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Integration? The perceptions and experiences of refugees in Yorkshire and the Humber

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Abstract:

Using data generated in three focus groups with refugees resident in the Yorkshire and Humber region this report explores refugees' perceptions and experiences of integration. Initially, refugees' understandings of integration are explored. Discussions then consider three potentially important areas of integration, that is, refugees' interactions with their neighbours, activity in the paid labour market and contact with formal welfare agencies. In spite of the barriers that many of them routinely face, the refugees interviewed clearly value the opportunity to rebuild their lives in a new location free from persecution.

1. Introduction

The study on which this report is based was commissioned in Spring 2008 to inform the Yorkshire and Humber Regional Migration Partnership's (YHRMP) new regional Integration Strategy for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (2009). The analysis presented draws directly on data generated in three focus groups with refugees resident in Yorkshire and Humber, England. This small scale qualitative study was one element of a wider consultation process carried out by the YHRMP with a range of relevant stakeholders; it has three linked aims,

- To explore refugees' understanding and experiences of integration.
- To identify and explore factors that may enhance or inhibit the process of refugees' integration.
- To allow the voices of refugees to inform understandings of integration.

Subsequent discussions draw on data generated in the three focus groups to provide theoretically informed, empirical evidence about refugees' experiences and expectations in respect of integration. As Robinson notes "since integration is individualised, contested and contextual it requires qualitative methodologies which allow the voices of respondents to be heard in an unadulterated form" (1998a :122 in Castles et al, 2002). Focus groups were chosen as the research

instrument for two main reasons. First, a group setting may be more informal than a one on one interview. This is often beneficial in encouraging people to speak, as participants feel more at ease and are able to draw upon the support of their fellow group members. Second, focus groups allow researchers to increase the sample size within a qualitative study without major increases in time and financial cost. This last point was particularly pertinent as the funding available for the study was limited to payment of refugee participants' travel expenses and refreshment costs.

Section 2 of the report offers some contextual background. It combines a brief overview of the literature on refugees and integration with a discussion of recent, relevant UK policy developments. The three routes to becoming a refugee that are currently available to individuals seeking asylum in the UK, and the impact that these have on welfare (including specific packages of integration support), are also set out. In section three the sampling strategy, and the methods used to generate and analyse the qualitative data produced are outlined. Section 4 presents the refugee participants' views on the notion of integration. It begins by highlighting what refugees in Yorkshire and Humber consider to be the key elements of their own, ongoing process of integration and then moves on to explore the extent to which refugees mix with other members of their local community. Paid employment is the focus in section 5. Here the majority of refugees spoke of the barriers they face when attempting to secure paid work. Section 6 examines issues that arise when refugees interact with various agencies of the welfare state. Two particular sectors of welfare provision, housing and social security benefits, dominated discussions within the focus groups and a number of problems within these particular areas are discussed. Finally, in the conclusion (section 7) the key findings from the study are set out.

This report focuses primarily on structural aspects (see section 2) of the integration of refugees resident in Yorkshire and Humber i.e. it considers refugees experiences and expectations in relation to the local neighbourhoods in which they reside, the paid labour market and mainstream welfare systems. The role of more informal migrant networks and refugee community organisations¹ in supporting and sustaining refugees fall outside its remit and are, therefore, not considered; nonetheless, the important part that they can play within the refugee integration process is recognised. It is hoped that the insights presented within the report, which are grounded in the perceptions and experiences of refugees, will inform future service development and planning and, ultimately, lead to an improvement in the lives of refugees both within and beyond the Yorkshire and Humber region.

2. Background: integration and refugees

Integration should be recognised as an ongoing process played out by both migrants and the host society over time in a range of social settings e.g. local communities, ethnic groups, wider society (Castles et al. 2002). The UK government defines refugee integration as,

“The process that takes place when refugees are empowered to achieve their full potential as members of British society, to contribute to the

community, access public services and to become fully able to exercise the rights and responsibilities that they share with other residents in the UK” (HO, 2006a :3).

Integration is a complex, contested and multidimensional concept (Castles et al. 2002; Musterd, 2003; Phillips, 2006a). Differences between ‘structural integration’ that is the increased participation of migrants in the institutions of their new society (e.g. the paid labour and housing markets, social welfare systems) and ‘acculturation’, (the processes by which migrants may develop their identities/practices over time within a host society) have been noted (Castles et al 2002; Korac, 2003). Others have highlighted spatial segregation, ‘cultural clustering’ and impact that social inequalities may have in impeding integration (Musterd, 2003) There has also been an attempt to design a set of transferable generic indicators of integration that draws on the literature relating to ‘social capital’ (Ager and Strang, 2004). Many previous studies (e.g. Castles et al. 2002; Griffiths et al, 2005; Perry 2005; Spencer, 2006; Atfield et al 2007) have recognised that the integration of refugees is rarely a straightforward process. Furthermore, some consider the notion of integration itself to be problematic in that it may be seen as a requirement imposed on migrants who are required to ‘fit in’. Furthermore, hostile asylum policy and negative press coverage (Statham, 2003) may also inhibit integration and exacerbate the harassment and racism that remains a feature of many refugees’ lives (Quilgars et al. 2003; Craig et al. 2004a, b; Phillips, 2006b).

2.1 Policy developments: three routes to becoming a refugee

Within the generic population of refugees resident in England three ‘ideal type’ categories of refugee, each granted status as a refugee under different elements of the asylum system, and with varied access to specific packages of support and rights to remain can be identified, they are:

1. **‘Asylum Process’ refugees:** people who fled their country of origin and were subsequently granted status as a refugee following a successful application for asylum under the New Asylum Model (NAM) whilst resident in England; up to five years temporary leave to remain in the first instance; rights to access the Sunrise/new integration services.
2. **‘Gateway’ refugees:** are granted refugee status prior to entering England, following a period living in a refugee camp outside their country of origin; groups with a shared ethnic background, or country of origin, are usually resettled together in a common location; indefinite leave to remain; orientation programme prior to arrival and access to dedicated support services on arrival in England.
3. **‘Case Resolution’ refugees:** long standing asylum applicants (previously referred to as ‘legacy’ cases), families in the first instance, who entered England pre NAM; granted indefinite leave to remain under the government’s recently implemented (2007) Case Resolution scheme, which seeks to resolve the backlog of old asylum applications outside of the NAM by June 2011; no rights to dedicated integration support services.

Among the group of migrants routinely referred to as ‘refugees’ important differences exist in respect of access to systems of integration support and rights

to remain (Brown, 2008). From October 2008, a new system of regionally delivered Refugee Integration and Employment Services aims to ensure a uniform level of support for 'Asylum Process' refugees in England (HO, 2006a; BIA, 2007). Utilising the personalised case management approach, which is central to the NAM (rf. HO, 2005; Refugee Council, 2006), this support is to be established around three key elements. First, building on pilot 'Sunrise' schemes (HO, 2006b; Mackay, 2006), a case worker will offer each client 20 hours 'intensive casework support' to develop individual personal integration plans and set and monitor (via 3 month review interviews), personalised integration targets. Caseworkers also conduct skills audits, signpost clients to mainstream welfare and ESOL providers, arrange interpreting services and liaise with agencies re opportunities for paid employment/voluntary work. Second, employment help (career advice, training, access to job experience schemes), for refugees, is to be prioritised. Third, a mentoring service based on the 'Time Together' franchise (Esterhuizen and Murphy, 2007) will match clients with a mentor from the receiving community to develop language skills and promote interaction with host community services.

Alongside the above developments the Government remains committed to expanding the 'Gateway Protection Programme' (HO, 2005). Under Gateway, the government, in partnership with the UNHCR, identifies up to 500 refugees who are living in refugee camps abroad and grants them formal refugee status and indefinite leave to remain prior to resettlement somewhere in the UK. A separate system of integration support exists for refugees who enter under this scheme. Gateway category refugees undergo an orientation programme prior to entry and on arrival they have access to a pre arranged package of localised support (including a community development worker), to help facilitate their integration (HO, 2004). Central government funds are given to local authorities, the NHS and voluntary sector agencies to provide dedicated support services for one year following settlement. Between 60 and 80 refugees with a shared ethnic background are resettled into a host community at any one time (HO, 2006c).

