

**RESPOND**

## **Working Papers**

### **Global Migration: Consequences and Responses**

Paper 2020/56, July 2020

## **Integration Policies, Practices and Experiences**

### **United Kingdom Country Report**

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RESPOND: Multilevel  
Governance of Migration in  
Europe and Beyond (770564)



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# Contents

List of abbreviations	5
Acknowledgements	6
About the project	7
Executive summary	8
1. Introduction	10
1.1. Methodology and Sources	11
1.2. Outline	12
2. Integration Policies: Legal, Political and Institutional Framework	13
2.1. Evolution of the UK's integration policy	13
2.2. The UK's integration policy	15
2.2.1. Vertical fragmentation	16
2.2.2. Horizontal fragmentation	17
2.2.3. Migrant specific approaches	18
2.3. Governance structure	19
2.3.1. Local authorities and devolved administrations	20
2.3.2. State agencies	20
2.3.3. Civil Society Organizations and other stakeholders	21
3. Labour Market	22
3.1. Employment in the formal labour market	22
3.1.1. Access of asylum seekers and refugees to the labour market	23
3.1.2. Validation of skills and recognition of qualifications	24
3.1.3. Vocational training	25
3.1.4. Gender dimension and vulnerable refugees	26
3.2. Employment in the informal labour market	27
3.3. Experiences in the labour market	28
3.3.1. Language barriers	31
3.3.2. Systemic barriers	34
4. Education	40
4.1. Policy overview	40
4.1.1. Early Childhood and School Education	40
4.1.2. Higher Education	41
4.1.3. Adult education and language learning	42
4.2. Formal and Informal Educational Opportunities	42
4.2.1. Adult education and generational barriers to education	47
5. Housing and Spatial Integration	54
5.1. Housing for Resettled Refugees and Asylum Seekers	54
5.2. Structural barriers to housing	56

5.2.1.	Legal status and government support	57
5.2.2.	Role of family and community in 'home-making'	61
6.	Psychosocial health	68
6.1.	Policy overview	68
6.1.1.	Access to healthcare	68
6.1.2.	Access to mental health services	69
6.2.	Psychosocial health of asylum seekers and refugees	70
6.2.1.	The impact of legal Status on psychosocial health	70
6.2.2.	Post-migration stressors: Increased trauma and isolation	75
7.	Citizenship, belonging and civic participation	82
7.1.	Legal-political framework	82
7.1.1.	Regularisation of legal status	82
7.1.2.	Naturalisation	82
7.2.	The role of local actors and NGOs in fostering belonging	83
7.3.	Experiences of Belonging, Integration and Citizenship	89
8.	Conclusions and policy recommendations	96
	Appendices	96
	Appendix I: Interview table	103
	References and sources	104

## List of figures

Figure 1. Long-Term International Migration to the UK by Citizenship, 1975-2016 .....	14
Figure 2 Asylum Seeker Applications (including dependants) 1979-2017 .....	18
Figure 3 Refugees (and others) resettled, including dependants, 2004-2017.....	19
Figure 4: Governance actors in integration policies and practices .....	21

## List of abbreviations

AIDA	Asylum Information Database
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
EU	European Union
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
NARIC	National Academic Recognition Information Centre
NASS	National Asylum Support System
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
RIES	The Refugee Integration and Employment Service
UASC	Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children
VPRS	Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme

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## About the project

RESPOND is a Horizon 2020 project, which aims at studying the multi-level governance of migration in Europe and beyond. The consortium is formed of 14 partners from 11 source, transit and destination countries and is coordinated by Uppsala University in Sweden. The main aim of this Europe-wide project is to provide an in-depth understanding of the governance of recent mass migration at macro-, meso- and micro-level through cross-country comparative research and to critically analyse governance practices with the aim of enhancing the migration governance capacity and policy coherence of the EU, its member states and third countries.

RESPOND studies migration governance through a narrative which is constructed along five thematic fields:

- 1) Border management and security (WP2),
- 2) Refugee protection regimes (WP3),
- 3) Reception policies (WP4),
- 4) Integration policies (WP5), and
- 5) Conflicting Europeanization (WP6).

