origin and are receiving Section 4 support.⁸

The [ECRE/ERF project page](#) contains a section with descriptions and comparisons of the different situations relating to permission to work for asylum seekers across European countries.

In addition to the Learning and Skills Council and Refugee Council (see footnote 10), the [UK Council for International Student Affairs \(UKCISA\)](#) provides comprehensive information and advice on this subject.

Refugee Employment policy

The bulk of this section concentrates on UK national policy. In 2008 the Minister for Communities and Local Government (CLG) published [Managing the Impacts of Migration: A cross-government approach](#). In doing so it announced that it was revising [Integration Matters](#),⁹ the 2005 Home Office integration strategy by which it had hitherto been guided.

In a parallel development, the Corporate Stakeholder Group (CSG) replaced the old [National Refugee Integration Forum \(NRIF\)](#), which had been set up to monitor and develop the DWP's 2005 [Refugee Employment Strategy](#). In a manner indicative of the policy shift that appears to have taken place, the CSG has the wider remit of looking at all aspects of migration rather than just refugee integration, and is intended to be a forum where the Home Office can share information on migration policies and practice and consult with relevant stakeholders. Unlike the NRIF, the CSG does not have 'sub-groups' focussing on specific issues such as employment.

Other bodies of relevance set up along with the CSG are the [Migration Impacts Forum](#), (MIF) which aims to build evidence on how migration (in general) affects public services and local communities; the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC), which is made up of economists and advises on labour market shortages, and the National Migration Group (NMG) which is intended to facilitate dialogue between the SMPs, the Home Office and other key stakeholders on policy and operational migration issues.

In addition, the Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) advises employers on good practice towards migrant workers; and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS), which is in charge of the restructuring of ESOL provision, is responsible for working with employers on this issue and has identified refugees as one of the target groups which future ESOL provision should cater.¹⁰

In line with these developments, integration services aimed at assisting refugees into employment were by 2008 being channelled through the new [Refugee Integration and Employment Service \(RIES\)](#), which is expected to be fully operational by October 2008, with 12 regional contracts due to be awarded in

⁷ On expenses see [Volunteering England](#) guidance. For a useful study of volunteering and refugees see **Wilson, R. and Lewis, H.** (2006) *A Part of Society – Refugees and Asylum Seekers Volunteering in the UK*, *Tandem*.

⁸ See [Refugee Council ESOL and FE Briefing \(2007\)](#), [Refugee Council guide for advisors \(2008\)](#) and the [Learning and Skills Council](#) website

⁹ Home Office (2004) [Integration Matters: A National Strategy for Refuge Integration](#). See also DWP (2005) [Working to Rebuild Lives: a Refugee Employment Strategy](#)

These two documents provide the framework for integrating refugees following a positive decision on their asylum claim.

¹⁰ See Community and Local Government (2008) [Review of Migrant Integration Policy in the UK](#)

May 2008. Contract-managed through the UKBA regional structure, RIES will offer a 'standard package' of integration services for all new refugees.¹¹ This follows a long gestation since the model was first put out for consultation in November 2006.¹²

Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES)

Following pilots for the Strategic Upgrade of National Refugee Integration Services (Sunrise) model set up in 2005, the new pilot integration service, RIES, will offer a limited service over a 12-month period covering three elements:

- an advice and support service to address initial needs such as housing, education and benefits;
- an employment advice service to help the person enter long-term employment at the earliest opportunity;
- a mentoring service offering the person an opportunity to be matched with a mentor from the receiving community.

Within a few days of receiving refugee status or humanitarian protection, the person will be referred to a personal case manager who will develop an individual integration plan and help the person to meet urgent needs.

UKBA expect that at least 30% of people who accept help from the RIES will find work within 12 months of receiving their status.

At regional and local level, migration policy implementation, including integration and employment strategies, has since 2007 been coordinated by Strategic Migration Partnerships (SMPs). Funded through an 'enabling grant' from the Home Office and replace the old regional consortia as a means of including migrant workers as well as refugees and asylum seekers – a move itself indicative of the aforementioned policy shifts. The SMPs facilitate joint work and consultation between regional actors and the UK Border Agency (UKBA) on migration issues, including employment. (See Contacts section for further information).

In London the process has been a little different: In 2006 the Mayor set up the Board for Refugee Integration in London (BRIL) as a multi-agency partnership to help develop his draft strategy for refugee integration in London, known as London Enriched.¹³ However BRIL is set to be replaced by an SMP for London pending approval of the draft strategy in the latter part of 2008.

Strategy and policy from other Government departments

There are a number of other Government departments whose activities have an impact on refugee employment. The following examples are indicative of Government departments with an interest and which may be useful to explore for further information:

- Improving Opportunity Strengthening Society (2005) is the Government's cross-cutting strategy to increase race equality and community cohesion. The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) website includes a separate page within its Community Cohesion section on employment.
- In mid-2008 the government published its Review of Migrant Integration Policy in the UK and another, broader, key strategic document on Managing the Impacts of Migration (see above).¹⁴ These formed its response to the 2007 findings of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, a fixed term advisory body established by CLG, which considered how local areas could make the most of the benefits delivered by increasing diversity - and the tensions it can sometimes cause. .

¹¹ BIA (2007), *Refugee Integration and Employment Service, pre-qualification questionnaire*

¹² Home Office (2006) *A New Model for National Refugee Integration Services in England: Consultation Paper*

¹³ For London see also **Michael Bell Associates** (2004) Refugees and the London Economy: Maximising the Economic Potential and Impact of London's Refugee Communities

¹⁴ See Chapter 4 (Cohesion and Integration) of Communities and Local Government (2008) Managing the Impacts of Migration: A Cross-Government Approach

- The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills launched a consultation on its ESOL strategy, linked to the findings of the Commission, to focus ESOL on community cohesion. Changes are not expected until September 2008 at the earliest.
- Opportunity for All is the annual Government report about tackling poverty and social exclusion. It includes a link to the Ethnic Minorities Task Force website and their Public Service Agreement target 4c – to increase the employment rate of ethnic minorities and close the gap between the ethnic minority employment rate and that of the rest of the country.
- The Treasury-commissioned Leitch Review reported in December 2006 on the UK's long-term skills needs until 2020.
- The DWP and DIUS have set up the Adult Advancement and Careers Service (AACCS) as a means of combining welfare changes and skills enhancement. This new system will also be reflected at a regional level by initiatives such as the London Skills and Employment Strategy¹⁵

Equal Opportunities – general information

The following references are indicative of broader issues that might have an impact on work experiences, even where a specific focus on refugees has not yet been fully developed. They also act as a reference for potential further sources of information.

The Equality Bill¹⁶ aims to bring all forms of discrimination within one single Act and make it legal for employers to discriminate in favour of women and ethnic minority candidates in certain circumstances.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has commissioned research, to be published in late 2008, on equalities and human rights as relevant to refugees and asylum seekers.¹⁷

The TUC established a Commission on Vulnerable Employment which reported in 2008. Prior to that it published a Guide to Equality Law in 2004, and ACAS revised its Tackling discrimination and promoting equality - Good practice guide for employers in 2005. This contains a sample equality policy, and checklists on how to avoid discrimination.

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations and the Black Training and Enterprise Group published a guide for voluntary organisations, Making Equality Simple (2005) on the religion or other belief and sexual orientation regulations.

Avoiding Racial Discrimination

As the Home Office's website comments, the prevention of illegal working can often raise race discrimination issues and employers must be careful not to use discriminatory recruitment practices when carrying out document checks.¹⁸ In February 2008 the Home Office updated its Code of Practice for employers on avoiding race discrimination in recruitment practice, in line with the new legislation around illegal working being made effective at the same time. Potentially relevant legislation includes:

- The Race Relations Act 1976 (Amendment) Regulations 2003: these include new definitions of indirect discrimination and harassment, a new genuine occupational requirement provision, changes to the burden of proof, and provisions in relation to post-employment discrimination. In addition to employment, they also cover discrimination in relation to social protection, education, and provision of goods and services (including grant-giving).¹⁹

¹⁵ London Skills and Employment Board (2008) The London Approach: Improving Skills and Employment Outcomes for Londoners

¹⁶ Government and Equalities Office (2008) Framework for a Fairer Future - the Equality Bill

¹⁷ Watters, C. and Aspinall, A. (2008 forthcoming) Refugees and asylum seekers: a review of equality and human rights implications. Equality and Human Rights Commission.

¹⁸ See <http://www.migrantsrights.org.uk> for updates relating to 'Papers please' - a 3 year joint research project by the Migrant Rights Network and Queen Mary College London begun in 2008.

¹⁹ The regulations and explanatory notes are at www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031626.htm

- The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000: according to the Act, public authorities and organisations which provide services on their behalf must 'have due regard for the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote equality of opportunity and good race relations'. This means they must consider the racial equality implications of all relevant activities and take active steps to promote racial equality.

Guidance and help

- The UK Border Agency provides information to employers on all immigration matters and illegal working.
- Business Link is the government portal offering practical information on all aspects of business, including eligibility to work in the UK.
- The Refugee Advice and Guidance Unit (RAGU), part of the Department of Applied Social Sciences at London Metropolitan University, supports refugees with high level education or professional qualifications into employment and education, and provides guides for advisors and refugees on rights and entitlements.
- The Newcomers Handbook, produced by the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion (CESI), provides advisors and advocates with information to ensure that working age migrants are aware of their rights and of the help available in and out of work. The second edition has a separate section on refugees and asylum seekers.
- The Employment Service and Department of Work and Pensions have set up Equality Direct, a confidential advice service for business on equality matters. Its website includes advice about refugees and asylum seekers.
- The Equality and Human Rights Commission has guidelines for employers and employees which can be accessed from their website.
- The National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) advises on how overseas academic qualifications relate to UK qualifications. The service covers a wide range of countries, and can advise on the standing of international qualifications with UK professional bodies.
- The Employability Forum includes information for refugees and employers and on specific professions.
- Refugee Council
- JCWI – Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants

Key issues

The following sub-sections draw on a range of sources to examine key issues connected with refugee employment.

As noted earlier, refugee integration, and with it employment, are now increasingly a part of government policy on migration as a whole, as exemplified by the cross-government [Migration Impacts Plan](#). This policy context, of so-called managed migration is the first key issue to be explored here.

Secondly, we turn to the economic contribution of refugees and asylum seekers. Unfortunately, even prior to this apparent policy shift relatively little was known about the economic contribution of asylum seekers or refugees. This is because existing data sources are generally unable to distinguish between separate categories of migrant. However, the contribution of the generic category 'migrants' to the labour market has been increasingly researched since the turn of the century,²⁰ and so by necessity we focus on this wider category within which refugees and asylum seekers are so often subsumed.

We then turn to the very issue of identifying refugees as a distinct category of migrant, followed by a discussion of the relevance of the asylum process itself and the relationship of employment to integration. Finally the section looks at what is known about refugee employment per se, including practical barriers and interventions.

Managing migration

The UK is not alone in the industrialised world in becoming increasingly reliant on economic migration to fill skills gaps and compensate for the declining indigenous population and an adverse ratio of people of wage earning age to the rest of the population. Linked to shared discourses around globalisation and its effects²¹, UK concerns have focused on economic sustainability and the more particular issues of the adequacy and sustainability of the current pension framework.²²

The current UK policy context for refugee employment is found within the shift towards planned or 'managed' migration, in essence an attempt to view all forms of inward migration to the UK within the same policy framework overtly linked to goals of economic sustainability and growth. This policy is enshrined in a number of key documents, namely the 2002 White Paper *Secure Borders Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain* (passed after much amendment as the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 and supplemented by successive legislation);²³ the 2005 five-year strategy, [Controlling our borders: Making migration work for Britain](#) and consequent policy statements; the UK Borders Act 2007 illegal working reduction strategies; and a 2007 international strategy

²⁰ **Glover, S. Gott, C. Loizillon, A. Portes, J. Price, R. Spencer, S. Srinivasan, V. and Willis, C.** (2001) [Migration: an economic and social analysis](#), RDS Occasional Paper No. 67, Home Office; **Dustmann, C. Fabbri, F. Preston, I. and Wadsworth, J.** (2003) [The Local Labour Market Effects of Immigration in the UK](#), Home Office Online Report 06/03; **Gott and Johnston** (2002) [The migrant population in the UK: fiscal effects](#), RDS Occasional Paper No. 77, Home Office; **Haque, R.** (2002) [Migrants in the UK: A Descriptive Analysis of their Characteristics and Labour Market Performance](#), DWP; **Kempton, J.** (2002) [Migrants in the UK: their characteristics and labour market outcomes and impacts](#), RDS Occasional Paper No. 82, Home Office 2002; **Shields, M. and Wheatley Price, S.** (2003) [The labour market outcomes and psychological well-being of ethnic minority migrants in Britain](#), RDS Online Report 07/03

²¹ See for example **Munck, R.** (2002) *Globalisation and labour: the new 'Great Transformation'*, Zed Books; **Crisp, J.** (2003) 'Refugees and the global politics of asylum', *Political Quarterly*, vol. 74, Supplement 1, pp 74-87; [Globalisation, Jobs and Wages](#), OECD Policy Brief, June 2007.