Furthermore, in July 2006 the government announced a 'Case Resolution' process to clear the backlog of 400,000 unresolved asylum cases that predate the NAM (HO, 2007a; Refugee Council, 2007). In the first instance priority will be given to families who have been in the asylum system for at least 3 years. Due in part to lack of funds, there are currently, no plans to allow 'Case Resolution' refugees access to additional integration support services (IAP, 2007). Furthermore, local authorities will have to apply for additional government money to ensure that families given the right to remain do not become homeless in the immediate period of transition to refugee status (HO, 2007b).

Inequalities that exist between these three categories of refugee may influence their subsequent integration into wider society. First, 'Gateway' and 'Case Resolution' refugees are granted indefinite right to remain. However, since September 2005 'Asylum Process' refugees are granted a maximum of 5 years temporary leave to remain with a potential expectation that they will return to their country of origin if the situation subsequently improves.ⁱⁱ Second, due to a higher per capita level of funding, 'Gateway refugees' have enjoyed a better quality of integration support compared to 'Asylum Process' refugees (Cramb and Hudek, 2005) and 'Case Resolution' refugees may be even more comparatively

disadvantaged as they have no rights to specific integration support. Third, the more managed resettlement process for Gateway refugees, where people with a shared ethnic/cultural heritage move together and preparatory work with the host community is sometimes undertaken, may ease their transition into English society. In contrast, the majority of 'Asylum Process' and 'Case Resolution' refugees have been subject to compulsory dispersal to, at times, hostile locations (Anie et al. 2005) Furthermore, the previous systematic exclusion from mainstream provisions experienced by asylum seekers subsequently granted 'Asylum Process' or 'Case Resolution' refugee status can have negative knock-on effects for any subsequent integration into their host communities (Castles et al 2002; Phillips, 2006a).

3. Methods: generating the data

In order to capture the diversity of possible refugee experiences' in respect of the three routes to refugee status identified, three focus groups were conducted in May 2008 with refugees resident in Yorkshire and Humber. Participants in each of the separate groups were sampled so that all members of shared a common refugee category. That is, participants in Focus Group 1 were Case Resolution refugees, Focus Group 2 was made up of Asylum Process refugees and Focus Group 3 consisted of Gateway refugees. A total of twenty eight refugees participated in the three focus groups, nine were female, nineteen male. Periods of residence varied from six months to over five years and they had arrived in the UK from ten countries of origin (refer to tables 1-3 in appendix 1 for further participant details).

As the study was aiming to explore a range of similar themes across the three focus groups, a common question guide was used to structure each session (rf. appendix 2). The question guide was not used to impose a rigid framework on discussions rather it was used to ensure that the sessions remained focused. A degree of flexibility was encouraged, in that if an issue that related to later issues arose spontaneously, it would be explored at that point in the session.

Each focus group lasted between two and two and half hours. Food and drink was provided and participants' travel expenses were paid. The focus groups were conducted in English as due to the limited funding available it was not possible to have paid interpreters present. However, the majority of refugees who participated in the sessions were able to understand and communicate effectively in English. Where individuals were unable to speak English, additional time was allowed for fellow refugees to act as informal interpreters to translate questions/discussions and feed back the opinions of their non-English speaking colleagues to the group.

3.1 Handling/analysis of data and ethical considerations

Interviews were recorded on audiotape and extensive additional field notes were taken by an assistant convenor. Tapes were then transcribed verbatim and the resultant transcripts analysed using grid analysis and thematic code and retrieve methods, (Mason, 2002; Ritchie et al., 2003). A Nud*ist 6 software package was used to assist this process.

Two basic principles, namely informed consent and confidentiality (see Lewis, 2003) underpinned the fieldwork. A short introductory session preceded each focus group. The focus group convenors were mindful of the potential for the discussions to cause discomfort for some participants and time was spent to put people at ease. Immediately prior to each session participant information sheets were handed out (and translated as requested), to explain the purpose of the study (appendix 3). Participants were then given the opportunity to pose any questions or queries to the convenors.ⁱⁱⁱ it was emphasised that they could withdraw from the interview at any time if they so wished. The issues of informed consent and confidentiality were then outlined and respondents were asked formally to record their willingness to participate by filling in a consent form (see appendix 4). Strategies to maintain anonymity included secure storage/restricted access to data and the removal of identifying locations and personal details from research outputs.

4. Refugees' perceptions and experiences of integration

When asked to consider what integration meant to them, the majority of refugees interviewed outlined broadly optimistic opinions of the integration process. In all three focus groups the idea of making a contribution to the new community in which they found themselves was strongly expressed. In many respects refugees were keen to emphasise the positive potential of their new lives. Involvement in the local community, fitting in with their new neighbours and contributing via paid work were all seen as important aspects of integration and ultimately steps on the way to becoming 'British'.

I think integration means to feel comfortable in the place wherever you live. To liase with every aspect of life and to get involved in that community and maybe know exactly where to go whenever you have any problem... Yes, getting involved with all the things that happen in that area... we are still working our way, trying to be part of British society at the moment... So we can call ourselves as British. 2CR^{iv}

Integration is good interaction and also the possibility to contribute to the community in which we live... Where I have a place and where there is a place for me... a bundle of belonging is not the only thing a refugee brings, there are also transferable skills. 7AP

Integration for me is very important. We live in this country so we have to know the culture and the systems and you have to follow the rules and regulations... you live in this country you have to respect the people... you have to pay tax and things. 25GW

If you have a skill then you can work among the British people. You can feel you are British. 5CR

The desire for structural integration i.e. "participation of newcomers in society's main institutions" (Phillips, 2006b :540), most notably in the paid labour market, through the utilisation of existing skills was strongly and consistently expressed. Alongside this a number of participants spoke of the importance of not forgetting who they were before persecution forced them to seek a new life outside their country of origin. Such sentiments are summarised by refugee 17GW who spoke of a period of transition and being allowed to adapt the customs and practice of

his homeland alongside others from different cultures with whom he now resided in Yorkshire and Humber.

In [location] I'm allowed to give what I have. Like the potential, the ability, the skills I have to put into practice... So it's a kind of a two way street... Integration is a transition from home to home. So I'm from a different place and I consider here to be my home.. [you] bring your old self to your new home this is kind of where I consider integration to be... My culture is very precious to me. But I also value other cultures. The main reason why I say [location] is my home is because I value the local culture but I feel they've given me the chance to celebrate my own culture. So in that situation, then this is my home. 17GW

Although positive views were very much to the fore in discussions, the comments of a minority of respondents indicated that, for some, integration was not as straightforward a process. Two barriers in particular were discussed. First, the inability to speak and/or understand English was identified as particularly problematic in hindering the process of integration. For example a fellow Gateway refugee stated “We are refugees, not British, because our level of [English] language is not the same standard”.^{24GW}. Elsewhere another refugee noted,

I've no problem as long as I can speak the language. That's my point I speak the language, I communicate with people. 4CR

Participants were clear that an inability to understand English was detrimental to integration. Debates about the extent to which service providers have a duty to provide interpreters for refugees and discussions about the desirability of making English language proficiency a requirement for those who wish to settle in England are well rehearsed. The evidence from this study would tend to support the view that refugees themselves identify the ability to communicate in English as a vital tool for enhancing their integration and avoiding problems with service providers (see section 6.2 below).