Each of these thematic fields reflects a juncture in the migration journey of refugees and is designed to provide a holistic view of policies, their impacts and responses communicated by affected actors within.

In order to better focus on these themes, we have divided our research questions into work packages (WPs). The present report is concerned with the findings related to WP5, which focuses specifically on the UK's integration system and experiences of asylum seekers and refugees.

## Executive summary

This report provides an overview of the legal and policy framework of integration policies in the UK and explains the main contours of immigrant integration. The report looks into policies (macro-level), practices of stakeholders (meso-level) and experiences of immigrants (micro-level) in five thematic fields: a) labour market, b) education, c) housing and spatial integration, d) psychosocial health and e) citizenship and belonging. The report draws on interviews with asylum seekers and refugees at the micro level, and with stakeholders from NGOs and local authorities who are involved in the implementation of integration policies at the meso level. The main contribution of this study lies in its micro empirical focus by bringing in ethnographic insights from the perspective of asylum seekers and refugees based on their experiences vis-à-vis migration and integration policies. These individual accounts show us how asylum seekers and refugees are struggling to establish a new home in the UK and at a different level, in developing a belonging to a new place of living, while expressing their frustrations and hopes, their secondary traumas and resilience. In other words, they inform us about their integration experiences in society.

Based on their experiences and perspectives, supplemented by the analysis of legal and policy documents, reports by NGOs and official institutions and academic research, the key findings of the report are that:

- the UK's approach to immigrant integration has been developed in **reaction to major events**, leading to short-sighted policy making instead of a clear focus on the long term. This has resulted in integration approaches that have often been inflected with, and beholden to, politicised issues of the day. Since 2000, a significant increase in the numbers of immigrants arriving in the UK and increasing anxiety about religious fundamentalism and the integration of Muslims have led to the securitization of migration policies and a **shift in multiculturalist integration policies**. The **Brexit** process has added to this already 'hostile environment' in migration and integration policies.
- **burden-shifting** is a key feature of the UK's integration approach. The UK Government has shifted responsibility for integration in two main directions; on the one hand to local authorities and on the other hand responsibility for integration has shifted to immigrants themselves in line with the neo-liberalization of migration policies. Compared to other European countries, the UK's integration policies tend to be **non-interventionist**, which in turn has resulted in a series of fragmented realities in policy and practice.
- Integration policies are **fragmented** across the UK's three tiers of Government. The division of labour between the three tiers means that there is no one, UK-wide strategy, leading to fragmentation, overlap and sometimes incoherence. Apart from Northern Ireland, all devolved administrations have developed their own integration strategies – in some cases more proactive than the UK wide administration.
- Integration policies are not only fragmented *between* levels of government, but also *within* levels of government. Given that holistic integration encompasses many policy areas, from education to health to community participation, it is crucial that the multiple functions which are currently tangled between several agencies are made to cohere.
- Fragmentation also results from the UK's **two different integration approaches** depending on the category of migrant. Concerning asylum seekers, the UK Government's approach is one of segregation and marginalisation. Asylum seekers' rights have been

progressively eroded and their freedoms diminished under ever tightening immigration laws and rules (Hirst and Atto, 2018) which aims to make asylum seekers' stay in the UK as temporary and as unstable as possible. In contrast to asylum seekers, those who arrive in the UK already as refugees via one of the resettlement programmes face a substantially different policy environment across all dimensions of integration.