²² See, for example, the 2002 Home Office White Paper [Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain](#); the 2007 Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office joint strategy, [Managing Global Migration: A strategy to build stronger international alliances to manage migration](#); **Dixon, M. and Margo, J.** (2006) [Population Politics](#), IPPR

²³ See the [ICAR Asylum Law and Process Navigation Guide](#)

statement on managing global migration from the Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office.²⁴

The 2002 White Paper states:

*'[W]e need to send out a signal around the world that we are neither open to abuse nor a 'Fortress Britain'. Our system combines rational and controlled routes for economic migration with fair, but robust, procedures for dealing with those who claim asylum.'*²⁵

The three aims underpinning the migration strategy set out in the White Paper were to:

- alleviate recruitment difficulties
- contribute to sustainable growth
- reduce illegal working²⁶

The 2007 international strategy document continues to highlight the consistency of the message and reinforces the economic objectives, adding a further goal: 'to help Britain gain a greater share in the global tourism and education market.'²⁷ It declares:

*'We want borders that are open to those who bring skills, talent, business and creativity that boost our economy, yet closed to those who might cause us harm or seek to enter illegally.'*²⁸

From 2000 onwards a number of different schemes, such as the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme, the Highly Skilled Migrant Programme (HSMP) and various Sector Based Schemes setting quotas for hotels and food processing, were established or re-focused towards a closer match between migrant labour and UK skills gaps. The system remained, however, very complex with around 80 different routes and a division between the administration of employment documents (by Work Permits UK in Sheffield) and the decisions to grant 'entry clearance' or permission to stay (by Entry Clearance Officers, Immigration Officers at ports or Home Office caseworkers).

The 2005 five-year strategy for immigration and asylum marked a radical departure with the intention of consolidating all routes of economic migration into a single points-based system (PBS) linked to qualifications, work experience, income and other relevant factors. The White Paper: A Points-Based System: Making Migration Work for Britain, sets out the design of the new five-tier system to be phased in incrementally by tier from 2007 onwards and covering highly-skilled migrants, skilled workers with a job offer, low-skilled workers, students and youth mobility and temporary workers. Low-skilled migration - Tier 3 – is linked to the level of low-skilled migration from A8 countries, broadly meaning that admissions will only be allowed to jobs that are not being filled by Europeans. It is expected to be 'quota-based, operator-led, time-limited, subject to review and only from countries with which the UK has effective returns policies.'²⁹

To measure need and monitor the effects of the new approach, the Home Office has created two new committees: the Migration Advisory Committee of labour market economists to advise on labour market shortages and requirements³⁰; and the Migration Impacts Forum³¹ to provide qualitative evidence of the impacts of migration. The latter's first report in 2007 took regional soundings on the impact of migration, and found that whilst there were many pressures on housing, education, health and around crime and

²⁴ Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (2007), Managing Global Migration: A strategy to build stronger international alliances to manage migration

²⁵ David Blunkett, then Home Secretary in the foreword to Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain

²⁶ **Crawley H.** (2002) *Managing Migration: Current entry routes into the UK labour market*, IPPR.

²⁷ Op. cit. p. 16

²⁸ Op.cit. p. 2, joint Ministerial foreword

²⁹ A Points-Based System: Making Migration Work for Britain, 2006, Home Office, Cm6741, p. 29

³⁰ See <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/aboutus/workingwithus/indbodies/mac/>

³¹ See <http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/racecohesionfaith/asylumandimmigration/migration-forum/>

community cohesion, the impacts were variable (for example on only certain crimes such as driving without insurance or a seatbelt) or difficult to measure (such as community cohesion).³²

In practice managed migration might best be seen as a flexible, evolving approach towards an ideal rather than a fixed strategy, The Government aims to be able to identify and respond to labour mismatches that are not being addressed by UK citizens or European Economic Area (EEA) nationals, at the same time as reducing unfounded asylum applications and dealing with applications more quickly (see below); making borders tougher to cross without permission; tightening up rules about who should be able to stay permanently in the UK; and making sure that those who have not been given permission to stay will leave.

It is too early to judge if this new approach is workable or meets its own criteria or avoids unintended effects. There are already concerns that the scheme may become far more complicated and administratively fraught than hoped and that A8 workers may not be a long term solution to UK low-skill needs.³³ In addition, attempts to retrospectively apply new PBS criteria to existing HSMP workers by extending the qualifying period for settlement from 4 to 5 years and tightening the requirements for extending leave were found to be unlawful by the Joint Committee on Human Rights who described them as being: 'so clearly incompatible with Article 8 [of the European Convention on Human Rights], and so contrary to basic notions of fairness, that the case for revisiting the changes ... is overwhelming.'³⁴

Economic contribution of migrants

Liam Byrne, current Home Office Minister of State for Borders and Immigration, has commented that the 1997 New Labour manifesto:

*'devoted 135 words to immigration and less than ten per cent of the population named immigration as the biggest issue in British politics. Today, 40 per cent rate immigration as their top concern, and in poll after poll during 2005, immigration was either the number one, or number two issue.'*³⁵

He points to the paradox that these concerns have risen at a time when migrant contributions have made Britain richer, with migrants making up 8% of the UK workforce yet contributing 10% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).³⁶ The Treasury estimate that migration contributed around 15-20% of growth between 2001 and 2005,³⁷ and the National Institute of Economic and Social Research calculated that taking 2004 and 2005 together, the economy grew by 5.3%, of which 0.9% could be directly attributed to immigration.³⁸ Whilst the evidence of contributions may be clear, as Byrne comments:

*'The political risk for any government is that if you fail to solve this paradox you could lose your job.'*³⁹

³² [Evidence from our regional consultation on the impacts of migration](#), Presentation by Home Office to the Migration Impacts Forum on evidence put forward by Regional Strategic Co-ordination Groups on the impact of migration report, October 2007

³³ JCWI (2006) [The points-based system: Can it really make labour migration work for Britain? A Critique of the PBS](#)

³⁴ [Highly Skilled Migrants: Changes to Immigration Rules](#), Twentieth Report of Session 2006-07, Joint Committee on Human Rights, August 2007, HL 173, HC 993, p. 15

³⁵ **Byrne, L.** (2007) 'From Free Movement to Fair Movement: the Immigration Debate in the UK' in *Rethinking Immigration and Integration: A New Centre-Left Agenda*. Policy Network. p. 46

³⁶ *ibid* p. 45

³⁷ **Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office** (2007) [Managing Global Migration: A strategy to build stronger international alliances to manage migration](#) , p.4

³⁸ **Riley, R. and Weale, M.** (2006) 'Commentary: Immigration and Its Effects' National Institute Economic Review 2006; 1984

³⁹ *Op.cit.* p. 48

What is less clear, however, is exactly how the benefits are accrued and who makes them – a debate that has been on-going for several years. A Home Office study⁴⁰ published in 2002 estimated that migrants contributed £2.5bn more in taxes than they consumed in benefits and services in 1999/2000. Despite Gott and Johnston's admission that 'this initial analysis is unsophisticated and tentative'⁴¹ due to the strong heterogeneity of migrant populations and breadth of labour market experiences included, the figure was contested by organisations concerned at the scale of inward migration, and the statistic became part of the heated political debate about immigration and asylum that has been gaining momentum throughout the New Labour administration. In 2005, a similar methodology was extended by IPPR to cover the five-year period 1999-2004 in direct response to anti-immigration criticisms provoked by the earlier findings.⁴² Taking a relative approach to the presentation of results, they found that migrant contributions were significant and that 'immigrants have become proportionately greater net contributors to the public finances than non-immigrants.'⁴³

In October 2007, a cross-Departmental submission from the Home Office and DWP to the House of Lords Select Committee on Economic Affairs⁴⁴ revisited the earlier estimates of migrant contributions and estimated that between the third quarter of 2001 and mid-2006, migration added 0.5% per annum to the working age population and therefore supported growth in economic output. On that basis, migration contributed around £6 billion to output growth in 2006. When the Select Committee published its final report in April 2008, however, it concluded that there was no evidence that net immigration generates significant economic benefits for the existing UK population.⁴⁵

Home Office research in 2003 concluded that contrary to popular perceptions, migration does not have a significant impact on overall unemployment amongst the existing UK population, including previous migrant groups⁴⁶. Similarly, migration was not found to have an adverse effect on the wages of the UK population. Indeed if anything, immigration was found to have a positive effect on the wages of the existing population – an assumption that continues to be supported by empirical evidence such as that produced in the UK and US more recently.⁴⁷ 'When IPPR explored average gross hourly pay rates using Labour Force Survey country of birth information for an episode of *Dispatches* on Channel 4⁴⁸, they found that UK-born workers were equal 13th in a ranking of 26, with workers from countries strongly represented in refugee communities lower in the ranking. Whilst acknowledging it may be 'tempting' to conclude that this represents a degree of 'undercutting' by immigrant workers, they find that conclusion invalid since it 'relies on the assumption that all immigrants perform similar jobs, whereas in fact they tend to be concentrated at either end of the skills spectrum' and are not in competition for the same jobs.⁴⁹ Findings from such research accord with both international⁵⁰ and European evidence⁵¹ on this issue and have influenced the change of government's turn towards a policy of 'managed migration.'

⁴⁰ **Gott and Johnston** (2002) The migrant population in the UK: fiscal effects, *RDS Occasional Paper No. 77*, Home Office

⁴¹ *ibid*, p.32.

⁴² **Sriskandarajah, D. Cooley, L. and Reed, H.** (2005) Paying their way: The fiscal contribution of immigrants in the UK IPPR

⁴³ *ibid*, p. 12

⁴⁴ **Home Office and DWP** (2007) The Economic and Fiscal Impact of Immigration

, A Cross-Departmental Submission to the House of Lords Select Committee on Economic Affairs, Cm 7237

⁴⁵ **House of Lords Select Committee on Economic Affairs** (April 2008) The Economic Impact of Immigration, Volume 1: Report, London: The Stationery Office

⁴⁶ **Dustmann, C. Fabbri, F. Preston, I. and Wadsworth, J.** (2003) The Local Labour Market Effects of Immigration in the UK, Home Office Online Report 06/03

⁴⁷ See for example **Manacorda M., Manning A. and Wadsworth J.** (2006) The Impact of Immigration on the Structure of Male Wages: Theory and evidence from Britain, Institute for the Study of Labor Discussion Paper 2352, Bonn: Institute for the Study of Labor; and **Peri, G.** (2007) Immigrants' Complementarities and Native

Wages: Evidence from California, NBER Working Paper 12956 New York: National Bureau of Economic Research

⁴⁸ **Sriskandarajah, D., Cooley, L. and Kornblatt, T.** (2007) Britain's Immigrants: An economic profile, IPPR

⁴⁹ *ibid*, p. 21

⁵⁰ See, for example, OECD (2002) International Mobility of the Highly Skilled

In considering public attitudes towards immigration, two of the researchers involved in the 2003 Home Office research on the local labour market effects of migration also developed a multiple factor model to analyse questions from the British Social Attitudes Survey on migration, job security and benefit expenditure.⁵² They found that an association between labour market concerns and hostility to immigration was only found amongst 'better educated and more skilled' sections of the labour force and that 'antipathy towards immigration amongst manual and poorly educated workers is associated only and strongly with racial attitudes.'⁵³

These research projects were undertaken largely before the more recent increase in A8 migration from the eight eastern European countries that acceded to the European Union in 2004 and there has since been an expansion of migrant-related research. The October 2006 edition of Labour Market Trends carried a special feature on '*Foreign labour in the United Kingdom*' which stated that in 2005 there were 1.505 million foreign migrants working in the UK, accounting for 5.4% of all employees, an increase over ten years of around 600,000.⁵⁴ However, these figures don't take into account 'irregular' or 'unauthorised' migrants, estimated in 2001 to be between 310,000 and 570,000,⁵⁵ and with an estimated gain to the public purse of up to £1 billion in tax and National Insurance contributions if their position was regularised.⁵⁶

Advisors to the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee have also been exploring the economic characteristics of immigrants and their impact on supply and have concluded that:

- most immigrants are employed
- they are overrepresented in both high-paid occupations (managers and professionals) and low-paid occupations
- they are also overrepresented in both high-paid industries (finance, real estate and business activities) and low-paid industries (hotels and restaurants)
- most immigrants tend to be younger, better educated and work longer hours than those born in the UK
- 'new' immigrants (those who entered the UK up to two years ago) are more educated than both previous waves of immigrants and those born in the UK, but are more likely to be working in low-paid occupations.⁵⁷

And elsewhere have concluded that

'There seems to be a broad agreement that immigration is likely to have reduced the natural rate of unemployment in the UK over the past few years. But there is some uncertainty about what has happened to the natural rate in the very recent past and what might happen to it in

⁵¹ See, for example, **Spencer, S.** (ed.) (1994) *Immigration as an Economic Asset: the German Experience*, IPPR; **Venturini, A. and Villosio, C.** (2004) *Labour Market Effects of Immigration: an Empirical Analysis based on Italian Data*, International Migration Papers, 69, International Labour Office.