The second barrier to integration highlighted by focus group participants has little to do with the refugees themselves, rather it centres on the reluctance of some members of the host community to interact with the new arrivals in their midst. When one refugee spoke of being given ‘the cold shoulder’, it was an experience that his contemporaries readily identified with,

I find it very difficult sometimes when I sit on the bus. Often when I am sitting there, no white person will sit next to me. As a last resort, when there is no other seat then he comes and sits like this. [Demonstrates turning his back and pulling away in mock fear] 9AP[All agree and laugh loudly].

As Castles et al. (2002) note integration is an ongoing process that involves both migrants and members of the host society interacting in a range of social settings. One such important setting is the immediate local community in which refugees live. Insights into refugees’ relationships with their immediate neighbours are discussed below.

4.1. Members of the local community?

In spite of the optimism initially outlined in many of the refugees’ perceptions of integration, as discussions in the focus groups evolved it became apparent that

participants' experiences within their local communities were mixed. Across the three focus groups accounts of negative relationships with neighbours slightly outnumbered positive ones. Those refugees who relayed more positive accounts encountered neighbours who were open to newcomers entering their local community.

I don't have a problem with my neighbours... I'm not getting close to them...But they have children. My daughter she is happy to play with them all day. Next door she says, come and have a cup of tea with me. But after that it is hello, hello. 1CR

Many English [i.e. white] friends and black friends. They are very good friends. 8AP

Additionally, several participants in two of the focus groups highlighted the church as a place in which friendships with members of the host community flourished. The benefits of such friendships clearly transcended the spiritual dimension and provided more secular support. One refugee spoke of a friend from church providing material support to help furnish their new accommodation on being granted of refugee status. Others spoke of how links to their fellow church goers offered opportunities for the routine, reciprocal relationships that often help to establish friendships to become established. For example,

Another group of people I always see is people from the church... I'm lucky they are nice, they are friendly. I'm sometimes invited and I invite. Somehow they provide some support. 7AP

Participants also commented on how their initial expectations of 'neighbourliness' gave way to feelings of frustration with new neighbours who, whilst not hostile, preferred to remain socially, if not physically, detached. Cultural differences meant that many found the reticence of their new English neighbours hard to reconcile with the more open approaches to communal life that were the norm in their countries of origin.

The culture we come from it's a very different culture. For example, if you went to my home, people would take your hand, they will greet you, they will welcome you, [and say] 'You are welcome to anything you want, ask for it. If you have any problems please come in, feel free to come'...I've been in my house for 5 years now- frustrating. The neighbours they don't even say hi to you. ...Sometimes its frustrating you know, I mean being in a neighbourhood and you don't know who are your friends, like a normal human being... Because people always like to be friendly with people, its about coming round. And he's [the neighbour] just no conversation. 27GW

My neighbour I think we've not said more than hi. [all laugh] That's the first word I learnt from my neighbour. That's all. After 2 years we're still hi. They might think that I can't speak their language. They try not to talk to me and I don't try my best to reach them... So we don't see each other very much. Sometimes people, I've just got the feeling they are afraid of Asian people as well...But [maybe] they just like to be themselves? We have also learned how to live by ourselves as well. We did that very quickly! 19GW [all laugh]

Friendship and/or ambivalence were not, however, the only responses from new neighbours experienced by refugees. As previously noted negative accounts of relationships with neighbours were more prevalent and hostility, harassment and

resentment were the common themes expressed by members of all three focus groups. Indeed, such issues dominated discussions within Focus Group 1 whose members had been given leave to remain under the recent (2007) Case Resolution Scheme.

When I was still an asylum seeker there were quite a lot of days when I felt very offended... They used to do they come and knock on my door. Or just bang the window with the ball. When I tried to say not to do it they shouted. 2CR

Where I am living I get abuse and harassment. They come and smash my windows. They have done it twice. I applied to the council and ask them to move me to other accommodation. 10AP

You try to mix with them but you find that the kids even the way they talk to you, they say oh you are asylum. The minute you meet someone, see you are a black person. 'Oh you are an asylum seeker'. Before you can talk, 'I don't want to talk to them'. I lock the door and forget... A bit of harassment off the guy who was the neighbour. I can't really put it like [believe] English people are like that... That guy I think he had a problem with alcohol or drugs. He came with an axe on my door.... I put it [his problematic behaviour] on him. It was his problem of drinking and drugs.... The other neighbours I think are friendly. 6CR

Whilst indifference and hostility from within local communities is not universal the harassment of newly arrived migrants is a common feature of many previous studies across the UK (Quilgars et al. 2003; Craig et al. 2004a, b; Perry, 2005) and presence in this study should come as no surprise. The data from refugee 6CR above, (aside from demonstrating her personal resilience and remarkable understanding), is important because it highlights the possibility that violence and resentment can and does occur simultaneously with more neighbourly acts from others in the local community. This was vividly illustrated by one refugee who reported,

I'm in between different people.. to my right they don't even want to see me. They say to the kids- 'inside!, inside!'. The other ones are so friendly. When I moved in they came to say, 'If you have problems please let us know. Sometimes you might face difficulties. Please feel free to come'. They come and knock and say, 'OK?' They are so friendly. But the other ones even if you greet them they will not speak. 9AP

Research into the perceptions of host community members highlights that many local residents are misinformed about the funding of housing and support services made available to asylum seekers and refugees. Many view such migrants as competing (on advantageous terms) with more established local residents for scarce resources and believe them to be an additional strain on already overstretched services (Cook et al. 2008). The fact that the majority of refugees are housed in areas characterised by high levels of deprivation (Phillips, 2004) and that sections of the media (Statham, 2003) have constructed refugees as 'undeserving' economic immigrants have also been identified as significant factors in promoting hostility within host communities. Resentment based on such views was evident within this study.

I had a problem with one of my neighbours, because when I came here I spent 1 year at college and I started working. But he didn't know, he thought

I was an asylum seeker on benefits. Then he came down and said, 'I'm working, you are eating my money, I am paying the tax.' I said 'Why are you saying this to me?' He said, 'Because you people come here and get benefits'. I said, 'No I work and I've been working all through. I pay my rent and fuel, I do everything'. The area my kids play out on, he thought they don't have as much right to because [he thought] we were on benefit. I took this complaint to the Housing Office. They came back to me and we went together to discuss it and he realised that he was wrong. Because all he knew was that all asylum seekers, all refugees are people on benefits. Then he apologised. He was so embarrassed he moved out. 17GW

As noted in previous discussions, accessing paid work (so that individuals can make a success of their new life and also contribute to the society that has given them refuge), is a key priority for many refugees. Asylum seekers on the other hand are not allowed to work and are given access to only basic welfare support whilst their claim for asylum is considered. The long quotation above is important for two reasons. First, it is indicative of a widespread lack of knowledge among members of host communities about the rules that govern refugees' and asylum seekers' rights to work and social welfare. Second, it is illustrative of the way in which some members of host communities resent or reject the welfare claims that asylum seekers/refugees make because they perceived such migrants to be lacking any form of previous contribution to the systems that are supporting them. In an era when citizens are bombarded with political rhetoric that pronounces that 'rights come with responsibilities' (i.e. that welfare claims are to be legitimised on the basis of prior contribution, primarily through paid work), and notions of need are relegated to secondary importance, the sentiments noted above are unsurprising. Such thinking informs recent discussions on community cohesion and the integration of refugees and other migrant groups into their new local communities and wider British society (CIC, 2007). They are also consistent with the government's preferred notion of social citizenship where a reciprocal relationship between claim and contribution is prioritised and inclusion is often singularly equated with activity in the paid labour market (Dwyer, 2004).

5. Finding paid work: barriers to employment

There are numerous reports which document the potential for refugees to make a positive contribution in the paid labour market. The same literature also details the substantial and varied barriers (e.g. prohibitive time and costs in converting or getting recognition of previous qualifications, a lack of English language skills, discrimination, a reluctance on the part of employers to hire), that many face in looking for work (see e.g. Bloch, 2004; Hurstfield, et al.2004). Participants within the three focus groups reiterated that such factors routinely inhibited their ability to access paid employment.