- Based on individual accounts, the report emphasizes the psychosocial aspect of having a job in a new country, which is associated with being able to root themselves and to connect to broader society. Employment, together with housing are two cornerstones of a successful integration policy which nurtures health and wellbeing, belonging and participation in society. The working ban for asylum seekers in their initial period has detrimental consequences on their wellbeing and further integration into society.
- At the individual level, language-learning problems have clearly been identified as one of the most influential and fundamental barriers towards integration into the UK labour market and ability to work. The report also points out the consequences of discriminatory practices towards newcomers in the labour market.
- The importance of legal status and allocated rights in terms of access to housing has taken up a central place of discussion among the participants of this research, showing the discrepancy in experiences among the people in the concerned legal categories. The place and conditions of housing provided through government-private company schemes are frequently criticised by both stakeholders and asylum seekers, which has been seen as a primary barrier towards integration, as well as being influential in other difficulties, such as the deterioration in physical and psychosocial wellbeing for the people involved.
- The report also underlines the importance of ethnic and family networks which are seen as an important asset for newcomers in the process of establishing new homes. Family and ethnic networks enable newcomers to find housing or temporary accommodation for themselves and facilitate a much swifter overall process of integration. They develop a sense of support and security, economic stability, and become connected more quickly with their communities.
- Post-migration stressors have had a decisive impact on newcomers' wellbeing and further integration. The report clearly shows how experiences in a new country have added to their traumatic past. Feelings of disappointment and hopelessness following arrival in the UK have frequently been expressed, after being confronted with the difficult procedures that newcomers have had to go through. To be confronted with, for instance, detention upon arrival can have a very negative effect on the start of a new life in the host country.
- The report also shows the strong relationship between a sense of belonging and wellbeing, both fundamental for a successful integration process in the host country. Even though the aim of integration policies is to foster belonging among newcomers, the policies at stake do not achieve this goal and neither do they have the vision to create a 'hospitable' environment, especially during the period of asylum application. Factors hampering a sense of belonging and integration in society are the cumbersome legal processes in the acquisition of citizenship, long waiting times for asylum decisions, feelings of hopelessness and uncertainty, asymmetric relations with authorities and a high level of dependency associated with experienced financial difficulties, inability to work and discrimination, and at a contextual level the 'hostile' host environment.

# 1. Introduction

Integration is a multifaceted term; it has different meanings in the academic and political debate. Historically, integration was often understood and conceptualized as 'assimilation' or the adaptation of immigrants into the host (and majority) societies. Accordingly, integration was seen a process in which immigrants would become part of the host society and culture following their own efforts and achievements. In the political realm this can be seen as the politics of 'sameness'. In the 1970s, in many Western countries this conceptualization of integration was challenged with the rise of multiculturalist models (the politics of 'difference') and integration as a 'two-way process'. In recent years, in the context of the rise of anti-immigrant narratives in many Western societies, the governments' main concern has shifted towards reducing the number of immigrants substantially by all means and introducing a new version of nativist discourse where assimilationist policies are at the core. With this background, immigrants are categorized in a binary fashion (e.g. 'wanted/unwanted', 'deserved/undeserved') and often portrayed as a burden to the economy, and a threat to national solidarity. This is a sharp turn from the multiculturalist policies which was a dominant narrative in Western countries during the 1970s and 1980s, built on an idea of recognition of differences and the 'other'. By breaking this link between self and other, populist discourses have managed to push forward an assimilationist agenda accompanied with a hostile environment for immigrants.

This report is not aiming to delve into the academic debate on integration. Different definitions may be used and each may have its own contested zones and serious pitfalls in capturing social reality. Our aim in this report is to understand a **relational social process** of integration in five thematic societal fields: 1) labour market, 2) education, 3) housing and spatial integration, 4) psychosocial health and 5) citizenship, belonging and civic participation. These thematic fields can also be seen as the main pillars of integration.

Our working definition of integration in this report is based on the definition as used by Penninx and Garcés-Masareñas' (2016); integration as 'the process of becoming an accepted part of society'. This highlights both the processual characteristic of integration and the relationship between newcomers and the host society. Here, we need to add a note about the intrinsic power asymmetries in this process and relationship. Penninx and Garcés-Masareñas' (2016) recognise three analytically distinct dimensions of integration: 1) the legal-political, 2) the socio-economic and 3) the cultural-religious. While the first two are predominantly regulated by the state and the market, the cultural dimension of integration is a field negotiated between newcomers and the host society members alongside the construction of old and new boundaries of what Benedict Anderson (1983) has termed 'imagined community'. These three dimensions are covered in the discussion of the five thematic sections mentioned above. We have analysed policies at the macro-level, practices at the meso-level and responses and experiences at the micro-level.