⁵² **Dustmann, C. and Preston, I.** (2004) *Racial and Economic Factors in Attitudes to Immigration*, CReAM

⁵³ *ibid* pp. 30-31

⁵⁴ **Salt, J. and Millar, J.** (2006) '*Foreign labour in the United Kingdom: current patterns and trends*' in *Labour Market Trends*, Office for National Statistics, Vol. 114, no. 10, pp 335-355

⁵⁵ **Woodbridge, J.** (2005) *Sizing the Unauthorised (illegal) Migrant Population in the United Kingdom in 2001*, Home Office Online Report 29/05

⁵⁶ **IPPR** (2006) *Irregular Migration in the UK*, an IPPR factfile; see also **JCWI** (2006) *Recognising rights, Recognising political realities: The case for regularising irregular migrants; and the Strangers into Citizens campaign*

⁵⁷ **Saleheen, J. and Shadforth, C.** (2006) *The economic characteristics of immigrants and their impact on supply*, Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin, Vol. 46, No. 4, (pp 374-385)

*the near future. This is because immigration has not been the only shock to the labour market recently.*⁵⁸

The Home Office/DWP submission to the House of Lords Select Committee on Economic Affairs in 2007 dismissed concerns that native workers would be displaced by migrant workers as ‘ill-founded’ based on the Bank of England’s work, and made clear that ‘immigration has clear benefits for both the labour market and the economy as a whole.’⁵⁹

Whilst there is thus some degree of consensus around the current economic benefit of migration, there is also caution and uncertainty about what the future will bring. The TUC, for example, has pointed to growing concerns that the high-level analysis hides specific instances where new migrants have affected employment rates or caused wages to be suppressed, and that central government grants to local authorities have underestimated the impact of migration. They also question whether migration damages developing countries or indeed causes harm to migrants and their families.⁶⁰

Homeless Link have explored the extent to which some A8 nationals in London rely on homelessness services because they are jobless and with no recourse to out-of-work benefits. Their 2006 survey found that 638 of 4356 people in contact with frontline homelessness agencies were from A8 countries.⁶¹

The Audit Commission has also published its assessment of the local challenges posed by migrant workers in a document spanning problems associated with migrant workers including exploitation, health and safety breaches, paying below the minimum wage, poor quality and/or overcrowded housing and destitution. In looking at community safety and community cohesion, they found that:

*‘There is little evidence that the increased numbers of migrant workers have caused significant or systematic problems in respect of community safety or cohesion. Despite this, community perceptions about migrant workers can be inappropriately negative. They are often confused with asylum seekers and refugees, and the tone of some national and local papers can encourage hostility.’*⁶²

Refugees as a distinct category of migrant

Refugees and asylum seekers are not the same as economic migrants and the difficulty of isolating separate groups within available data routinely receives comment in reports on the impact of migration. As shown above, systems, processes, entitlements and constraints vary depending on the category of migrant a person belongs to, and these will have a material effect on experiences and labour market outcomes.

Economic migrants who obtain entry to the UK as European nationals or on the basis of skill or sector-based work permits are able to work or look for work without delay. But the experience of asylum seekers and refugees is more complex and protracted. Asylum seekers claim protection from persecution and are accepted under humanitarian, rather than economic criteria. Their rights (and those of refugees) are governed by relevant UK legislation (see [Legal and policy aspects](#) section), and UK asylum legislation has become increasingly restrictive, with asylum seekers given access to fewer rights and entitlements while their cases are decided.⁶³

⁵⁸ **Blanchflower, D.G. Saleheen, J. and Shadforth, C.** (2007) [The Impact of the Recent Migration from Eastern Europe on the UK Economy](#)

⁵⁹ **Home Office and DWP** (2007) [The Economic and Fiscal Impact of Immigration](#)

, A Cross-Departmental Submission to the House of Lords Select Committee on Economic Affairs, Cm 7237, p. 11

⁶⁰ **TUC** (2007) [The economics of migration: managing the impacts](#)

⁶¹ **Homeless Link** (2006) [A8 nationals in London homelessness services](#)

⁶² **Audit Commission** (2007) [Crossing borders: Responding to the local challenges of migrant workers](#)

⁶³ [Migration: A Welcome Opportunity. A new way forward by the RSA Migration Commission](#), (2005), Annex 2. ‘UK Immigration System – Assessing Its Record,’ p. 45

As a result, a constant theme throughout legislation and regulation towards managed migration has been the emphasis on reducing asylum applications through such measures as tougher border restrictions, white-listing countries, criminalising travel with false documentation, etc. This usually comes with a reference to 'abuse' of the system. For example, the 2005 five-year strategy for immigration and asylum commented that 'since the late 1980s there has been significant abuse of the asylum system by those who are economic migrants but claim to be persecuted.'⁶⁴ As Sales comments: 'The trajectory of asylum policy has been to treat asylum seekers with suspicion, as a risk to society rather than as people themselves at risk.'⁶⁵ Certainly, there has been a steady stream of criticisms by, - among others - two successive Home Affairs Committees⁶⁶, that criteria have been applied very narrowly with too many examples of poor decision-making and an over-reliance on appeals to achieve correct decisions.⁶⁷ The 2003-04 Committee also questioned the clarity of the distinction between economic migrant and refugee:

*'The difficulty of distinguishing between economic and non-economic causes of migration is compounded by the fact that the two categories may frequently overlap. Some refugees are undoubtedly motivated solely by the impossibility of continuing to live without persecution in their own countries. Some may be fleeing persecution in their homeland and be seeking a better job and income than is available there. Some may primarily be seeking to improve their economic position which is limited by the political or economic instability in their country of origin. Yet others will have identified the asylum system as a means of gaining access to the economic prosperity and welfare systems of Western Europe.'*⁶⁸

The issue of blurred categories runs through discussions of refugee employment and integration and is highlighted in IPPR's work around public attitudes to asylum (and which reinforces earlier research around migrants as a whole).⁶⁹ They found that:

*'Asylum seekers are widely perceived to be responsible for housing shortages, for unemployment and for problems in accessing services such as health. The more socially vulnerable an individual is the more likely they are to feel anxious about the impacts of asylum seekers. These concerns are very largely based upon perceived rather than actual impacts, but they reflect the reality of social vulnerability.'*⁷⁰

Thus asylum-seeking is a distinct category of migration placed firmly, albeit uncomfortably, within an approach dictated by economic objectives of growth and modernisation. This places asylum as a subordinate theme in a programme aiming to comprehensively manage all forms of migration whatever their cause.⁷¹ The urge to manage – the 'new managerialism' associated with the New Labour administration - encourages performance targets as well as privatisation of key functions.⁷² The implicit

⁶⁴ Controlling our borders: Making migration work for Britain p. 17, para 26

⁶⁵ **Sales, R.** (2007) Understanding immigration and refugee policy: Contradictions and continuities, Policy Press, p. 152

⁶⁶ Asylum Applications, Home Affairs Committee, Second Report of Session 2003-04, HC218-1; Immigration Controls, Home Affairs Committee, Fifth Report of Session 2005-06, HC775-1

⁶⁷ Under the New Asylum Model (NAM) which became fully operational in March 2007, the UN Refugee Agency and UNHCR are partners in a Quality Initiative project to improve first-instance asylum decisions. The NAM aims to address a number of the criticisms made by the Home Affairs Committee.

⁶⁸ Asylum Applications, Home Affairs Committee, Second Report of Session 2003-04, HC218-1, p. 21

⁶⁹ **Dustmann, C. and Preston, I.** (2004) Racial and Economic Factors in Attitudes to Immigration, CReAM

⁷⁰ **Lewis, M.** (2005) Asylum: Understanding Public Attitudes, IPPR, p. 49

⁷¹ **Flynn, D.** (2005) 'New borders, new management: the dilemmas of modern immigration policies', *Journal of Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol 28, no 3, pp 463-90

⁷² **Duvell, F. and Jordan, B.** (2003) 'Immigration control and the management of economic migration in the United Kingdom: organisational culture, implementation, enforcement and identity processes in public services', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol 29, no 3, pp 299-336

danger is that the specifically humanitarian requirements of approaches to asylum and refugee integration become neglected or, as the previous section suggests, buried within the broader category of 'migrant'. While refugees have an important contribution to make to the economy, their claim to settle in the UK is primarily based on their reasons for flight from their country of origin, not on the skills they bring to the host country.

The asylum process and refugee employment

There are two aspects of the asylum process that have a particular impact on refugee employment: the areas chosen for dispersal; and employment limitations placed on asylum seekers whilst awaiting a decision.

The White Paper that preceded the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 - and which remains the basis of the treatment of asylum seekers - had two main objectives: to deter applications for asylum from those who were 'attracted' to the UK but were felt to be more accurately described as economic migrants⁷³; and to relieve pressure on local authorities, particularly those in traditional areas of refugee settlement in London and the South East. The system of 'dispersal' - a no-choice allocation of housing and support for asylum seekers in designated areas while their application is determined⁷⁴ - was set up to achieve the latter aim and remains the experience for most asylum seekers. Most of the administrative infrastructure around it, however, has since been reorganised, and the 2005 Five Year Strategy for Immigration and Asylum introduced a New Asylum Model which became fully operational in April 2007.⁷⁵

The areas for dispersal were originally anticipated to be chosen on the basis of a number of criteria, such as the existence of community networks and welfare support, but a swift timetable for implementation⁷⁶ effectively gave primacy to the single criteria of a supply of available and affordable housing, thus creating a strong correlation between dispersal areas and recognised areas of deprivation.⁷⁷ In addition, a structural reinforcement of the dispersal principle occurred under homelessness legislation where refugees and their families apply for housing and are recognised as homeless and in 'priority need'. This reinforcement took the form of Section 11 of the Asylum and Immigration Act 2004, which amended housing legislation⁷⁸ to establish a local connection to the area where the person was last supported. This meant that people wishing to apply to the local authority under homelessness legislation for housing in an area other than the one in which they were last supported (normally the dispersal area) would have to show that they had a stronger local connection to the other area. The anticipation is that this would encourage refugees to stay in their dispersal area when they make the transition from Home Office support to mainstream housing.

In practice, however, it is likely that there has been a significant level of 'secondary migration', particularly to London where Jobcentre Plus (JCP) 'marker' figures in 2006 (see Statistics section) showed that about half of all refugee clients are located.⁷⁹ There are, however, new policy shifts that reinforce the link with the dispersal area: the new Refugee Integration and Employment Service (intended to be operational from October 2008) will be restricted to service users who stay in the same area following the decision on their asylum claim. Anyone who moves to another area will not be eligible

⁷³ Home Office (1998) Fairer, Faster and Firmer: A modern approach to immigration and asylum

⁷⁴ See **Hynes, P.** (2006) The Compulsory Dispersal of Asylum Seekers and Processes of Social Exclusion in England, Middlesex University

⁷⁵ From April 2007, the New Asylum Model of regionalised end-to-end decision-making aims to speed up and improve the process. See <http://www.icar.org.uk/?lid=6002>

⁷⁶ NASS had only six months from its inception in March 2000 until dispersal went 'live' in October.

⁷⁷ **Carter, M. and El Hassan, A.** (2003) *Between NASS and a hard place*, hact; **Hynes, P.** (2006) The Compulsory Dispersal of Asylum Seekers and Processes of Social Exclusion in England, Middlesex University

⁷⁸ Section 199 of the Housing Act 1996.

⁷⁹ Response from the Mayor of London to Home Office consultation *A New Model for National Refugee Integration Services in England*, (2006)

for help from an alternative regional provider.⁸⁰ Thus refugees will continue to be connected to areas that have high levels of unemployment and deprivation.

The second key factor in relation to asylum policy is the decision to prevent asylum seekers from working whilst their claim is being determined. In theory, allowing asylum seekers to work immediately upon their arrival in the UK could save money for the taxpayer by reducing the financial and material support needed during their application period. However, present government policies are based on the belief that being allowed to work on arrival in the UK would act as an additional 'pull' factor in attracting more asylum seekers and economic migrants posing as asylum seekers to the UK.⁸¹

That is why in 2002 the government removed the concession that gave asylum seekers permission to work after they had been waiting over six months for a decision on their case. The withdrawal of this concession was made without consultation and engendered protest from refugee agencies and organisations promoting refugee employment. Such organisations also maintained that given the lengthy appeals process and the fact that many initial decisions may still not be made within six months, exclusion from the labour market could affect processes of integration. Many organisations also suggested that the public and asylum seekers themselves support the notion that, where possible, asylum seekers should be given the opportunity to provide for themselves and contribute to the economy⁸². In the event, a European Council Directive⁸³ was implemented in February 2005 allowing asylum seekers to apply for permission to work if they have not received a decision after 12 months⁸⁴.