Its about them not recognising the qualifications that we have. There are so many positions that I apply for only to be told that I was a good candidate. [but] 'Your only disadvantage is your experience is foreign. It would take time to train you, to orientate you into the system that we have.'9AP

For jobs, they say they need references, from someone who knows you for all those years. We've been sitting here so where can we get a reference. I went to one care home last week and they interviewed me. They told me

they needed a reference or experience. I told them you know about my experience from [country of origin]. They said no...we want UK experience and someone who knows you as a referee. And then they did this to my paper [holding up paper to the light to demonstrate] 'Is it not fake?' I was so... I felt like I should never ever have gone to this place. She said 'Have you got a passport or UK drivers licence, because this is fake'.6CR

Refugees are often in a 'Catch 22' situation whereby they are unable to get work without the references and UK experience that many employers require, whilst simultaneously they cannot get the necessary experience and references without someone first employing them. Problems linked to documentation, particularly for Case Resolution refugees, occur not only when individuals deal with various welfare agencies (see section 6.2) but also with prospective employers. Since 1996 it has been a criminal offence to employ any individual who is not legally allowed to work in the UK and increasingly the responsibility for checking papers has been placed on employers. The mistrust evidenced above, illustrates that when faced with this kind of hassle many employers simply shy away from employing refugees regardless of whether or not an individual is legally entitled to work. Given that, more recent legislation (e.g. the 2006 Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act), has further augmented government powers to prosecute and fine employers who hire migrants not legally entitled to work in the UK, it remains unlikely that this situation will improve in the near future.

Policies that prohibit asylum seekers from working whilst their claim is assessed also have a negative knock on effect on those who are subsequently expected to look for work once their refugee status has been confirmed.

A problem that we have is that we have been here for quite some time and the employers are finding it very difficult to understand why we have not been working for the past 5 years.6CR [general agreement]

A person who has been unemployed for a substantial period of time (regardless of the reasons behind such inactivity), is unlikely to hold the greatest appeal to an employer; especially if, their situation is further complicated by the need for additional checks on their residency status and right to work.

Beyond simply getting a job participants in the focus groups also spoke of the trouble they had in getting work that was appropriate to their experience and skills prior to migrating to the UK. It was reported that the search for such work was routinely unproductive and participants spoke of the need for further help in securing suitable employment. For example,

They [Sunrise] helped me to apply for the house and for the benefits. But the problem is now I am looking for work and I have experience as an accountant, I have worked in a bank about nine years. If they could help people to find a suitable job this would be even better. 16AP

It should be noted, however, that one participant within Focus Group 2 (Asylum Process refugees) was highly critical when fellow refugees complained about the barriers that prevented them from accessing similar positions in the UK to those they had previously held in their countries of origin.

I applied two weeks ago for a security officer..... They need reference for five years from British guy who know me that long. I go to Sunrise and told

them this is a problem and they fix that problem. They[employers] write to me today I can work as security officer... There are many jobs. You don't need anything [qualifications] for a basic job. Before I used to work in a warehouse, I couldn't speak English. 14AP

Participant 14AP was adamant that unfilled jobs were available within the local job market and he strongly believed that refugees had a responsibility to take whatever jobs were available as a first step in rebuilding their lives. He subsequently went on to outline a plan whereby he was combining security work with part-time GCSEs study as the first step on a personal path to studying international marketing at university. In many ways he made the most of the Sunrise support on offer and was clearly focused on improving himself. The essential difference between him and his fellow group members was that he had entered the UK with limited qualifications and was, therefore, genuinely invigorated by the educational opportunities available to him. In contrast, other refugees in the group spoke repeatedly of their intense frustration when potential employers refused to recognise as valid the qualifications and experience they had previously gained in their countries of origin. Consequently, those refugees that do find paid employment^v are often working in jobs that fail to make full use their abilities (Duvell and Jordan, 2002).

6. Accessing mainstream welfare services

Within the focus groups, participants were asked to reflect on their interactions with the various welfare service providers they came into contact with. Refugees satisfaction with the services they received varied considerably across sectors. Generally, refugees within all three groups were positive about the healthcare provisions. There were some complaints about waiting times for general practitioner appointments and the problem of registering with an NHS dentist came up in one discussion. Nonetheless, comments such as '*We don't have any problems, apart from waiting*'^{19GW} and, '*I think it is 100 times better than our country*'^{25GW} were typical. Two participants in Focus Group 1 were the only people who disputed this general view. One complained of being left to wait in a hospital accident and emergency (AandE) department whilst others who arrived after her were treated. Whilst it is routine practice in AandE departments to operate a triage system whereby the most pressing cases receive priority treatment she believed that her wait was due to the latent hostility displayed by some hospital staff towards asylum seekers and refugees.

The minute they read your status, the minute they see you are asylum, you know most of them treat you like an animal. 6CR

The second (refugee 1CR), was unhappy because she felt she had been ignored by her general practitioner when explaining her child's complaint.

Positive views were also routinely expressed in discussions about schooling and the education delivered to participants' children. Comments from refugees in Focus Group 3 express the sentiments most usually offered by those interviewed.

My daughter she loves her teachers very, much. They are very, very highly qualified. Really patient, care for the children. Really, help the children.
19GW

Yes. They are happy and there is no problem. 26CR

My son is seven and he is better at English than I am. He speaks like a Yorkshire man. 17CR

Aside from this general satisfaction, two participants did mention incidents where other pupils made racist comments to their children. When such problems did arise the refugees interviewed believed that the schools responded appropriately.

The schools are OK. I've got no problems with that. Only sometimes an instance where they [pupils] make racist comments. Yes they deal with it.
4CR

In contrast to the views expressed about healthcare and education refugees' interactions with housing providers and the various agencies charged with the delivery of welfare benefits were much more problematic. The issues related to these two welfare sectors are worthy of more expansive discussions in light of the type and scope of issues highlighted by refugees in the focus group discussions.

6.1. Housing and the switch to mainstream providers

Problems in respect of housing refugees and asylum seekers have been a key feature of much previous research (e.g. Craig 2004a, b; Dwyer and Brown, 2005; Phillips, 2006b). A positive outcome to an individual's asylum claim and the granting of refugee status is often the trigger to a number of serious housing problems for Case Resolution and Asylum Process refugees. On receipt of a positive asylum decision, such refugees have a maximum period of 28 days in which to leave the UK Border Agency^{vi} (UKBA) accommodation (which was provided for them as asylum seekers), and are expected to make the transition into mainstream housing provision. In principle refugees enjoy the same housing rights and options as UK citizens. However, in practice, housing choices are essentially limited to those available in the social or private rented sectors (Dwyer and Brown, 2008). As many new refugees routinely experience poverty and/or find themselves in areas where social housing is already under severe pressure there are often delays in accessing appropriate accommodation (Perry, 2005). Participants in Focus Group 1 (Case Resolution refugees) and Focus Group 2 (Asylum Process refugees) routinely spoke of such problems. For example,

It is only now may be when we get our status we get serious problems with houses. You finish the arrival stage, then we get our status. This is when we've got serious problems... We have been here in this country for 5 years, not allowed to work. You get your status. NASS gives you 28 days to vacate premises. They stop your support, nothing and then we take temporary accommodation because my house was not ready. After 2 weeks you are given the house. The problem is the house is empty. It's not even painted. You need wallpaper. The only thing they gave us was BandQ vouchers.... £75 for the wallpaper and the paint. But that money is too little... It's inhuman you can't expect us, not to work for 5 years, then expect us to go in that house with nothing, we have children. Its freezing. I mean the gas people they will take their time to come and fix the gas. The electricity

people will take their time to come and connect. The system is very, very horrid. You need to highlight this because they are not treating us as human beings. 4CR [General agreement]

The place is good but its empty, no carpets, no electricity, nothing. I have not been working for 6 years, where do I get the money. They can't even give me the period so I can find a little money for doing the carpet, doing everything. They are saying as soon as you sign you have to be in, in the next 4 days... I'm only getting £59 for Jobseekers, how do I sort that house? 11AP

The problem is that they take their time to offer you accommodation. They tell you that we are trying to get you accommodation whereby your neighbours and neighbourhood are going to will suit your needs . But at the end of the day when they give you accommodation you find out that the accommodation they offer you is totally not taking into consideration what they promised to consider. 2CR

The pressure on social housing stock leads to delays in finding available accommodation, some of which does not meet the needs of clients. Often housing is only available in less desirable areas and a number of participants spoke of being housed next to problematic neighbours and/or in areas that involved uprooting children from schools. Additionally, as a result of not being able to work in the UK refugees spoke of having little or no money to spend on making their new homes habitable and all appeared to be either confused, or ignorant of, any rights to apply for Integration Loans, the Social Fund or Community Care grants to help pay for housing set up costs.