In our understanding, integration is a relational social process where new boundaries are shaped and negotiated constantly by different subject positions. Thus, we acknowledge the contextual, processual and relational features of integration. This definition gives us flexibility to study integration across time and space. Today's migrants may become tomorrow's host populations or vice versa in a given society, though it is not straightforward and not always in one direction but depends largely on different factors at multiple levels. Power relations are intrinsic to this process. In this context, integration is about

- **participation** (access, opportunities and pathways to the labour market, education, and society at large);
- **interaction** of groups (migrants/newcomers and host societies/earlier settled groups);
- **negotiation** of space (between new migrants and earlier settled groups) and a
- **sense of belonging, cultural transformation** (of both new migrants and earlier settled members of society) and **community building** in progress.

This working definition captures the fluidity of identities (new migrants, earlier settled groups and other native populations) without essentialising identities and social roles and understands integration as a process, a dialectical relationship between openness of structures and participation of individuals. The multi-level analysis deployed in this study therefore provides a good way forward to realise the aims of this report.

### 1.1. Methodology and Sources

This report follows the RESPOND project's overall methodology and applies a multilevel framework of analysis: the macro- (policy), meso- (implementation) and micro- (individual) levels. The report is structured according to the five themes of a) labour market b) education c) housing and spatial integration d) psychosocial health, and e) citizenship and belonging. For each of these five thematic sections, data from various sources have been used to provide a comprehensive overview and insights on the laws, policies, practices and experiences in the field of integration in the UK, through the lens of the tri-tiered analytical framework:

1) The **macro**-level of analysis in each section (including Section 2) draws on legal texts and policy documents, reports and articles written by NGOs and human rights organizations and relevant academic literature. The brief discussion of the legal and policy framework in each section provides context for the broader analysis.

2) For the **meso**-level, 16 interviews have been conducted with stakeholders to understand the implementation processes and practitioners' own experiences and reflections about their work in the field of integration. Most of the stakeholders are representatives of NGOs or working for local authorities, and are involved in different domains of integration policies and practices (including detention, reception, housing, education, labour market, healthcare).

3) At the **micro**-level, in order to explore how integration policies and practices have been experienced by the target group, we draw on 15 semi-structured in-depth interviews. These have been conducted by the RESPOND UK teams (University of Cambridge and Glasgow Caledonian University) with migrants (including recognised refugees, asylum seekers and those with no legal status such as refused asylum seekers) who arrived in the UK in the period 2011-2018. Interviews have been conducted in Scotland, Wales, and in England in 2018-2019 (see Appendix 1 for the composition of interviews). The majority of the interviewed asylum seekers and refugees are male, representing the gender dominance of this group among the group of migrants seeking asylum in Europe in the concerned period. The countries of departure of the interviewed are mainly in the Middle East, with some in East Asia. The interviews have been based on the semi-structured questionnaire designed by the RESPOND research team, making use of relevant interview questions for all RESPOND work packages (border management, refugee protection regimes, reception policies, and integration practices).

The interviews have been analysed using a qualitative content analysis approach. All sections are supported by secondary sources, mainly consisting of research by NGOs and academics, as well as official reports written about integration policy.

## **1.2. Outline**

This report is divided into six sections, addressing the main contours of immigrant integration in the UK. The first section lays the groundwork by outlining the legal, political and institutional framework of integration policies in the UK, as well as providing a short account of the evolution of the UK's integration policy. The subsequent sections deal with the different dimensions of immigrant integration at the levels of policy (macro-), practice (meso-) and experiences (micro-): Labour market integration (section 3), Education (section 4), Housing and spatial integration (section 5); Psychosocial mental health (section 6) and Citizenship, belonging and civic participation (section 7). Within each section, the meso-and micro-level analysis has been intertwined to discuss the implementation practice and experiences of the target group. The report ends with conclusions and policy recommendations drawn from the report. Each section of this report can be read independently.

## 2. Integration Policies: Legal, Political and Institutional Framework

This section provides a brief account of the evolution of the UK's integration policy and information about the general legal and policy framework and governance structure. A more detailed discussion of the integration framework, including the labour market, education, housing and spatial integration, psychosocial health and citizenship, belonging and civil participation will be discussed in chapters 3 to 8.

### 2.1. Evolution of the UK's integration policy

There are several themes that have characterised the evolution of the UK Government's integration policies. The first is **reactivity**. The UK's approach to integration has tended to develop in reaction to major events, leading to short-sighted policy making instead of a clear focus on the longer-term picture. The result is that integration approaches have often been inflected with, and beholden, to politicised issues of the day.