There are continued, and increasingly vocal, calls coming both from grassroots advocates and campaigners and from mainstream organisations such as the TUC and Refugee Council⁸⁵ calling for asylum seekers to be able to work from six months or even earlier, and for the concession to be extended to those whose claims have been refused but who cannot be returned to their country of origin. A significant percentage of asylum seekers (25-30% over recent years) are eventually given refugee status or other forms of temporary protection (Humanitarian Protection or Discretionary Leave).⁸⁶ There is evidence that obtaining employment helps asylum seekers to settle in the host country, to improve English language skills, to interact socially, to fulfil the wish to contribute to their adopted country, and to support their families. It may also reduce the mental health problems resulting from war, trauma, family disasters and the problems of flight and exile⁸⁷. In addition, it has been argued that there has been no evidence put forward to prove that access to welfare benefits or employment are significant 'pull' factors influencing the decisions of asylum seekers.⁸⁸

Employment and integration

In a Refugee Council report around social capital and integration, the link between integration and employment is made within a recommendation to introduce a right to work from day one:

Respondents expressed their desire to contribute to British society, rather than always being the recipients of government support and charity. Not being able to work put financial and

⁸⁰ *Refugee Integration and Employment Service: Pre-qualification questionnaire*, September 2007, p. 4, section 2.1

⁸¹ See [David Blunkett's statement of 29th October 2001](#)

⁸² See for example, the position of [the Refugee Council](#)

⁸³ EC Directive 2003/9/EC of 27 January 2003

⁸⁴ Although there is currently a lack of Home Office data on the numbers applying for such permission.

⁸⁵ See Refugee Council Policy Response (2007) [Social Exclusion, Refugee Integration, and the Right to Work for Asylum Seekers and the *Let Them Work* campaign](#) launched by the TUC and Refugee Council in 2008.

⁸⁶ **Bennett, K., Heath, T., and Jeffries, R.** (2007), [Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 2006](#), London: Home Office, p.18.

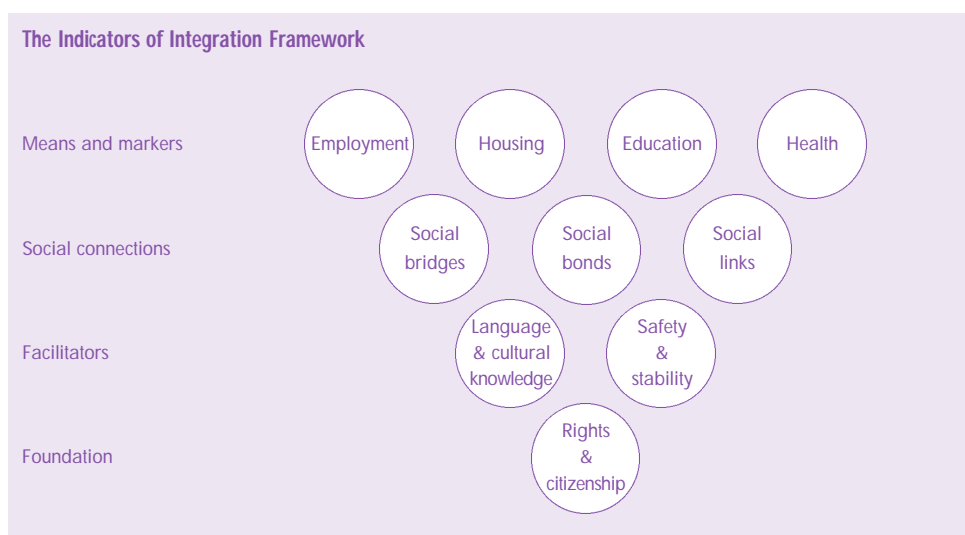
⁸⁷ See for example the findings of a recent report on migrants: **M. Shields and S. Wheatley Price** (2002) [The Labour Market Outcomes and Psychological Well-being of Ethnic Minority Migrants in Britain](#) Home Office Online Report 07/03

⁸⁸ **Bloch, A.** (2004) [Making it Work: Refugee employment in the UK](#), Asylum and Migration Working Paper, IPPR, p. 9

emotional barriers in the way of the integration process. Additionally, asylum seekers were unable to meet people, and develop the skills and experience necessary to utilise qualifications gained in their country of origin. Complex rules surrounding the right to work, and a lack of knowledge about these rules on the part of service providers were an additional barrier to asylum seekers joining the workforce. The granting of permission to work to the main applicant and their dependents emerged in the research as one of the most useful factors in aiding the integration of asylum seekers, with long-term consequences for the integration of refugees.⁸⁹

Those granted full refugee status or time-limited protection have been promised ‘quick and effective help to aid their integration into UK society’.⁹⁰ Recent policy frameworks for integration and employment – the Home Office refugee integration strategy and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) refugee employment strategy – have recognised the additional help that may be needed as a consequence of seeking asylum.⁹¹

Home Office commissioned research led to framework and indicators being developed in order to assess refugee integration, in the form of a set of ten domains grouped into four headings (below):⁹²



Within the framework, the importance of employment is central, not only as a separate indicator but also for its potential in underpinning or reinforcing many of the other indicators.

Successive reports have shown that refugees’ own goals largely match these indicators and suggest a timeframe whereby short term goals of meeting physical needs and attaining a level of security give way to medium and long term goals of achieving choice, satisfaction and acceptance.⁹³ The ‘psychosocial’ benefits of employment in giving refugees a sense of control over their own lives have also been

⁸⁹ **Atfield, G., Brahmhatt, H. and O’Toole, T.** (2007) Refugees’ Experiences of Integration, Refugee Council, p. 66. For the broader policy context but with specific reference to the refugees and the refugee sector see **Cooke, S. and Spencer S.** (2006) The Integration of Migrants: Engaging Employers, Unions and the Voluntary Sector. Oxford: Compas

⁹⁰ Home Office White Paper Secure Borders Safe Haven Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain (2002) p. 15

⁹¹ Different structures apply in London where the Mayor has responsibility for refugee integration through a high-level Board for Refugee Integration in London (BRIL). The link body for BRIL on the employment, training and enterprise element. Is LORECA (London Refugee Economic Action).

⁹² **Ager, A. and Strang, A.** (2004) Indicators of Integration: Final Report, Home Office Development and Practice Report 27

⁹³ **Macdonald, S. and Barnard, H.** (2006) Evaluating ERF and Challenge Fund Services report, Home Office Online Report 22/06; **Atfield, G., Brahmhatt, K. and O’Toole, T.** (2007) Refugees’ Experiences of Integration, Refugee Council and University of Birmingham

identified.⁹⁴ The importance of employment within integration continues to be recognised within government policy and the new model for provision of transitional support to those who have received a positive decision on their asylum claim envisages a much stronger role for employment-related activities.

In the consultation paper for the Refugee Integration and Employment Service, the Home Office acknowledge the diversity of definitions of integration and state their own as being:

*'the process that takes place when refugees are empowered to achieve their full potential as members of British society, to contribute to the community, to access public services and to become fully able to exercise the rights and responsibilities they share with other residents of the UK.'*⁹⁵

The theme of rights and responsibilities was taken up by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion in its 2007 final report, in considering how local areas can play a role in forging cohesive and resilient communities.⁹⁶ It argued that the rights and responsibilities approach which had previously been applied to welfare reform should be applied as a response to 'local and dynamic demographic change'.⁹⁷ The report found that traditional models of citizenship had been challenged from above and below: from 'above' by the process of globalisation that brings trans-national identities; and from 'below' by the increasing significance of local areas to peoples' source of identity.⁹⁸

It is at the level of local area that many of the concerns around integration have been felt, in particular around community cohesion, which emerged as a concept in the UK in 2001 following the disturbances in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham⁹⁹. As a development of the concept of multiculturalism, community cohesion places emphasis on separateness and difference being counterbalanced by the creation of interaction and commonalities, and it has been a driver of Government policy since.

Elsewhere, attention has been drawn to examples of community conflict arising when a new 'division', such as the arrival of new migrants, is overlaid on an already disadvantaged community.¹⁰⁰ IPPR research found that violent and aggressive conflict that was uncovered during their study of the reception and integration of new migrant communities was most often fuelled by 'alcohol and anti-social behaviour' and perceived to be one-off incidents not always related to the migrant's ethnic origin.¹⁰¹

The IPPR work also explored possible connections between labour market profiles and attitudes towards migrant contributions to the local economy, finding that negative sentiments around jobs and wages seemed to be concentrated among both skilled and unskilled groups and more apparent where labour markets are weak. In a more detailed exploration of six areas, concerns most commonly related to eastern Europeans in low skilled work.¹⁰²

The role of refugee employment, therefore, can be seen to stretch well beyond personal needs and is both a tangible and symbolic representation of acceptance and belonging within a receiving country, as well as an important component in becoming established within new networks.

⁹⁴ **Rutter, J. with Cooley, L., Reynolds, S. and Sheldon, R.** (2007) *From Refugee to Citizen: 'Standing On My Own Two Feet'*. A research report on integration, 'Britishness' and citizenship, Metropolitan Support Trust and IPPR

⁹⁵ Home Office (2006) *A New Model for National Refugee Integration Services in England: Consultation Paper*

⁹⁶ CLG Commission on Integration and Cohesion; Commission on Integration and Cohesion

⁹⁷ Our Shared Future, p. 62

⁹⁸ *ibid*

⁹⁹ Homepage of *Institute of Community Cohesion*, Coventry University

¹⁰⁰ **Lemos, G. and Crane, X.** (2004) *Community conflict: causes and actions*.

¹⁰¹ The reception and integration of new migrant communities (2007), IPPR

¹⁰² *ibid* pp 41-43

Refugee employment – the knowledge base

Information and statistics on refugee employment are generally, as discussed in the Statistics section, patchy, non-uniform and without the benefit of longitudinal analysis or large-scale data sets. Despite the recognised importance of the role of employment within integration, the known experience of refugees suggests more potential than fulfilment. Research on refugee employment has been fairly consistent since the mid-1990s in finding high levels of unemployment.¹⁰³ Of the refugees and asylum seekers that are employed, the majority work in catering and hospitality, interpreting, retail, cleaning, security, factory, administrative and clerical jobs.¹⁰⁴ Studies show that migrants from many ethnic minority groups have significantly lower levels of employment and wages than the UK-born population, with different ethnic groups experiencing greater success in the labour market than others¹⁰⁵. For example, figures for London show that economic inactivity is particularly marked for Pakistani and Bangladeshi migrants and for refugees.¹⁰⁶

In its preliminary employment strategy report from 2003, the DWP pointed out that the average refugee unemployment level was around 36% - around six times the national average¹⁰⁷. Although that figure is based on relatively old and small-scale work, there has been nothing to replace it. The DWP report and subsequent related documents also acknowledge the separate issue of refugee underemployment, whereby refugees are employed at levels well below their capability. However there are no statistics to show either the extent of underemployment or the level of disparity.

One of the reports used by the DWP to support these assertions was Home Office research published in 1995 which showed that out of a sample of 263 refugees only 27% of those seeking work were employed¹⁰⁸. Within this sample, men were more likely to be employed than women, with only 15% of women being in paid employment compared to 42% of men.

Despite the increasingly outdated nature of the report and its narrow statistical base, consequent research has consistently found similar, or higher, levels of unemployment. For example:

- Studies in 1997 found that of the groups surveyed, 73% were unemployed, 85% had never succeeded in getting employment¹⁰⁹ and at least 75% were unemployed after 2 years¹¹⁰.
- In 1998, it was estimated that 160,000 refugees and asylum seekers in Greater London were unemployed¹¹¹.
- The Peabody Trust and the London Research Centre in 1999 found, on the basis of a sample of 236 London-based interviewees that there was 68% unemployment among asylum seekers and 42% unemployment among refugees. Taken together, 51% of those seeking work were unemployed.¹¹² (This research was conducted when asylum seekers could apply for permission to work after 6 months)

¹⁰³ **Somerville, W. and Wintour, P.** (2006) 'Integration of new migrants: employment' in Spencer, S. (ed) *Refugees and other new migrants: a review of the evidence on successful approaches to integration*, COMPAS

¹⁰⁴ **Shiferaw, D. and Hagos, H.** (2002) *Refugees and progression routes to employment*, Refugee Council and PLRTEN; **Bloch, A.** (2002), *Refugees' opportunities and barriers in employment and training*, Department for Work and Pensions Research Report 179.