Another effect of the development of a separate accommodation system for asylum seekers is that any subsequent transition to becoming a refugee renders many susceptible to homelessness. This was particularly the case for the Asylum Process refugees (Focus Group 2) who took part in the study,^{vii} several of whom reported becoming homeless for a period following confirmation of their refugee status.

When I got my status they sent the letters on 9th December and I was supposed to leave on 4th December. That is already overdue. When I told them, you send me my letters too late ... they said there was nothing they could do. I had to go and live in [another town] with my friend. When I went to the [city] Council they said at the moment there is no room that we can provide for you..... So when I went to[other town] I had 2 months without anything, no money. 11AP

I went to [city] Council and they say they didn't have any accommodation for me. 'Don't you have a friend who could take care of you'. I said I don't have anyone. But they phoned the housing people where I was living under NASS... When I explained my situation they [NASS provider] actually said just stay in your NASS accommodation for tonight and let me know tomorrow what happens. Don't tell people. Otherwise there will be problems.... Sunrise ended up intervening. I wasn't given accommodation by the[city] Council but Sunrise knew a private housing group. So I think they approached them and they said, yes we've got room for one person. So then they took me in. 9AP

Clearly, even for those Asylum Process refugees with access to Sunrise support, susceptibility to homelessness as status changes remains a problem for some. Participant 9AP also noted, “*there was no communication between NASS, the Home Office and the [city] Council*”. A lack of joined up, cross agency working exacerbates many of the problems experienced by refugees as they switch from UKBA asylum support systems to mainstream housing providers. It should be noted, however, that several Asylum Process refugees in Focus Group 2 stated that the availability of Sunrise support workers ease their transition across service providers.

When we get the paper we don't know where we go. But I know now we have sorted this problem because we have got Sunrise. She [Sunrise worker] is good. She comes in very early. She is very, very good.14AP

NASS sent me the letter. Within 28 days you go, I don't know [what to do]. I contact Sunrise and they give me appointment . I saw this lady is very good for me. They are very happy. They help me with everything.12AP

The area I was living was covered by Sunrise. So there was a good transition from NASS. Because I had a medical condition they also managed to sort something out for me that I would get some funds on medical ground. Then I got some support from Sunrise... When my contract came they applied for the Community Care Grant for me.10AP

Whilst any additional support that helps to ease the transition from asylum seeker to refugee is to be welcomed it should be noted that the energies of Sunrise workers remain currently too often focused on managing housing crises rather than actively supporting integration per se. Home Office research reports that some involved in piloting the Sunrise schemes, have been frustrated by high case loads and individual client support time being exhausted in attempts to resolve housing and benefit problems in the initial 28 day transition period (HO, 2006b).

The housing concerns of the Gateway refugees (Focus Group 3) differed from those of their fellows noted above. Discussions within this group tended to emphasise the poor standards of accommodation provided and a lack of response to requests for maintenance and repairs.

The water pipe was broken... It leaked the whole night and wet the floor. But no-one cares about that. And for many months my back door was not locked. The lock was no good.... Even though you talk to the housing association, they do not come and replace it. 19GW

This shift in emphasis is not surprising given that Gateway refugees are allocated housing and have their refugee status conformed prior to arrival in the UK. It should be noted, however, that some felt abandoned once their time limited support services came to an end (cf. Dwyer and Brown, 2005).

The Refugee Council look after you for a year. During that period you have a case worker chasing up, like repairs. The support worker is properly assigned for you, housing officer assigned for you. So they will chase up everything. But after a year, there is a lack of support, they don't support you as much. They don't have that close support any more. So some people who don't speak much English they don't complain too much. So they [housing providers] don't care.25GW

6.2 Engaging with the mainstream benefit system

Alongside housing, discussions in the three focus groups highlight that interactions with the mainstream welfare benefit system also present refugees with a range of problems. Among the Case Resolution and Asylum Process refugees interviewed issues linked to documentation proved to be a significant factor in delaying access to benefits. Two refugees spoke of long delays in accessing Child Benefit.

I've waited almost 3 months for Child Benefit. But they say they need proof from the Home Office of my status.6CR

My child benefit took about 16 weeks or more... I sent it [proof of identity] to Child Benefit. I went to Jobcentre first, they photocopied and stamped it. I sent it to Child Benefit. They said they want the original birth certificate. They can't process my claim.2CR

In order to prevent fraud it is necessary for the various benefit agencies to require proof of identify and legitimacy of claim. However, this can be particularly problematic for newly confirmed refugees, who may need to apply for more than one benefit simultaneously. Delays are compounded when mistakes are made by the Home Office in the delivery and/or details of documentation to confirm an individual's positive asylum decision and their subsequent refugee status; such mistakes were reported by several people in the study. For example, study participant 11AP was granted refugee status in 2007. His original status documents had been sent to the wrong address and gone astray. This, as he noted, meant "*I can't go into the mainstream without those documents*". A specific documentation related issue was also a feature of discussions with the Case Resolution refugees in Focus Group 1. Members of this group outlined a situation whereby they were required to apply for, and subsequently be refused, a passport from the embassy of their country of origin before being able to obtain an official certificate of identity from the UK government. Understandably many were very reluctant to pursue this requirement, a factor which further delayed the issue of UK government documentation and thus their ability to access welfare benefits (see also Brown, 2008 :9).

As is the case with housing provision, the initial problems experienced by Case Resolution and Asylum Process refugee with welfare benefit providers have their roots in new refugees having to make the switch from the separate welfare support arrangements made available for asylum seekers to the mainstream benefit system that refugees are entitled to access. As noted above, documentation problems may hinder this process. Additionally, participants spoke of not being able to access financial support from either system in the period immediately following their change in status from asylum seeker to refugee.

When I got my refugee status they give one month, 28 days grace. So after the 28 days I'm supposed to be registered with the Jobcentre, they pay in arrears after 2 weeks. There is a gap between when you get the papers and when you begin to receive Jobseekers Allowance.9AP

One of the problems that we mention here, when you get your status, is the gap when your asylum seeker support is cut. While you are processing the Jobcentre stops supporting you.12AP

Gateway refugees do not experience such delays as their refugee status is confirmed prior to entry in the UK, nonetheless, participants in all three focus groups spoke extensively about the common problems that they routinely experienced when visiting the Jobcentre. A key concern for many was the apparent lack of understanding shown by frontline Jobcentre staff about the particular needs of refugees many of whom were searching for work for the first time.