In the post-war period, immigration from the New Commonwealth countries (Caribbean, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh) and the integration challenges created by this wave gave rise to a specific policy framework that focused on the rights of minorities which have been recognised through equality legislation, the 1976 *Race Relations Act*<sup>1</sup>. For a long period, the UK's integration policy was mainly built around this 'race-relations' model and the main driver of this policy was ethnic diversity, rather than immigration (Saggar and Sommerville, 2012). In 1981, following the riots in Brixton, Bristol and other cities, *multiculturalism* emerged as part of the policy response (Simon and Beaujeu, 2017: 28). The multiculturalism approach, which promoted ethnic diversity and difference, (and which was also in line with the 'race relations' model), continued to be the main approach to integration until the riots in northern England in 2001 (Jensen and Gidley, 2014: 6). Riots in the early 2000s together with 9/11 have led to a debate about the direction of integration policy. Following the 'Report of the Independent Review Team on civic disturbances in Burnley, Bradford and Oldham in 2001' (Home Office 2001), the multiculturalist policy frame shifted towards the '*community cohesion*' agenda which aimed at the promotion of shared values at the local level. According to Saggar and Sommerville (2012), the UK government's approach to integration started to change in the mid-1990s, 'a clear reaction to the doctrine of multiculturalism' even though the multiculturalist model has never been an official programme in the UK. Alongside the 'community cohesion' agenda – noting that the initial version of this agenda had no focus on immigrants but rather on problems concerning long standing ethnic minority communities – the emphasis shifted towards the obligations of immigrants to integrate, such as through the introduction of language exams, ceremonies and citizenship tests in 2004<sup>2</sup>. The community cohesion agenda did not go in a single direction. According to Jensen and Gidley (2014), there are diverse modalities, such as *differentialist* ('Britain as a multi-faith society'), *assimilationist* (emphasis on 'British values') and *interculturalist* ('shared spaces' emerging in the local context).

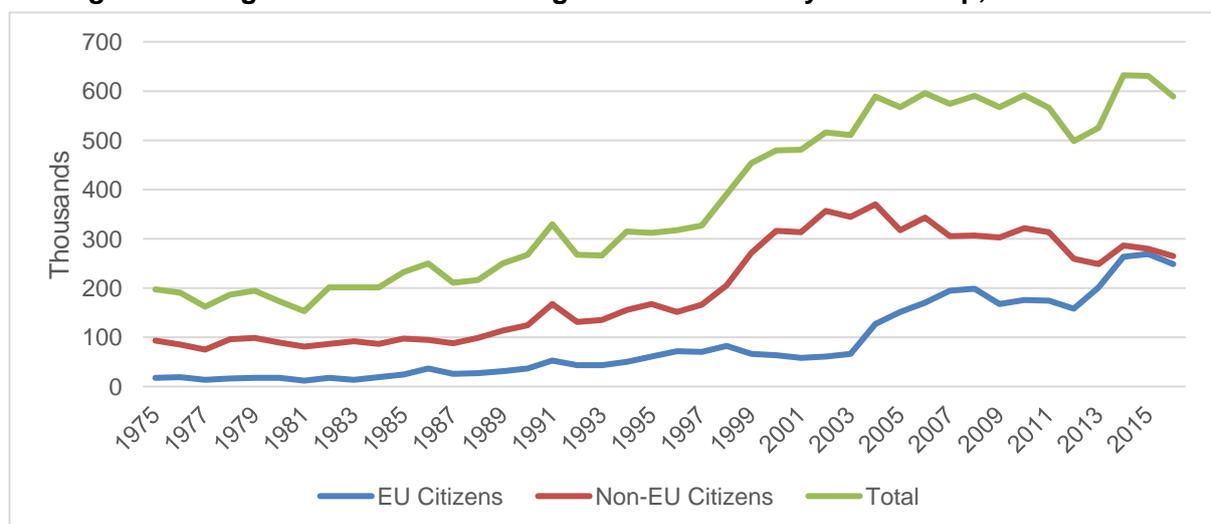
<sup>1</sup> This legislation, amended in 2000 (*Race Relations Amendment Act*), had a clear emphasis on the general responsibility of public authorities to actively promote equal opportunity.