¹⁰⁵ **Kempton, J.** (2002) *Migrants in the UK: their characteristics and labour market outcomes and impacts*, RDS Occasional Paper No. 82, Home Office 2002; **Kyambi, S.** (2005) *Beyond Black and White: Mapping new immigrant communities*, IPPR

¹⁰⁶ **Somerville, W. and Wintour, P.** (2006)

¹⁰⁷ **Department for Work and Pensions** (2003) *Working to rebuild lives. A preliminary report towards a refugee employment strategy*

¹⁰⁸ **Carey-Wood et al** (1995) *The settlement of refugees in Britain*, Home Office Research Study 141, Home Office

¹⁰⁹ **North London TEC** (1997) *Refugee skills analysis*

¹¹⁰ **Michael Bell Associates** (1997) *Developments to assist refugees and asylum seekers towards earlier self-sufficiency*, report prepared for Refugee Action.

¹¹¹ **DTZ Pinda Consulting** (1998) *Labour market information for Objective 3 ESF Programme in London*

¹¹² **Barer, R.** (June 1999) *Refugee Skills Net: the employment and training of skilled and qualified refugees*, Peabody Trust and London Research Centre

- In a small scale project carried out for the Refugee Council in 2000¹¹³, 31 people were interviewed, of whom only five were in stable employment, two of them part-time. Of the five, two were unsatisfied with their work whilst the other three were in jobs they liked, mainly in their chosen careers. Those three had been in the UK for at least eight years and all had found it extremely hard to get the jobs. In one case an accountant had retrained in the UK and then spent four years in a series of underpaid trainee accountancy posts.
- Census country of birth information used by the Greater London Authority in 2005¹¹⁴ found that over one million Londoners in work were born outside the UK, representing 31% of all Londoners in employment. Migrants were found to have significantly lower employment rates (65%) than UK-born Londoners (78%) but there is considerable variation in rates within the migrant population. In some 'refugee countries of birth' (i.e. using a proxy between country of birth and refugee status) the unemployment rate was extremely high: for Somalia, only 16% were in work and DR Congo only 28% were in work.

Alice Bloch's research for the DWP¹¹⁵, which was published in 2002 and remains the largest survey of refugee employment, was the precursor to the current DWP policy framework, the Refugee Employment Strategy. It found that on the basis of a survey of 400 refugees and asylum seekers from five different countries, living in five regions in England and who had been in the UK for different lengths of time, the level of labour market activity was very low indeed. Only 29% of refugees were working at the time of the survey compared with 60% of the ethnic minority population as calculated using Labour Force Survey data. Within this sample, men were more likely to be employed than women, with only 15% of women being in paid employment compared to 42% of men. There were also differences in employment by country of origin. Tamils were the group most likely to be working, with 36% of these respondents in employment at the time of the survey, whilst Somalis were much less likely to have a job, with only 16% of respondents employed.

Of the selected sample of 400, one quarter of those in work had temporary posts, the majority not by choice but because they were unable to find secure work. The duration of such jobs was often quite short, with 25% working for less than six months. Nearly a third of both men and women were working part-time, half of these because they were unable to find full-time work. Nearly half of those working were working unsociable hours, before 8.30 a.m. and after 6.30 p.m. in the evening at least twice a week. Less than half of the refugees employed were entitled to holiday pay and only a third had been offered training in their job. The research concluded that in comparison with the wider ethnic minority population, refugees experience greater job insecurity and have fewer entitlements in the workplace. Importantly, refugees were also found to be earning on average 79% of what ethnic minorities in the UK earn on average per hour. More than one-tenth were earning less than the National Minimum Wage. However, there was a notable disparity between the five communities involved in the research. Even though Tamils were the most likely to be employed and Somalis were the least likely to have a job, the Tamils in the survey had the lowest average hourly rate whilst the Somalis had the highest.

Another report by Bloch¹¹⁶ continued to explore unemployment rates finding that Somalis level of employment rate was 38% compared to 48% for Turkish people, 78% for Iraqis and 81% for Zimbabweans.

Thus despite the lack of a clear or uniform dataset or precise consensus on proportions, there is consistent data indicating that refugees occupy a disadvantaged position in the labour market:

¹¹³ Feeney, A. (2000) 'Refugee Employment', *Journal of Local Economy*, Volume 15(4), pp 343-9

¹¹⁴ Greater London Authority (2005) *Country of birth and labour market outcomes in London: an analysis of labour force survey and Census data* and 2005 briefing at <http://www.london.gov.uk/gla/publications/factsandfigures/dmag-briefing-index.pdf>

¹¹⁵ Bloch, A. (2002) *Refugees' opportunities and barriers in employment and training*, Department for Work and Pensions Research Report 179

¹¹⁶ Bloch, A. (2004) *Making it Work: refugee employment in the UK*, Institute for Public Policy Research, Asylum and Migration Working Paper 2

employment rates are low and underemployment is high. However, in the absence of extensive and regularly collected information that can identify refugees as a generic category within employment studies and be analysed within that context, a more detailed picture of differential experiences is gleaned through the increasing catalogue of smaller-scale qualitative studies. The following sections are structured to reflect some of the key categories of focus and outline the main findings.

Skills-focused research

Further evidence of refugee *underemployment* emerges from a major postal survey conducted by the Home Office in 2002/3 on the skills, qualifications and English language competency of refugees¹¹⁷. This is the largest ever skills audit of this group and data collated from the 1,827 survey respondents contribute to an employment and education profile of this group in the UK. The responses were heavily influenced by the groups most predominant in the refugee population of the time – Iraq accounted for 50% of responses; Zimbabwe, 20%; and Somalia, 11%. Before leaving their country of origin, two-thirds of respondents were working, one in ten were students and less than 5% were unemployed. Almost half had ten years or more of education and over 40% held qualifications before they arrived in the UK. Three-quarters of respondents could read and write fluently or fairly well in their main language. Around a third rated their English language skills as either fluent or fairly good.

Within these headline figures were significant variations according to country of origin and gender. Zimbabweans tended to be highly educated with almost 90% having received at least ten years of education prior to departure and over 90% holding qualifications before they came to the UK. 98% were able to read and write in their main language either fluently or fairly well, and 93% considered their English language skills to be either fluent or fairly good. By comparison, only just over a quarter of respondents from Iraq had received ten or more years education, and the same proportion held qualifications prior to their arrival in the UK. 65% of Iraqis were able to read and write either fluently or fairly well in their main language, and only 12% considered their English language skills to be either fluent or fairly good. Among Somalis, over a quarter of men held qualifications prior to their arrival, compared to 3% of women. Iraqi women and men had higher levels of employment in their country of origin, whilst Zimbabwean men and women had lower levels.

A smaller audit carried out in Scotland¹¹⁸ of 523 refugees and asylum seekers in Glasgow and Edinburgh found that they were, for the most part, well qualified and possessed a broad range of technical and professional skills. The skills and experience respondents had gained and developed in employment before coming to the UK were varied, and included highly specialised skills in areas of medicine (for example, surgical skills and skills in midwifery, obstetrics and gynaecology), law and engineering as well as management experience, work in social and economic development, trades skills (such as carpentry and building) and IT. More than 75% of respondents had completed secondary school education and just over 95% had experienced some kind of formal education. Over 55% had completed college or equivalent, and around 21% had completed a university course. 42% spoke at least two languages and just over 20% spoke three fluently or fairly well. Over 90 languages were spoken in total.

A report for the GLA and Refugee Women's Association in 2002¹¹⁹ surveying 231 refugee women – 53 teachers, 51 nurses and 75 doctors – found that while 68% of women described themselves as employed in their country of origin, only 18% were employed in the UK. 68% had been educated to university level in their country of origin and 67% said they could speak English before coming to the UK. 63% expressed dissatisfaction with what they were doing now, with 90% saying they would like to practice their own profession.

¹¹⁷ Kirk, R. (2004) *Skills Audit of Refugees*, Home Office Online Report 37/04

¹¹⁸ Charlaff, L., Ibrani, K., Lowe, M., Marsden, R. and Turney, L. (2004), *Refugees and asylum seekers in Scotland: A skills and aspirations audit*, Scottish Executive and Scottish Refugee Council

¹¹⁹ Dumper, H. (2002) *Missed opportunities. A skills audit of refugee women in London from the teaching, nursing and medical professions* Mayor of London in association with Refugee Women's Association

Approaching the issue from a different angle, a University of London team looking at low paid employment in the capital¹²⁰ interviewed 341 low paid workers in four sectors of the London economy: contract cleaning on the London Underground and in offices, hospitality work, home care and the food processing industry. The researchers found that 90% of randomly selected workers were migrants, from a total of 56 countries. The research did not present information on immigration status. The findings did, however, show that almost half (49%) had acquired tertiary level qualifications before moving to the UK but that 90% were earning less than the GLA's Living Wage for London of £6.70 an hour, with average earnings of £5.45 per hour. The research also found that different parts of the low paid economy were dominated by particular migrant groups in terms of nationality and region, at least partly the result of strong migrant networks. 58% of the London Underground contract cleaners were from Ghana or Nigeria; 26% of the office cleaners were from Latin America; and 27% of hospitality workers from Eastern Europe.

There are numerous small-scale, local studies of refugee and asylum-seeker skills, usually to help towards provision of tailored local support. NIACE, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, has developed a skills audit methodology for use with refugees and asylum seekers.¹²¹ Other research has explored the situation of refugees from a particular country of origin.¹²² These projects concur with the larger surveys in that they identify differences based on each person's educational and work circumstances in countries of origin, and their experiences of flight and asylum.

Much of the activity in the field of refugee employment has increasingly become based around employment sectors - a consequence of the practical nature of such work in seeking to identify barriers and overcome them. The numbers included within sector-specific databases also provides some indication of unlocked potential, for example:

- In May 2006, the British Medical Association Refugee Doctor Database contained 1087 registered doctors, 77 of whom were working as doctors in the NHS and 230 assessed as being job ready. Nearly 100 refugee dentists and over 250 refugee nurses were on other specialist databases¹²³
- An informal survey carried out amongst voluntary sector providers in London in 2004 identified over 750 refugee teachers. The Refugee Teachers Task Force estimate that the number of refugee teachers in England may be upwards of 1500¹²⁴
- A UNHCR commissioned survey of 238 refugees in Greater London from 2002 recommended steps to facilitate greater contact between skilled refugees and potential employers in the international development sector.¹²⁵

As the bank of qualitative research around refugee employment expands, differences between categories and groups have emerged. The following headings provide an overview of key distinctions and issues that are likely to have a material impact on the refugee employment experience.

¹²⁰ **Evans, Y., Herbert, J., Datta, K., May, J., Mcllwane, C. and Wills, J.** (2005) Making the City Work: Low Paid Employment in London, Queen Mary College, University of London

¹²¹ See the NIACE refugee skills audit webpage

¹²² See for example, **Bloch, A. & Atfield, G.** (2002) *The Professional Capacity of Nationals from the Somali Regions in Britain*. London: Refugee Action and IOM

¹²³ **NRIF Employment and Training Subgroup** (2006) Rebuilding Lives - Groundwork: Progress report on refugee employment, Home Office and Employability Forum

¹²⁴ **Employability Forum** (2006) *Draft report to DfES*, Refugee Teachers Task Force

¹²⁵ **Michael Bell Associates** (2004) Refugees and the London Economy: Maximising the Economic Potential and Impact of London's Refugee Communities

Professionals and entrepreneurs

A key distinction is between professional and non-professional refugees. Professionals (covering doctors, nurses, teachers, social workers, engineers, academics, etc) are recognised as having a range of specific issues including:

- the struggle to prove qualifications where certification may have been lost or left in flight and where copies are hard to come by
- assessment of qualifications and the need to re-prove professional ability where qualifications are not recognised in the UK
- the need to master technical language in order to work in a UK setting
- the need to tackle the impact of an enforced career break due to the experience of flight and asylum, and to update skills and qualifications
- the inappropriate nature of Jobcentre Plus support for this group, which is designed for those with lower levels of skills and is highly target-driven and thus with limited flexibility¹²⁶

In early consultations around the new model for refugee integration services (see [Legal and policy aspects](#)), there was an expectation that refugee professionals would receive separate, tailored employment advice and support. This was dropped in the latter stages in favour of a 'standard' integration and employment service which could adapt to all needs.

The UK has been involved in campaigns to recruit overseas professionals to fill gaps in the availability of qualified staff e.g. doctors, teachers, nurses and IT specialists. Conversely, there have also been situations where there is over-supply, e.g. junior doctors. But at the same time, qualified refugees already settled in the UK and with the right to work have been unable to obtain suitable jobs, and so programmes have been developed to assist academics, teachers, engineers and health professionals.¹²⁷

There is significantly more research around health workers than for any other group of professionals, and a number of programmes have been developed to overcome obstacles that prevent refugees from re-qualifying and obtaining jobs¹²⁸. The obstacles include the difficulty of studying for and passing the necessary International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and the 2-part Professional and Linguistic Assessments Boards (PLABs) tests; financial difficulties; rigid General Medical Council (GMC) regulations; lack of access to library facilities; lack of hospital placements; being required to take up unsuitable job offers; and discrimination. Even once qualified, barriers to career progression may continue to cause problems for refugee health professionals¹²⁹.