The people at Jobcentre need to understand what a refugee is. How asylum seekers get their status... they have to know that people differ, their status differs. We just want some time. That's all we are saying...They need a little bit of additional training about asylum seekers and refugees to understand them. That's the area which is putting people out...When you go to Jobcentre, they think that you're good for nothing. 3CR [general agreement]

They [Jobcentre staff] are uninformed about the Gateway protection programme and the plight of refugees. 27GW

Access to out of work welfare benefits in the UK has become increasingly conditional on active work search activities and the acceptance of specified training responsibilities by claimants. In one respect conditional benefits are utilised on the premise that employment opportunities remain unfilled because some claimants prefer to remain on benefits rather than engage in paid work; hence the need to use a conditional approach cajole or compel claimants to actively search for available work (rf. Dwyer, 2008 for fuller discussions). Previous discussions (see section 2 above) report a strongly expressed desire to work (and thus make a contribution to their new community), among the refugees who took part in this study. Similarly, previous discussions (section 5) highlight the additional barriers that refugees often face when looking for paid employment. These barriers did not appear to be central concerns of Jobcentre staff who tended towards assumptions that refugees were 'good for nothings' who preferred to rely on benefits rather than work.

That's the big thing no workers to explain it. [The way the system is set up]... My husband came back and he said, 'oh it was hell today. I wish that I could work because they looked at me like I was really lazy and didn't want to bother, didn't want to look for a job. That's why instead of them I'll jump into a job'.19GW

As the UK benefits system now operates within a context that promises to further "enshrine the responsibility to work" (DWP 2008 :12), a preoccupation on the part of frontline Jobcentre staff with getting people off benefits and into work - any work - rather than a concern to explain how the system works, and the benefits available, is perhaps to be expected. Evidence from this study, however, suggests that this 'work first' approach is inappropriate for many refugees. Data indicates that a lack of information and advice, exacerbated on some occasions by refugees' limited ability to understand English led to widespread confusion about their benefit rights and responsibilities and, at times, the inappropriate use of sanctions. Dialogue from Focus Group 3 (Gateway refugees) clearly illustrates these problems.

19GW: [translating for 18GW]: This gentleman has got a lot of problems. He was saying that he can't speak English. The Jobseekers', money, he said that I wish that those the Jobcentre staff could understand us more when

we don't speak the language, yet they kind of force us to get a job, to look for a job.

25GW: Every two weeks when we go to the Jobcentre [to sign on] they don't provide interpreters. For the three or six monthly interviews they provide them. Take his [18GW's] case. Twice he went to sign at the Jobcentre and they asked him questions. 'Do you look for work?' And he doesn't understand. He just says 'no'.

Interviewer: Then they cut his benefits?

25GW: Yes, so the next time he thinks, 'Last time I said no, so the next time I'm going to say yes'. He said 'yes' and they cut again!

[All laugh]

19GW: He's [18GW] just said 'The only two English words I know, neither of them useful!'

What is perhaps most alarming is that, as Gateway refugees, the participants in Focus Group 3 are ostensibly the recipients of a prearranged package of support to help facilitate their integration into the UK. Aside from the comic elements inherent in the retelling of the above tale, it is a good indicative example of the more widespread problems many refugees face when interacting with the Jobcentre. Routinely, refugees reported struggling with the complexities of a benefit system that they did not understand with, on occasion, dire consequences.

My wife just got a temporary job. They call her whenever there is a place for her to work on that day. So its not guaranteed that she will work permanently. So it happened that she is working 3 days one week, for which she is getting about 33 hours work. The Jobcentre just cut my Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) because my wife is now working 33 hours, but it is not guaranteed that next week she will be working. And now I'm finding it very difficult because if they stop that JSA support then that means that the housing benefit is stopping. So its very difficult. 2CR

They stop my JSA because they said that money I have for my job is more than £59.50. When I get my contract, my housing contract for the housing benefit they didn't deal with that because the Jobcentre has already stopped my JSA. I spent more than 3 weeks in the streets. I didn't have anywhere to sleep. Only a friend took me in his house for 3 weeks.... no money, no accommodation for 3 weeks. Only because I did 2 hours as a cleaner. 9AP

The above quotes highlight three important points. First, they offer further evidence of a willingness among the refugees interviewed to find work to support themselves and their families. Second, they counter suggestions that somehow refugees would prefer to rely on benefits. Third, they suggest that it may be more productive for Jobcentre staff to shift away from sanctioning refugees who have broken the rules, through ignorance rather than intent, and move towards more actively supporting refugees who are engaging with the UK paid labour market and benefit system for the first time. Ensuing data about the type and level of training and support routinely on offer at the Jobcentre suggest that such a change is unlikely in the near future. Participants in the study consistently spoke of being forced into dead end jobs and/or low quality 'training' schemes.

You can't say they [Jobcentre Plus] are giving training. Just sitting there. You can't do nothing. They keep you there from 9 to 4 o'clock. 7AP

They [Jobcentre Plus] just try to send people to training, they call it training... But the training, they just say write your CV, go apply for this job, go apply for this cleaning job. They don't give proper training. When they teach English, you can sit there the whole day, playing poker, or playing on the computer. 25GW

They referred me to training. But it is too basic, how to apply for a job. Techniques in interview. I've got this. 16AP

Last seven months they forced me go to job. 'If you do not go to job I will stop your national insurance'. 24GW

There is little here to suggest that the training and support offered by Jobcentre Plus enhanced the skills of refugees looking for work. On the contrary it would seem that the service prioritised getting claimants off benefit and into any job or ensuring that those who continue to sign on nominally meet the conditions required for receipt of benefit.

In the Jobcentre they are happy if you say, here is a letter from where I have applied here is what I've done. Then they are happy and you sign and they say OK. One day I said [to myself], I have to take a training course - car engineering- I did it at [location] College. I had to travel one hour from here. I could not get it here in [location]. After 26 weeks Jobcentre sent me a letter saying now you've been on benefit up to 26 weeks so what are you doing? Are you in education? Are you on training? I say, OK I'm training. They say, how many hours? I say, 6 or 7 hours. Do you have to travel 1 hour there and 1 hour back? Which is 16 hours. They said this is too much for you because you are not available for [job] interviews. This is not true. They saw it as full-time. I said, I've done this instead of staying at home sitting and waiting for JSA. 7AP

Again the actions of this refugee are not indicative of an individual who wants to remain dependant on welfare benefits. He wants to work and is prepared to seek out useful training to better his job opportunities. His frustrations are with a benefit system that penalises his attempt to retrain because it breaks JSA rules about availability for work.

None of the refugees who took part in the focus groups had anything positive to say about their dealings with the Jobcentre. Generally they had little or no comprehension of the rules under which it operated. They complained that frontline staff tended to view them as lacking the will to find work. Some were subject to inappropriate sanctions for breaches of regulations caused by a lack of English and/or accessible information about the rules that govern the receipt of out of work benefits. The training on offer was deemed to be of a poor standard and geared towards placing individuals in low paid, low status work regardless of their skills and aspirations. Whilst the majority of those who took part in the focus groups wanted to work they did not associate the jobs and training on offer via Jobcentre Plus with meaningful integration into the UK paid labour market.

7. Conclusions

In the past decade legislation has excluded asylum seekers from the mainstream welfare provisions available to citizens and simultaneously denied them the right to work whilst their asylum claim is considered (Bloch 2000; Zetter and Pearl, 2000; Dwyer and Brown, 2005). The negative impact that such policies continue to have on the integration of those asylum seekers who are subsequently granted refugee status should not be underestimated. Refugees in this study expressed a strong desire to work in order to maintain themselves and their families and also to contribute to their new society. The period of enforced worklessness endured by Asylum Process and Case Resolution refugees whilst their claim for asylum is considered does little to enhance their subsequent attempts to find work once leave to remain is granted. It is also clear that all refugees, regardless of their particular refugee status, face a number of common problems that inhibit their integration into the paid labour market. Problems with documentation and a lack of recognition by potential employers of the qualifications and experience previously acquired by individuals in their country of origin, exacerbate the likelihood that refugees will be unemployed, or working in jobs that do not make full use of their skills in the UK. The study also suggests that many refugees consider the training and support available to them via the Jobcentre as inappropriate and unlikely to lead to suitable employment. Participants in the study regularly reported unsatisfactory dealings with frontline staff who failed to appreciate the particular needs of unemployed refugees looking for paid work.