<sup>2</sup> Citizenship education was implemented into the national curriculum; a handbook for newcomers to Britain was published; and the Knowledge of Language and Life citizenship test for those who wanted to 'earn' British citizenship was introduced

Two phenomena have framed the UK Government's approach to integration from 2000 – a significant increase in the numbers of immigrants arriving (see figure 3) and increasing anxiety about religious fundamentalism and the integration of Muslims (Katwala et. al., 2017: 8). This led to blurred lines between immigration, refugees and security policy, with the Home Office pursuing initiatives that fused counter-extremism measures with community integration issues (All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration, 2017: 8 and 2018: 44). Refugee integration strategies released by the Home Office in 2000 ('Full and Equal Citizens – A Strategy for the Integration of Refugees into the United Kingdom' and 'Integration Matters: A National Refugee Strategy') focussed on acculturating refugees to British values, customs and norms (Saggar and Somerville, 2012: 12). Dame Louise Casey was charged with carrying out a review of integration policy in 2015, which continued the focus on Muslim integration (Katwala et. al., 2017: 10). The Syrian Vulnerable Person's Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) was established that same year, in the context of the so-called 'refugee crisis'.

The next chapter on integration unfolded in the context of Brexit. Around this time two discourses became evident – one underpinned by unease at the speed of cultural and demographic change, and a corresponding lack of confidence in the UK Government to secure Britain's borders. Another discourse was centred on concerns about growing racism directed at new and established immigrant communities (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2018: 4, 8). It is against this backdrop, in August 2016, that the All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration began its investigation into immigrant integration (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2018: 4).

**Figure 1. Long-Term International Migration to the UK by Citizenship, 1975-2016**



Source: Office for National Statistics, 2017a.

A second theme in the development of immigration policies is **burden-shifting**. Responsibility for integration has been shifted by the UK Government in two main directions. The first is on to local authorities. The Department for Housing, Communities and Local Government's 2012 strategy report 'Creating the Conditions for Integration' effectively handed over accountability for integration to local government (All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration, 2018: 44; Katwala et. al., 2017: 9). A key problem with this approach is seeing integration as being able to be delegated to one level of government, ignoring the impact that UK Government policies can have at the local level (All Party Parliamentary Group

on Social Integration, 2017: 8). This trend has continued, with the 2018 All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration recommending a statutory duty be bestowed upon every local authority to encourage integration within their communities (2018: 5, 46). While devolution and decentralisation are critical in promoting integration, it is important that the fine line between the empowerment and the encumbrance of local authorities is trod carefully. A co-ordinated, three-tiered government approach is required.

The onus for integration has also been shifted on to immigrants themselves. There has been a trend since 1997 for integration to be seen as largely the responsibility of migrants (Saggar and Somerville, 2012: 10). This tracks a bi-partisan backlash against ‘multi-culturalism’ (seen as cultural preservation) which emerged during this period, which is thought to have led to divided and isolated communities (Saggar and Somerville, 2012: 10-11). The 2018 All Parliamentary Group on Social Integration marks a retreat from this approach, however, recognising that integration is a ‘two-way street’ (2018: 8, 37).

In 2018, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published an *Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper*, followed by a cross departmental action plan for England in 2019. The Green Paper addresses both long standing communities and migrants, and defines integration as ‘communities where people, whatever their background, live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities.’ It sets out areas for development in integration policy such as boosting English language provision, increasing economic opportunity and promoting meaningful social contact. The Green Paper offers a shift from earlier approaches (race relations and community cohesion) towards the promotion of ‘new migrants and resident communities’. Accordingly, five local integration areas (Bradford, Blackburn with Darwen, Peterborough, Waltham Forest and Walsall) have been selected to be supported by MHCLG (through the ‘Controlling Migration Fund’) and a set of Indicators of Integration have been published by the Home Office (2019). The Integrated Communities Action Plan sets out a different way of working, with new partnerships between all levels of government and civil society in a local community to work together in identifying their priorities and the best ways to address them. The Green Paper’s primary focus remains on ethnicity, fails to acknowledge socioeconomic inequalities and to provide an in-depth understanding of segregation. It also fails to address the current anti-migration discourse, its consequences for immigrant integration and it does not take account of the Government’s own responsibility at the national level.<sup>3</sup>

A third theme in the development of UK Government integration policies is that they have tended to be **non-interventionist**. This is especially apparent when comparisons are made between the UK and its European neighbours. Recent calls have been made for greater use of tailored and strategic initiatives to support integration, and these may herald a new approach to integration policy beyond its ‘laissez-faire’ pre-cursor (All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration, 2018: 36).