There are differing views as to the role of entrepreneurial activities and aspirations. Whilst the aspiration towards self-employment has been articulated quite widely¹³⁰, the extent to which it has been filled is

¹²⁶ **Carter, M., Lukes, S. and El Hassan, A.** (2006) *Climbing a Mountain? The experiences of refugee professionals in West London*, Refugees into Jobs and Employability Forum

¹²⁷ See [Council for Assisting Academic Refugees](#); [Employability Forum teachers webpage](#); [Raise/Refugee Engineers Database](#) [Employability Forum health professionals webpage](#)

¹²⁸ There is significantly more research around health workers than any other group. See **Berlin, A., Gill, P. and Eversley, J.** (1997) 'Refugee doctors in Britain: a wasted resource' *British Medical Journal*; **Stewart, E. and Nicholas, S.** (2002) *Refugee doctors in the United Kingdom*, *British Medical Journal*; National Health Service Executive (NHSE) Advisory Group on Medical and Dental Education and Staffing - Overseas Doctors Subgroup *Report of the Working Group on Refugee Doctors and Dentists* (2000); **Winkleman-Gleed, A.** (2006) *Migrant Nurses*, Radcliffe Publishing

¹²⁹ **Stewart, E.** (2003) *A Bitter Pill to Swallow: Obstacles Facing Refugee Doctors in the UK*, paper presented at 1st Annual Student Conference on Forced Migration, Oxford, 22 February 2003

¹³⁰ **McKay, S.** (2006) *Motivations and aspirations – refugees in a changing environment*, Working Paper No. 9, Working Lives Research Institute, London Metropolitan University; **Kofman, E. and Lukes, S.** (2005) [Mapping Research on Refugees in the Borough of Islington](#), London Borough of Islington; **Lyon, F., Sepulveda, L. and Syrett, S.** (2005) *Refugees, New Arrivals and Enterprise: their contribution and constraints*, CEEDR, Middlesex University

open to debate. Lyon et al also found mixed levels of satisfaction among entrepreneurs, including greater dissatisfaction expressed by professionals.¹³¹ Longitudinal research in London, Birmingham and Slough found that often hopes for self-employment had not been met when the researchers made subsequent visits, and that the small number of business start-ups had subsequently failed.¹³² Reasons for failure include limited access to institutional credit and business start-up funding, and poor remuneration for those who do start up a business.¹³³ There is some indication, however, that localised and small scale entrepreneurial activities are thriving, one example being women in Islington using their social networks to sell clothes they had sewn.¹³⁴ The Refugees into Business website, set up in 2006 through a partnership led by the Refugee Council, provides resources and information for refugees and business advisers.

Barriers to employment and improving access

A consensus of key findings shows that:

- labour market participation is low, and significantly lower than for other BME groups
- informal labour market participation is believed to be higher
- many refugees with higher skills and/or professional qualifications are only able to find work at levels below their skills and are therefore underemployed
- wages and conditions for those who do find work are also poorer
- literacy and formal education are mixed with both the highly skilled and very poorly skilled
- jobs found in the UK are not always commensurate with skills and qualifications
- there is some clustering around ethnic ‘enclaves’ in formal and informal economy activity
- barriers and obstacles – as shown by the table below – have proved to be extensive and enduring

Two studies have developed a typology of four groupings of barriers, as shown in the table below:¹³⁵

Personal, social and economic issues	Community language provision English language skills Health issues (physical and mental) Gender (issues to specific to either men or women) Age (youth and old age) Social isolation Vulnerability
Knowledge, information and advice	British culture Enterprise Information, advice and guidance Labour market knowledge, job search skills and job brokerage
Qualifications and credentials	Assessment and recognition of experience and qualifications Background checks Financial exclusion Personal and professional references Professionals

¹³¹ **Lyon, F., Sepulveda, L. and Syrett, S.** (2005) *Refugees, New Arrivals and Enterprise: their contribution and constraints*, CEEDR, Middlesex University

¹³² **McKay, S.** (2006) *Motivations and aspirations – refugees in a changing environment*, Working Paper No. 9, Working Lives Research Institute, London Metropolitan University

¹³³ **Carter, M., Lukes, S. and El Hassan, A.** (2006) *Climbing a Mountain? The experiences of refugee professionals in West London*, Refugees into Jobs and Employability Forum

¹³⁴ **Kofman, E. and Lukes, S.** (2005) Mapping Research on Refugees in the Borough of Islington, London Borough of Islington

¹³⁵ From **Schreiber, S.** (2006) LORECA Mapping Exercise. Examining the numbers, locations and employment, training and enterprise needs of London's refugee and asylum seeker communities, LORECA; following **Archer, L., Hollingworth, S. and Maylor, U.** (2005) *Challenging Barriers to Employment for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in London*. University of Sussex

	Skills and training Work experience
Structural issues	Consultation and leadership Discrimination and racism Childcare/Early years provision Employer awareness Policy environment Underemployment

Studies have suggested that asylum seekers and refugees have higher levels of education, skills and qualification than the UK average, high levels of motivation, and that the majority are young males of working age. Given these characteristics, it is likely that, along with other categories of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers have a great deal to offer their host country if initial obstacles can be overcome.

There are differences in the interpretation of the experiences of certain categories and groups. Refugee women, for example, have been found to suffer greater work exclusion where they have entered the UK as dependents on their husband's asylum claim. Among the specific reasons for this are the loss of support systems from family and friends and the informal childcare arrangements that these provide; and relative lack of access to community and professional networks compared to male refugees.¹³⁶ In addition, awareness and use of statutory provision may also be affected by gender, with women being less likely to visit a Jobcentre and more likely to ask family and friends about jobs than men¹³⁷. Conversely, for those that are more settled and/or looking for less skilled work, 'female' skills or segregated job types may find more success in an economy dominated by the service sector.¹³⁸

There is much less debate about the central importance of language. The acquisition of English language is one of the indices of integration for refugees. Although many asylum seekers arrive in the UK speaking some English, evidence suggests that the lack of adequate language skills is the single most serious obstacle to obtaining employment¹³⁹. Echoing findings relating to migrants in the UK generally¹⁴⁰, research into the employment of refugees and asylum seekers suggests that English language proficiency is the factor most positively associated with labour market participation. Furthermore, those with poor knowledge of English that do manage to find work are generally confined to low-skilled work as generally the more skilled the work the higher the level of language skills required. Research published by the DWP found that among the 400 asylum seekers and refugees surveyed, English language training was felt to be the most useful type of help needed to gain the employment they wanted.¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ **Dumper, H.** (2002) Missed opportunities. A skills audit of refugee women in London from the teaching, nursing and medical professions Mayor of London in association with Refugee Women's Association. Also see <http://www.refugeewomen.org.uk/>

¹³⁷ **Bloch, A.** (2002), Refugees' opportunities and barriers in employment and training, Department for Work and Pensions Research Report 179.

¹³⁸ ¹³⁸ **Rutter, J. with Cooley, L., Reynolds, S. and Sheldon, R.** (2007), From Refugee to Citizen: 'Standing On My Own Two Feet'. A research report on integration, 'Britishness' and citizenship, Metropolitan Support Trust and IPPR

¹³⁹ **Schellekens, P.** (2001) *English Language as a Barrier to Employment, Education and Training*, DfEE; **Barer, R.** (1999) *Refugee skills-net: the employment and training of skilled and qualified refugees*, Peabody Trust/London Research Centre; (2001), DfEE; **Shiferaw, D and Hagos, H.** (2002) *Refugees and progression routes to employment*, Refugee Council and PLRTEN; **Bloch, A.** (2002), Refugees' opportunities and barriers in employment and training, Department for Work and Pensions Research Report 179

¹⁴⁰ See for example, **Haque, R.** (2002) *Migrants in the UK: A Descriptive Analysis of their Characteristics and Labour Market Performance*, DWP

¹⁴¹ **Bloch, A.** (2002) Refugees' opportunities and barriers in employment and training, Department for Work and Pensions Research Report 179

However, research also indicates that simply identifying English language proficiency as a problem is not enough. There is evidence that the availability, quantity, level, flexibility, vocational content and progression of courses and training have been inadequate.¹⁴² Moreover the proposal to withdraw ESOL for asylum seekers until they receive a positive decision suggested that the importance of language for cohesion and integration had not been fully accepted. The controversy created by that proposal led to a partial retraction in March 2007¹⁴³ and increased recognition of the importance of language to community cohesion. The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills then explored this through a consultation on focusing ESOL provision on community cohesion, with a report due in mid-2008¹⁴⁴.

Likewise, means and strategies for finding employment differ according to a number of factors including length of residence, proficiency in English and experiences or trust of mainstream agencies. Mainstream employment services are more likely to be used by those that have been in the country for a longer period and have a better command of English. However, the take-up and knowledge of these services still remains low. In Shiferaw and Hagos' research, only 11% of those interviewed had used their Jobcentre to find a job, and the same number had accessed refugee agency career advisory services.¹⁴⁵ Bloch's research found that of those who had been able to find work in the UK, 11% had used statutory services to find their most recent job, 7% had used private agencies and 5% had used community groups. Just under half of those who were working or looking for work had heard of schemes run by Jobcentre Plus. Of the statutory schemes offered, New Deal was the most widely known.¹⁴⁶

Informal personal contact is reported as the most common means of job seeking and gaining advice on employment, although personal contacts are more likely to be made through friends rather than kinship networks, which were commonly used in countries of origin.¹⁴⁷ RCOs and refugee-specific or specialist agencies are also preferred, although there are concerns that RCOs at the smaller end of the scale could struggle to keep up with changes in legislation, policy and practice. They are also often very precariously funded and might have difficulty managing the expectations on their capacity.¹⁴⁸

Methods of job-seeking may also vary according to country of origin. For example, Somalis used Jobcentres more than respondents from Iraq, Sri Lanka, Kosovo or Turkey, but were less likely than these other nationalities to have asked friends about employment opportunities¹⁴⁹ (although this might be linked to very low employment rates for Somali refugees). These findings illustrate the significant challenges faced by voluntary and statutory agencies in making their services accessible to a diverse refugee and asylum-seeking population.

¹⁴² **Schellekens, P.** (2001) *English Language as a Barrier to Employment, Education and Training*, DfEE; **Griffiths, D.** (2003) *English language training for refugees in London and the regions*, Home Office Online Report 14/03; **NIACE** (2006) *'More than a language...'* Final report of the NIACE Committee of Inquiry on English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), NIACE

¹⁴³ With a concession for eligibility for both FE and ESOL if the asylum claim or appeal has not been decided after six months; or the person has been refused asylum but is unable to their country of origin and are receiving Section 4 support. See *Refugee Council ESOL and FE Briefing (2007)* and the *Learning and Skills Council website* and *NIACE website*

¹⁴⁴ <http://www.esolconsultation.org.uk/>

¹⁴⁵ **Shiferaw, D and Hagos, H.** (2002) *Refugees and progression routes to employment*, Refugee Council and PLRTEN;

¹⁴⁶ **Bloch, A.** (2002), *Refugees' opportunities and barriers in employment and training*, Department for Work and Pensions Research Report 179.

¹⁴⁷ **Shiferaw, D and Hagos, H.** (2002) and PLRTEN; **Bloch, A.** (2002), *Refugees' opportunities and barriers in employment and training*, Department for Work and Pensions Research Report 179.