Focus groups were convened with refugees who were granted asylum under three different elements of the current asylum system. As previous discussions highlight, at times, members of all three groups of refugees interviewed face common problems in respect of integration into their local neighbourhoods, paid employment, and systems of welfare provision. These problems are often intensified when individuals are unable to communicate in English.

Nonetheless, differences in status continue to matter in a number of significant ways. First and foremost due to pressure on available housing stock, on becoming a refugee, Asylum Process and Case Resolution refugees remain susceptible to periods of homelessness as they switch from UKBA provided accommodation to mainstream housing providers. Gateway refugees do not face such problems as refugee status and accommodation is confirmed prior to their arrival in the UK. Second, allied to the above, whilst all participants in the study routinely live in poverty, Asylum Process and, particularly, Case Resolution refugees (who are not able to apply for integration loans), struggle to find the money to buy furniture and make their new homes habitable. Data presented in the study also suggests that access to dedicated integration support services (e.g. Sunrise, Gateway) can have a positive effect in resolving or managing the problems faced by refugees. Case Resolution refugees have no access to such support. It should not be assumed that merely because they have been resident as asylum seekers in the UK for a relatively long period of time that they are better able than other refugees to manage their own integration into mainstream society.

Finally, to finish on a more positive note. This report has highlighted some of the many barriers that refugees face as they look to integrate into UK society. However, in spite of the problems that many face, participants in each of the three focus groups emphasised their gratitude for the opportunity to begin rebuilding their lives in England. Above all else they valued the basic freedoms that refugee status ensures.

8AP: When I came here the Home Office [initially] refused, but the courts gave me asylum, humanitarian protection and human rights and they gave me this travel document. This secures me in this country for 5 years, and I am very, very happy because I know I've got human rights. There were no human rights in [country of origin]. I found a humanitarian regime and human rights for the first time in the UK. They secured me. Everywhere has some little problems. Problems also sometime come to our area, and I have to balance out these problems with the good things about my life here. This [now standing up waving travel documents/official UK refugee papers] is very good, and after 5 years, I will qualify for a British passport. I am very, very honoured. If the Government or Queen feels we behave well, they will honour us with a British passport.

7AP: I agree with him. These are the freedoms we came to seek. Even if we are still struggling to integrate, the main thing we have achieved freedom. We are very grateful for that. [General agreement, all nodding]

Dialogue from Focus Group 2

11AP: I think all of us, especially me, I appreciate for the protection that we receive in this country.

We are free from fear. No one will arrest us and put us in jail or prison unless we commit a crime. So that's one huge thing for us.3CR

I'm free. Free from fear and I really appreciate my life living in [city]. We know that we've got one year support from refugee council. And that's not so bad for us. We also aware of we have to stand on our own feet.21GW

Regardless of the negative rhetoric that at times dominates debates about the reception and integration of refugees it needs to be remembered that those who seek asylum in the UK do not come to take 'our' jobs, or exploit the generosity of 'our' welfare systems rather, they are seeking refuge from persecution elsewhere.

Peter Dwyer, November 2008.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Participant basic information

Focus Group 1					
Refugee participants' category: 'Case Resolution '					
Number of respondents: 6					
RESPONDENT CODE NO.	GENDER	AGE	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN^{viii}	LENGTH OF TIME IN UK	FAMILY STATUS
1CR	F	27		5 years	Single , 1 child
2CR	M	Unknown ^{ix}		5 years	Married, 2 children
3CR	M	40		5 years	Married, 3 children
4CR	M	Unknown		5 years	Married, 1 child
5CR	F	Unknown		5 years 2 months	Single, 1 child
6CR	F	Unknown		5 years	Single, 2 children

Table 1.

Focus Group 2					
Refugee participants' category: 'Asylum Process'					
Number of respondents: 10					
RESPONDENT CODE NO.	GENDER	AGE:	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	LENGTH OF TIME IN UK	FAMILY STATUS
7AP	M	Unknown		1 year 3 months	Married, 1 child
8AP	M	Unknown		1 year 2 months	Married, 2 children
9AP	M	Unknown		3 years	Married 2 children
10AP	M	Unknown		4 years 6 months	Single
11AP	M	Unknown		6 years	Married 4 children
12AP	F	38		11 months	Single
13AP	M	24		3 years 6 months	Single
14AP	M	20		1 year 1 month	Single
15AP	M	37		Unknown	Married 2 children
16AP	F	Unknown		Unknown	Unknown

Table 2.

Focus Group 3					
Refugee participants' category: 'Gateway'					
Number of respondents: 12					
RESPONDENT CODE NO.	GENDER	AGE	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN:	LENGTH OF TIME IN UK:	FAMILY STATUS
17GW	M	32		4 years	Married, 3 children
18GW	M	29		2 years	Single
19GW	F	45		2 years	Married, 2 children
20GW	F	54		2 years	Married, 1 child
21GW	M	56		Unknown	Married, 5 children
22GW	F	24		2 years	Unknown
23GW	M	30		Unknown	Married
24GW	M	24		Unknown	Single
25GW	M	36		5 years	Unknown
26GW	M	32		4 years	Married, 2 children
27GW	M	38		4 years	Married, 3 children
28GW	F	45		6 months	Single

Table 3.

Appendix 2: Focus group questioning guide

INTRODUCTION

- All told this should take about 2 hours
- Who we are: From Refer them to the information sheet, allow time to read/translate.
- Outline and emphasise informed consent and anonymity refer to the consent form.
- Ask them to write a first name on the card and explain we're going to change/delete them later.
- Check if OK to record for transcription
- If anyone needs a break let me know and we'll stop
- I'm looking for your views about your day to day life here in ????
- It is useful if you say your name before speaking and also if you wait till someone else has finished their point
- **THERE ARE NO RIGHT AND WRONG ANSWERS**
- If you have a different opinion please share it with the group
- Please speak clearly and if possible one at a time

Can I start by going round the room please give **a name, age, length of time in UK, familial status, where you live, country of origin** (repeat confidentiality caveat re they don't need to disclose anything they are unhappy with)

1. REFUGEES' PERSPECTIVES ON DAY TO DAY LIFE AND MIXING/INTEGRATION IN COMMUNITY

(Keep thinking integration in to what, an existing ethnic or social group? Local community, wider British society?)

How would you describe your life here in [city]?

P: Could someone tell me about a typical day in their life?

Do you feel you are part of local community? wider society?

Who do you mix with/meet with each day?

P: How do you get on with neighbours/ those around you, people when you are out in the city?

Are people friendly/ hostile to you in [city of focus group]?

How do you get to know most of your friends?

Family/ fellow refugees, school etc.

Do you have many British friends?

Is it easy to make friends in [city of focus group]?

In what situations do you normally speak to British people in [city]?

Tell me about your neighbours and the people in the local community?

P: Do you know many people where you live?

what about the neighbours?

Do you speak to them?

Friendly? Supportive? Hostile?

How does being a refugee impact on your life here in [city]?

Have you ever experienced any harassment or hostility in the UK?

Tell me what happened?

(Such as people shouting at you, saying racist comments, physically attacking you?)

2. SPECIFIC INTEGRATION SUPPORT

Once you arrived here in [city] did you have access to any help or support to help you settle in/access services/ get a job?

P: Tell me about it. What was it?

How useful was it? Were you happy with the help you received?

Did your support cease at any time?

How did this impact on you?

What help/guidance/support did you find particularly useful?

P: Who would you turn to if you need support or information about something?
e.g. dedicated support worker, volunteers, RCOs, family, friends etc. CAB, advice centres support etc.

Could the support you received when you came to the city be improved?

3. WORK

We want to talk a little more about the issue of work.

Are any of you in paid work?

P: What do (did) you do?? Full-time/ part-time?

Helping people on a casual basis?

How did you go about finding work?

P: What help have you had to get employment?

Was it useful?

How would you describe your experiences of paid work in this country?

Positive /negative why?

Who do you work with?

P: What would you see as the main issues about working here in [city]?

How do you get on with your workmates?

Are you happy in your job?

Do you feel you are working to your full potential?

Are you happy with your current work situation?

How is it different to your previous employment before coming to the UK?

What job would you like to do?

Does it match your skills and aspirations?

If no, what factors are holding you back?

Those of you who don't do paid work what do you do?

P: Voluntary/ familial care work??

Would you like to be able to work?

What's stopping you from working?

Do you have any hopes or expectations about finding paid employment when you came to this country?
What are the main barriers to employment in [city]?

4. ACCESS TO SERVICE PROVISION

How satisfied are you with various services you receive? (see what they lead on before prompting)

P: Are there any particular services that you are satisfied or dissatisfied with?
e.g. Housing, benefits offices, healthcare and schools

What are the issues you face?

Can you tell us about your HOUSING experiences here in ????

P: Where are you living now? How did you come to live there?

What do you think of the standard of your current accommodation/housing?

P: Adequate/ inadequate? Furniture, heating, general repair.
What sort of condition is in?

Is it easy or difficult to get a house?

P: Did you receive any help in getting a house?

if difficult – how could this be improved/what would help you?

Who provides the housing? Do you own your house or do you rent?

if rented – who rents it to you, is it the council, or a housing association, or private rented?

What about the area about the area in which you now live?

P: Are you happy with your current situation re housing Would you like to stay there or move elsewhere?

Have you got any particular issues or concerns about your housing that we haven't covered?

Can you tell us about your experiences of the BENEFITS services here in ?????

P: What is it like applying for benefits e.g. Jobcentre Plus, HB, IS etc.?

Problems/ Improvements???

Any other issues you want to discuss?

What about HEALTHCARE provision

P: Access to doctors etc. hospitals ??

Could it be improved in any way ??

Issues/improvements?

Finally EDUCATION and SKILLS/TRAINING how do you find those kinds of services?

P: For yourselves/children??

What do you think of the schools in [city]?

Children happy at school, mixing/ part of the community???
Any issues you want to bring up?

5. PERCEPTIONS OF INTEGRATION AND ASPIRATIONS

What does integration mean to you?

Do you feel part of society?

Is anything holding you back/ helping you go forward?

What barriers do you face in respect of integration?

How important is learning to speak English in helping you integrate?

P: What has been your experience of learning English?

Is it easy to access English courses?

Have you done any other courses in the UK such as at college or university?

Have they been useful?

Were they easy to access?

How might your integration be enhanced?

P: What would improve your life here?

Do you feel able to achieve your full potential?

Are you able to access public services adequately?

Exercise your rights and responsibilities?

What changes to your daily life here in [city] would help you to integrate/
become a full member of society?

How do you see yourself?

P: Do you consider yourself to be a refugee or do you see yourself as a
member of British society?

Do you think of [city] as being your home?

How might your lives be improved in the future??

What would you most like to change about your life here in [city]

Are you hopeful about your future here in [city]

Do you have anything else that you would like to say?

END

Thanks

Appendix 3: Participant information sheet

Refugees' understandings and experiences of integration

What is the purpose of the study?

It is important that you understand the reason why this research is being carried out, and what your participation will involve. We would be grateful if you would take time to read the following information carefully

We would like to ask you to take part in a small study which is trying to explore the perceptions, experiences and expectations of refugees about their lives in Yorkshire and Humberside. The project has three linked aims:

- To explore refugees' understanding and experiences of integration
- To begin to identify and explore factors that may enhance or inhibit the process of refugees' integration
- To allow the voices of refugees to inform understanding of the process of integration

Who is doing the research?

David Brown is Yorkshire and Humber Refugee Integration Manager, for the Yorkshire and Humber Regional Migration Partnership.

Peter Dwyer is Professor of Social Policy at the Graduate School, Business, Law and Social Sciences, Nottingham Trent University.

David and Peter have previously worked together in projects related to asylum and forced migration and will be happy to answer any questions you have about this project.

How will we gather information?

The project is very much about your views and opinions. To enable you to share these we are inviting you to take part in one of three group discussions (focus groups) we are undertaking with refugees living in Yorkshire.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep, and you will also be asked to sign a consent form. You will still be free to withdraw from the study at any time: this includes the right to withdraw your interview from the study after it has taken place. If you decide not to take part, or to withdraw at any stage, you will not be asked to give us any reasons.

What do you want me to do?

We would like you to take part in a focus group interview lasting between 1 and 2 hours. The focus group will be carried out by David and Peter. We will provide refreshments and meet your transport costs for attending.

We will ask for your written permission to audio-tape the interview, to ensure that the information you give us is accurately recorded.

What will happen to the information I give in my interview?

The tape of your interview will be transcribed. After the interview we will forward a copy of the transcript to you to ensure that they are happy with the content of the interview and/or offer any feedback. We will then analyse the information generated.

How will you protect my confidentiality and anonymity.

The transcripts will be fully anonymised. Any information that identifies you or your organisation will be removed. The tape and transcript will be handled only by members of the research team and our secretarial staff, in line with data protection principles and our approved research protocol. Hard copies of research notes are kept in locked filing cabinets, and electronic files are kept on password protected computers which are not accessible to any other university staff.

Once the research project is completed the tape of your interview will be destroyed and the relevant files erased from our computers.

What will happen to the results?

Your views will be used to inform into the Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Refugee Integration Strategy. The results of this research will also be disseminated locally, regionally and nationally via presentations at appropriate organisations. We also intend to disseminate findings at an academic conference and to write an article in an academic journal.

David Brown and Peter Dwyer, May 2008

Appendix 4: Participant consent form



Yorkshire & Humber
Regional Migration Partnership
shaping migration in the region

Refugees' understandings and experiences of integration

Please read and confirm your consent to being interviewed for this project by ticking the appropriate box(es) and signing and dating this form

1. I confirm that the purpose of the project has been explained to me, that I have been given information about it in writing, and that I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw at any time

3. I give permission for the interview to be tape-recorded by research staff, on the understanding that the tape will be destroyed at the end of the project

4. I agree to take part in this project

Name of respondent:

Date

Signature

Name of researcher:

Date

Signature

Participant code number:

PROJECT ADDRESS:

c/o Dave Brown, YandH Refugee Integration Manager,
Yorkshire and Humber Regional Migration Partnership
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ⁱ See e.g. Griffiths et al (2005) for some relevant discussions.

ⁱⁱ For example, the Home Office has previously stated that if the situation in a refugee's country of origin "has not improved after 5 years we would grant them permanent status otherwise we expect them to return" (Home Office, 2005b :23).

ⁱⁱⁱ Peter Dwyer took a lead in instigating discussions, David Brown took field notes and noted non verbal responses from participants.

^{iv} Refugees have been assigned a participant code number that reflects their status e.g. 1CR (Case Resolution), 9AP (Asylum Process) and 27GW (Gateway).

^v The unemployment rate for refugees has been reported to be six times the national average at 36% (Home Office, 2004). Studies in Yorkshire and Humber also indicate high levels of unemployment (Brown, 2007) *rf*.

http://www.refugeeaccess.info/uploads/yandh/RIM_empandskills_review_oct07.pdf, p. 11.

^{vi} The UK Border Agency has taken over the housing responsibilities of its predecessor the National Asylum Support Service (NASS).

^{vii} The Case Resolution refugees in Focus Group 1 appeared to less susceptible to homelessness as they routinely remained in housing provided under the UKBA asylum system before entering mainstream provision.

^{viii} In order to protect participants' anonymity the country of origin has been removed from tables 1-3. The refugees interviewed had originally resided in the following countries; Eritrea, Burundi, South Africa, Bangladesh, Burma, Somalia, Cameroon, Congo, Liberia, Zimbabwe.

^{ix} When participants chose not to disclose a particular piece of personal information this is recorded as unknown.