¹⁴⁸ **Schreiber, S.** (2006) *LORECA Mapping Exercise. Examining the numbers, locations and employment, training and enterprise needs of London's refugee and asylum seeker communities*, LORECA; **Garneledin-Ashami, M., Cooper, L. and Knight, B.** (2002), *Refugee Settlement: Can communities cope?*, CES; **Griffiths, D., Sigona, N. and Zetter, R.** (2005) *Refugee Community Organisations and Dispersal: Networks, resources and social capital*, Policy Press

¹⁴⁹ **Bloch, A.** (2002)

The role of volunteering and work placements

The potential of volunteering activities to support community cohesion and integration has, by contrast, been recognised by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion¹⁵⁰ and is anticipated as having an enhanced role in refugee integration within the new RIES model taking effect in 2008 (see [Legal and policy aspects](#)). Relevant studies have also examined the extent to which volunteering and work placements may provide a route into work.¹⁵¹ Refugees and asylum seekers often view volunteering in a functional sense to gain skills and experience towards paid work, as well as the oft-articulated wish to 'give something back'.¹⁵² Research into women refugees found that it increased their confidence and that they benefited especially from the training, mentoring and English-speaking practice, and valued gaining a reference to prove their work experience.¹⁵³ Whilst the benefits in terms of work experience, social and cultural acclimatisation, and integration may be self-evident, there are also concerns that refugee community volunteering can confine people in a sub-sector of an 'ethnic economy'¹⁵⁴ with limited prospects for paid employment.¹⁵⁵

Carey-Wood *et al* (1995)¹⁵⁶ and Rutter *et al* (2007)¹⁵⁷ both identified a 'marked correlation' between career success and the length of time spent in the UK. In Rutter's survey of 30 people, none of those who had arrived after 1989 had secured a well-paid or high status job, and many of those who had achieved career success had spent long periods in low-skilled jobs where their qualifications were not utilised.¹⁵⁸ Elsewhere, a local study of Somalis in Sheffield covering 249 respondents found that length of stay had not helped their chances and that cultural and racial barriers, language and childcare remained as long term obstacles.¹⁵⁹

Barriers are experienced differentially by respondents at different stages of settlement in the UK. Whilst lack of familiarity with the UK system was mentioned by many of those who had been in the UK for less than five years, this barrier was perceived to be less of a problem by those who had been resident in the UK for longer. For this group, racial discrimination was perceived to be more of a barrier to participation in the labour market.¹⁶⁰

Until the other recognised obstacles identified above are removed by improved policy and job preparation services, there is insufficient evidence to judge whether employers may be discriminating against refugees on racial grounds. Most studies based on qualitative interviews with refugees,

¹⁵⁰ Commission on Integration and Cohesion

¹⁵¹ **Phillimore, J. and Goodson, L.** (2005) *Employability initiatives for refugees in the EU: building on good practice*, University of Birmingham; **Wilson, R. and Lewis, H.** (2006) *A part of society: Refugees and asylum seekers volunteering in the UK* Tandem Communications and Research. The role of mentoring in this process is brought out by **Refugee Mentoring & Employer Network** (2002) *Quality Guidelines on Mentoring for Refugees*

¹⁵² **Islington Training Network** (2007) *Asylum seekers and volunteering in Europe - a transnational report based on experiences in Hungary, France and England*; **Wilson, R. and Lewis, H.** (2006); **McKay, S.** (2006) *Motivations and aspirations – refugees in a changing environment*, Working Paper No. 9, Working Lives Research Institute, London Metropolitan University

¹⁵³ *Women refugees - from volunteers to employees*, (2005) Working Lives Research Institute and Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit, London Metropolitan University

¹⁵⁴ **Kofman, E. and Lukes, S.** (2005) *Mapping Research on Refugees in the Borough of Islington*, London Borough of Islington

¹⁵⁵ **Carter, M., Lukes, S. and El Hassan, A.** (2006) *Climbing a Mountain? The experiences of refugee professionals in West London*, Refugees into Jobs and Employability Forum

¹⁵⁶ **Carey-Wood J., Duke, K., Karn, V. and Marshall, T.** (1995) *The Settlement of Refugees in Britain*, Home Office Research Study 141, Home Office

¹⁵⁷ **Rutter, J. et al** (2007),,

¹⁵⁸, *ibid*

¹⁵⁹ **Hamm, T.** (no date) *The Education, Training and Employment Needs of the Somali Community in Sheffield*, Policy Research Institute, Leeds Metropolitan University, quoted in **Kofman, E. and Lukes, S.** (2005) *Mapping Research on Refugees in the Borough of Islington*, London Borough of Islington

¹⁶⁰ **Bloch, A.** (2002) .

however, reflect a perception of racial prejudice and recent research is increasingly supporting that case.¹⁶¹ Employers on the other hand, identify key problems as confusing permission to work documentation, the negative public image of refugees, and the lack of familiarity and comparability of qualifications and work experience.¹⁶² These may be exacerbated by the removal of indefinite leave to remain and its replacement with temporary leave, as employers may seek employees elsewhere rather than risk penalties under Government initiatives to prevent illegal working.¹⁶³ The deterrent asylum regime and the climate within which migration is discussed – as well as public confusion between categories of asylum seekers, refugees and economic migrants – does not facilitate refugee employment.

Lessons for research, strategy and policy

The Compas report on evidence of successful approaches to migrant integration¹⁶⁴ sets out the indicators beyond employment, unemployment and inactivity measures that are relevant to employment:

- rates of under-employment (defined as having professional and university qualifications but being in manual employment)
- the number of part-time workers wanting a full-time job
- the levels of self-employment
- the number of days lost to sickness/absence
- the level of unionisation within a workplace
- the number of days of training and/or the amount spent on training per employee
- the proportion of migrants in senior positions
- levels of job satisfaction

A better understanding of refugee employment experiences would also be gained with information from the following three periods of the asylum seeking process:

- pre-asylum experiences and situations, such as the type of area the person is from (rural, urban, etc.); their level of education; their vocational or professional training and qualifications achieved, etc.
- asylum-seeking experience including the impact on work of circumstances leading up to leaving the country of origin; the length, type and experiences of the journey to the UK; and the length, type and experiences involved in claiming asylum and reaching a positive decision on the asylum claim
- How becoming a refugee impacts on labour market outcomes including (but not confined to): the abrupt switch from asylum-specific provision to mainstream support around income and housing; the legacy of dispersal or periods in detention; issues around employer confidence in checking Home Office documentation and temporary leave; labour market conditions in the area settled; and the psychological impact marking the end of the asylum process.

Information at that level of detail would enable a broader and deeper picture to emerge that would be able to isolate particular trigger points or effects which might in turn suggest other appropriate policy interventions.

Refugee employment issues cannot be detached from the global events that have shaped the asylum process and continue to shape diasporic experience and life choices. Within this context, we can

¹⁶¹ See most recently **Rutter, J. et al** (2007; **Dhudwar, A.** (2006) *Refugee perceptions and experiences of discrimination in the labour market*. Working Lives Research Institute, London Metropolitan University

¹⁶² **Hurstfield, J., Pearson, R., Hooker, H., Ritchie, H. and Sinclair, A.** (2004), *Employing Refugees: Some Organisations' Experiences*, Institute of Employment Studies/Employability Forum. See also

<http://www.employabilityforum.co.uk/> and <http://www.niace.org.uk/research/asr/projects/progress-gb.htm>

¹⁶³ **LORECA** (2006) *Impact of Temporary Leave to Remain on Refugee Employment Prospects*. LORECA

¹⁶⁴ **Spencer, S.** (ed.) (2006) *Refugees and other new migrants: a review of the evidence on successful approaches to integration*, Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, University of Oxford.

identify as general tendency willingness on the part of refugees to consider career changes; suspend personal career ambitions; negotiate the balance between short, medium and long term goals; and actively pursue jobs, training and/or further education. Underpinning this tendency is the renegotiation of place and identity.

This taster of the increasing knowledge about refugee employment issues provides some useful general points for policy development:

- there is such variety and diversity of situations and experiences that no single approach could address refugees' employment needs – a range of support, services and provider-types is necessary
- likewise, the extent and complexity of barriers and hurdles faced lends itself to an holistic view of need, particularly when thinking about broader settlement and integration
- a focus on refugees is only one side of the equation – many issues will only be addressed through shifts in the policy and practice of other actors

Statistics

There is no escaping the difficulties surrounding refugee employment statistics. Whilst there have been, and continue to be, improvements in the quality and depth of information, they have tended towards small scale surveys or incomplete subsets within data that is unable to distinguish between different categories of migrant. As such they often come with caveats and only provide partial or incomplete results that are unable to contribute to any national baseline data for reference. Compared with Australia¹⁶⁵ and Canada¹⁶⁶ there remains very little statistical data about refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. The need for more robust research and data collection – and this is not confined to employment issues - is an almost constant theme running through the associated literature, including some of the larger pieces of work around migration.¹⁶⁷

As refugees are not a homogenous group for employment (or any other) purpose, there are significant methodological and ethical issues in attempting to identify and approach refugees as a subgroup for employment-related research or statistics collection. Whilst some information is collected to reflect the broader category of migrants, this includes an extremely diverse range of characteristics and employment situations from seasonal agricultural workers to highly-skilled global workers. The majority of work in this area is found in grey literature or smaller scale research on specific topics (some of which includes self- or oddly-selected samples). Some progress is being made but there is still nothing that approaches 'official' statistics on labour market participation or outcomes.

This section explores some of the difficulties with reference to existing data sources. Available statistics around refugee unemployment and underemployment are included within the relevant Key Issues sections.

The problem of refugee employment statistics

There are many reasons for the lack of robust, national data around refugee employment, unemployment and underemployment. Firstly, there is a difficulty created by the extensive use of ethnicity as a way of exploring disadvantage, which tends to conceal the position of refugees. Furthermore refugees may be reluctant to identify themselves as such, either because it is an episode of their life that they don't wish to be continually identified by; or due to a fear of how information might be used, especially in relation to their refugee status or personal safety. The following issues go some way to explain why information is so patchy.

Operational relevance

Statistics are often gathered where there is an operational relevance to do so, whether to aid the work of a particular government department, to inform policy, for programme delivery, or where the group in question presents sufficiently large policy challenges to warrant the use of such resources. In this context refugees may not fit the criteria being a highly diverse group with divergent experiences who, following granting of status, have no departmental locus and are likely to be marginal to the mainstream work of any department. After a final decision on an asylum claim has been taken and following an initial phase of supported integration, the Home Office withdraws from its role as a provider of housing and

¹⁶⁵ **Vanden Heuvel, A. and Wooden, M.** (November 1999) *New settlers have their say: how immigrants fare over the early years of settlement - An analysis of data from three waves of the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia*. The National Institute of Labour Studies, Flinders University of South Australia; report prepared for the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs.

¹⁶⁶ See the work of [CERIS - the Ontario Metropolis Centre](#), a cross-university research centre.

¹⁶⁷ **Glover, S. Gott, C. Loizillon, A. Portes, J. Price, R. Spencer, S. Srinivasan, V. and Willis, C.** (2001) *Migration: an economic and social analysis*, RDS Occasional Paper No. 67, Home Office; **Dustmann, C. Fabbri, F. Preston, I. and Wadsworth, J.** (2003) *The Local Labour Market Effects of Immigration in the UK*, Home Office Online Report 06/03; **Gott and Johnston** (2002) *The migrant population in the UK: fiscal effects*, RDS Occasional Paper No. 77, Home Office; **Haque, R.** (2002) *Migrants in the UK: A Descriptive Analysis of their Characteristics and Labour Market Performance*, DWP; **Kempton, J.** (2002) *Migrants in the UK: their characteristics and labour market outcomes and impacts*, RDS Occasional Paper No. 82, Home Office

subsistence. The refugee retains links with the Department for purposes of overseeing their permission to stay, but in all other respects becomes free to go about their own business and with recourse to the services of public agencies as they require. The supported integration phase immediately following a positive decision, marks the last stage at which a universal and reliable contact point is theoretically possible. In 2004, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) introduced a 'marker' to its computer system in order to identify the number of clients on their books belonging to different groups deemed vulnerable, including refugees. However identification as a refugee is voluntary and only applies to those who claim benefits or seek employment through Jobcentre Plus.¹⁶⁸ The absence of refugee-specific data leads to a reliance on the use of country of birth information as a general proxy for immigration status.

Even where there might be operational relevance, many national surveys and administrative data sources relating to refugees, including the Labour Force Survey, may contain insufficient numbers for meaningful analysis or include only a very limited number of specified refugee nationalities.

'Stocks' and 'flows'

Data on both 'stocks' and 'flows' are necessary for a more dynamic analysis of the position of refugees in the labour market. 'Stock' is the established refugee population and 'flow', the numbers coming or going in any year. As highlighted above, there are limitations with respect to stocks and localised labour market information in general, as well as the particular issue of local flows. The latter are especially relevant in the aftermath of the dispersal policy, which was designed to remove the pressure of asylum claims converging in London and the South East (due to the existence of refugee networks and greater employment opportunities). It remains unclear the extent to which refugees are moving to London following a positive decision.¹⁶⁹

Definition

'Stock' information will also be affected by issues of definition. For the purposes of employment, this is slightly more straightforward in that asylum seekers are generally not allowed to work (see [Legal and policy aspects](#) for exceptions) so the category refers to those who have received a positive decision on their asylum application. However, this might not include other adults of working age who have joined the refugee as part of their family, and would later *exclude* those who acquire citizenship or whose status has changed for other reasons (such as moving to the UK after gaining refugee status in another EU country).

In addition, there are issues of temporal definition and what definitions are used over time. For example the IPPR report *Beyond Black and White*¹⁷⁰, adopts the definition of a new migrant in 2005 as 'those who arrived in the UK in 1990 or later.' Their reasoning being that 1990 'represents a point after which international migration begins to assume different patterns [and] ... the UK experienced a clearer rising trend in net immigration, a rise in asylum applications and the diversification of immigrants' countries of birth beyond the Commonwealth and European Union.'¹⁷¹ Their definition, therefore, is someone who arrived in the UK in the preceding 15 years. By contrast, the National Refugee Integration Forum Employment and Training Subgroup¹⁷² recommended that the focus of monitoring should be on those who have received status since 2001, 'as their experiences reflect the more recent labour market and policy context, including the national dispersal programme which started in 2000'.¹⁷³ Definitions are, therefore, arbitrary in the sense that there is no common or clear agreement and the definition used partly depends on the purpose to which the information will be put.

¹⁶⁸ **Marshall, H. and Joyce, L.** (2007) *Disadvantage Marker Study*, A report of research carried out by BMRB Social Research on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions, Research Report no. 451

¹⁶⁹ See footnote 75

¹⁷⁰ **Kyambi, S.** (2005) *Beyond Black and White: Mapping new immigrant communities*, IPPR

¹⁷¹ *ibid* p.vii

¹⁷² **NRIF Employment and Training Subgroup** (2006) *Rebuilding Lives - Groundwork: Progress report on refugee employment*, Home Office and Employability Forum

¹⁷³ *ibid* p. 8

Self-definition is a related but separate issue. Some people may continue to define themselves as refugees long after receiving their status, and possibly beyond being granted UK citizenship. Others may immediately eschew the label, preferring not to be defined by that episode of their life. This has significance for both the methodology for making contact with refugees (what points or means of contact are available) and in terms of representativeness (would the research and policy messages be different if other refugees were included).

Disaggregated data

The reasons outlined above mean it has not so far been possible to reliably disaggregate information specific to refugees from data collected on migrants. Work on migrant fiscal contributions carried out for the Home Office¹⁷⁴ found that migrants made a net contribution of £2.5 billion based on 1999/2000 figures, but acknowledged that disaggregated results would uncover significant differences between groups of migrants. A 2007 study aimed at updating these figures took a different approach to calculate that migration contributed around £6 billion to output growth in 2006.¹⁷⁵ But the study moved away from attempts to isolate refugee contributions, in keeping with the more general trend of combining migrant groups and focussing on scale. Elsewhere, the Labour Force Survey, which is the only source of statistics on the foreign national population living and working in the UK, and the International Passengers Survey (IPS), are often the basis for statistics on migration and the workforce. However in neither case can they adequately identify refugees within the data.

Census data

Country of birth information from the Census is a source of national and local authority area statistics and is usually held within local authority planning departments as well as at national level. For example, the BBC/IPPR Born Abroad website uses census data to explore where immigrants in Britain come from and where they live. It also includes statistics about the economic performance of different immigrant groups.¹⁷⁶

There are wide variations in the extent to which refugee populations are acknowledged and integrated within population analysis and planning activities, although there is the potential, as has been shown in Islington,¹⁷⁷ to use this as the basis for maps based on 'output areas' of about 200 people and supplemented by other local data.

However, there are a number of limitations to the data. Firstly, ethnic minorities may be undercounted. Secondly, country of birth may not always be a true reflection of nationality – for example, there are high numbers of Germans in national figures reflecting people being born to British forces stationed there. Thirdly, country of birth information cannot reflect the sometimes complex connection with where people were born, so for example a Kurd might be born in Turkey, Iraq, Iran or Syria, but describe themselves as Kurdish. Furthermore, decennial census data relies on projections through its cycle and may suffer from having insufficient 'flow' figures, particularly in relation to refugees. 'Second generation refugees', the UK-born children of refugees, will not be identified at all.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ **Gott and Johnston** (2002) The migrant population in the UK: fiscal effects, RDS Occasional Paper No. 77, Home Office

¹⁷⁵ The Economic and Fiscal Impact of Immigration, a Cross-Departmental Submission to the House of Lords Select Committee on Economic Affairs (2007), Home Office and DWP. The figure is based on the calculation that from the start of the economic half-cycle in 2001 Q3 to mid-2006, migration added around 0.5% per annum to the working age population, stimulating growth in total output. Average output growth over this period was around 2.7% per annum and migration is estimated to have contributed around 15-20% of this (p.11).

¹⁷⁶ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/uk/05/born_abroad/html/overview.stm

¹⁷⁷ **Kofman, E. and Lukes, S.** (2005) Mapping Research on Refugees in the Borough of Islington, London Borough of Islington

¹⁷⁸ Employment among second generation refugees is discussed in Enneli P., Modood T., and Bradley, H. Young Turks and Kurds: a set of 'invisible' disadvantaged groups, London: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Otherwise it is a largely under-researched area.

Future statistics

There are a number of newer sources of information that have the potential to plug some of these gaps.

- National Insurance numbers (NiNO's) can be very useful as indicators of presence, especially as they are more recent than census data. They can also give a good idea of new entrants to the labour market, although the figures for some countries will be affected by the fact they have a lower proportion of people in work due to age, disability or caring responsibilities. In this instance specialist knowledge of national groups needs to be applied.
- The RIES casework approach may provide more information, or at least an access point for longitudinal work, when it becomes more widespread as part of the new approach to integration that is due to become operational in October 2008. Under the new arrangements, employment advice will begin within two months of the positive decision on the asylum claim and the UKBA regional asylum case owners will notify the RIES of eligible service users¹⁷⁹, thus potentially providing a source of case study or contact information.
- The DWP refugee marker will grow in strength as a cumulative resource for deeper analysis than is currently possible. The most recent information coming from the DWP refugee marker shows that there have been around 80,000 markers on the Jobcentre Plus data management system since it was established in 2004.¹⁸⁰ An evaluation of a number of 'markers' on DWP information systems found that the refugee marker was being used more accurately and reliably than others.¹⁸¹
- The Inter-Departmental Task Force on international migration statistics reported in 2006 with recommendations aimed at improving information about migrants and migration throughout the period leading up to the next census in 2011.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ **BIA** (2007) *Refugee Integration and Employment Service, pre-qualification questionnaire*

¹⁸⁰ **Hayward, S.** (9 March 2007) Presentation at *Refugee Employment on Merseyside: Championing Change* conference

¹⁸¹ **Marshall, H. and Joyce, L.** (2007)

¹⁸² **Allnutt, D.** (2006) *Review of Home Office publications of Immigration Control Statistics*, National Statistics Quality Review Series, Report No. 46, Home Office

Contacts

The following are mainly *national* organisations whose work relates to employment issues. At the end you will find a list of Strategic Migration Partnerships, which act as umbrella bodies for all organisations and activities relating to refugees and asylum seekers on a *regional* level.

Africa Educational Trust p://www.acas.org.uk/00845 600 3444845 600 3444

Support for students and refugees of African descent including the African Refugee Women's Project, which provides free educational and vocational training advice for unemployed African women refugees and asylum seekers. The Project also provides advice on how the law affects refugees and asylum seekers' education and training entitlements. AET also works with other organisations to represent the views and concerns of refugees and asylum seekers concerning education, training and employment.

Asset UK

Asset UK (Asylum Seekers' Skills, Empowerment & Training) was a multi-partner project led by the Refugee Council which closed in 2005. Aimed at assisting asylum seekers and staff working with them in main dispersal areas, the website still has various relevant publications available.

British Dental Association

The BDA runs a number of projects aimed at assisting refugee dentists, including the Refugee Dentist Steering Group and the Refugee Dentist database, listing refugee dentists in the UK. Both the latter projects are run jointly with the Refugee Council.

British Medical Association (BMA)

Hosts a database of refugee doctors as well as regular briefings and newsletters and a list of useful links for refugee doctors.

Council for Assisting Refugee Academics (CARA)

CARA aims to assist university teachers or researchers who have lost their jobs as a result of political, racial or religious discrimination and have become refugees in the UK.

Department of Health

The ROSE website is an NHS-led project aimed at helping refugee health professionals in the UK to establish a career. In London the Building Bridges partnership has taken forward this work.

EASI

Empowering Asylum Seekers to Integrate (EASI) was a Development Partnership within the EQUAL programme (see below) which worked closely with PRESTO. It consisted of fourteen organizations and aimed to tackle discrimination in the labour market. Its website gives access to a number of relevant products including an education, employment and training guide for refugees and asylum seekers.

European Council on Refugees and Exile

The ECRE is a Pan-European network of refugee NGOs which carries out policy work and research on refugee issues in Europe, including employment.

Education Action International

Specialized support for asylum seekers and refugees on education and employment in the UK through their Refugee Education and Training Advisory Service (RETAS), including an online series of FAQs and practical guides to a range of sub-topics.

Employability Forum

Independent organization which works with the voluntary sector, employers and government in order to promote 'the employment of refugees and integration of migration workers in the UK'. It provides

practical help through events and projects and seeks to influence government policy, where necessary, to dismantle obstacles to employment.

EQUAL

A programme supported by the European Social Fund aimed at combating discrimination and inequality in the labour market, the final phase of which ran from 2004 to 2007. Its work was grounded in the four pillars of the European Employment Strategy, one of which covered the specific needs of asylum seekers. EQUAL operated by bringing key partners in a geographical area together in Development Partnerships (DPs). There were four DPs focused mainly on refugees, with one focussing on asylum seekers.

General Medical Council

The GMC Help refugee doctors to requalify: The GMC waives the £145 fee for refugee doctors to sit part one of the Professional Linguistics Assessment Board test, as well as other discounts and payment facilities.

London Refugee Economic Action

Now part of the London Development Agency's Equality and Diversity Team, LORECA works to improve refugee employment, training and enterprise within the context of the economic regeneration of London. LORECA serves as the link body on employment matters to the Mayor's Board for Refugee Integration in London. The website includes a directory of services for refugees and asylum seekers in London, a library of refugee employment resources, a mapping exercise of London's refugee population, and briefings on refugee employment issues.

National Institute for Adult Continuing Education

NIACE aims to promote the study and general advancement of adult continuing education. It has conducted research on refugees and asylum seekers and developed a number of projects relating to the education and employment of this group.

National Academic Recognition Information Centre for the United Kingdom

NARIC advises on how overseas academic qualifications relate to UK qualifications. The service covers a wide range of countries, and can advise on the standing of international qualifications with UK professional bodies.

Presto Legacy Website

As one of EQUAL's Development Partnerships the Partnership for Refugee Employment through Support, Training and Online Learning (PRESTO) brought together 11 organisations between 2004 and 2007 to test new models to improve the employment prospects of refugee professionals in the health, education, engineering and enterprise. To ensure the learning from the project is not lost, PRESTO has developed the Presto Legacy Website, divided into Refugee Case Studies, Partnership Lessons, Policy Papers, and Products Produced. Of particular relevance is their Advice Guide for Advisors, and the 12 final partnership evaluation briefings

ProgressGB

The Progress GB Development Partnership was again funded by EQUAL and consisted of eleven organisations across seven regions, led by NIACE (see above), who worked together between 2004 and 2007 to 'address barriers to appropriate employment for refugees and migrants.' The legacy website contains a series of reports that came out of their work, including the final report 'Routes to Integration and Inclusion: New Approaches to Enable Refugee and Migrant Workers to Progress in the Labour Market',

Refugee Action

An independent national charity that aims to enable refugees to build new lives in the UK. It provides employment and training advice as part of its services, including the Horizons volunteer project, which seeks to match employers' needs and refugee skills.

Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit

As part of the Department of Applied Social Sciences at London Metropolitan University, RAGU supports refugees with high level education or professional qualifications to move into employment and education through individual guidance, work placements, specialist training and short courses. They also publish their own research and guides on education and employment for refugees and asylum seekers.

Refugee Council

The Refugee Council's Learning Integration Unit (LIU) offers learning, development and employment opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers, including work-related training and support, and study grants. They also offer information on entitlements relating to training, education and employment in relation to refugees and asylum seekers.

Refugee Engineers Database

This Database is an online resource, for professional refugees who have engineering qualifications and experience and are looking for work in their field of expertise in the UK. The database works like an employment agency but also offers extra support to help the engineers with CVs, interview techniques and work placements as well as the more traditional job searches.

Refugees into Teaching

Refugee Council site with project details, policy and information briefings etc.

Scottish Refugee Council

Provides advice, information and assistance to asylum seekers and refugees in Scotland. Their education and employment section provides details of a variety of current employment and training related projects, including work experience for asylum seekers and a refugee doctors' database. It also links to the main findings of a 2004 skills audit of refugees and asylum seekers in Scotland.

Welsh Refugee Council

Performs a similar function to the Scottish Refugee Council. Their site contains a research report on the Refugee Skills Audit carried out by the Welsh Refugee Council under the auspices of the EQUAL programme.

Strategic Migration Partnerships**East of England**

EERA Strategic Migration Partnership

East Midlands

East Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership

London

(pending launch of London Strategic Migration Partnership end 2008)

Board for Refugee Integration in London

North East

North East Strategic Migration Partnership

North West Regional Strategic Migration Partnership

Paul Harris, One North West

paul@nwnetwork.org.ukv

Scotland

[COSLA Strategic Migration Partnership \(CSMP\)](#)

South East of England

South East Strategic Partnership for Migration

SESPM@portsmouthcc.gov.uk

South West

[South West Region Strategic Migration Partnership](#)

Wales

[Wales Strategic Migration Partnership](#)

West Midlands

[West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership](#)

Yorkshire and Humberside

[Yorkshire & Humberside Regional Migration Partnership](#)

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