## 2.2. The UK’s integration policy

There is no one integration policy in the UK that covers all themes and all geographies. Instead, integration is highly fragmented across three related dimensions: vertically between levels of government, horizontally across different departments, and at delivery in terms of different approaches for different categories of migrants.

<sup>3</sup> Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper Summary of consultation responses and Government response (HM Government, February 2019).

### 2.2.1. Vertical fragmentation

Integration policies are fragmented across the UK's three tiers of Government. This is in part because of the functions and duties delegated to each level. While the UK Government's reserved powers include those surrounding immigration, citizenship and nationality, the national legislatures of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are responsible for the delivery of education, health and social services. Further, local authorities are responsible for some social care, schooling and housing functions. The division of labour between the three tiers means that there is no one, UK-wide strategy, leading to fragmentation, overlap and sometimes incoherence. For example, each devolved administration is at various stages of developing its current integration strategy. Scotland's 'New Scots refugee integration strategy 2018-2022', an antecedent to the 'New Scots integration strategy (2014 to 2017)', is the most developed. The Strategy has seven main themes: a) needs of asylum seekers, b) employability and welfare rights, c) housing, d) education, e) language, f) health and wellbeing, and g) communities, culture and social connections, which were derived from a 2017 consultation with more than 2,000 people, 700 of which were asylum seekers and refugees (Scottish Government, 2019a and 2019b: 6). The Strategy is designed to be flexible, responding to changes on the ground as they unfold, while regular reports are produced assessing progress against key outcomes and identifying challenges (Scottish Government, 2019b: 3, 6). This monitoring of progress is an important step in ensuring successful implementation.

In January 2019, the Welsh Government released its integration strategy 'Nation of Sanctuary – Refugee and Asylum Seeker Plan', in light of a public consultation in 2018, and following on from the 'Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan 2016-2019'. The new plan groups proposed initiatives, actions and objectives under four themes: prosperous and secure, healthy and active, ambitious and learning, and united and connected (Welsh Government, 2019: 6-35). Each action is assigned to a particular Welsh government agency. A key premise of the strategy is that refugees and asylum seekers stand to make a valuable contribution to Welsh communities, and so should be seen as a benefit, rather than as a burden (Welsh Government, 2019: 2). The plan aims to 'ensure inequalities experienced by these communities are reduced, access to opportunities increased, and relations between these communities and wider society improved' (Welsh Government, 2019: 2). Priority issues include access to health services, channels of communication about advice and services, avoiding poverty and access to education and language courses (Welsh Government, 2019: 2).

The UK Government released its 'Integrated Communities Strategy Paper' and 'Integrated Communities Action Plan' in February 2019. The strategy aims to build robust and integrated communities in England, with several actions focussed on refugees. Despite important initiatives spanning information dissemination, access to benefits and English language provision, these measures target refugees, with virtually no mention of asylum seekers. Northern Ireland does not currently have a refugee and asylum seeker integration strategy, but one is urgently needed (*RTÉ Ireland*, 2018).

There are also numerous sub-national integration strategies, for example the 'Mayor's Strategy for Social Integration' which covers London (2018), the 'Regional Integration Strategy for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Yorkshire and Humber 2009-2011' (2009) and Peterborough's 'Community Cohesion Strategy' (2012).

Although effective moves towards integration do need engagement from all three levels of government (Katwala, 2017: 9), it is crucial that these levels are working together<sup>4</sup>. A problem in the UK has been limited coordination and leadership from central government (Katwala, 2017: 9), and that policies at one level are in some instances undermining policies at others. Both the Scottish and Welsh Governments recognise that UK Government policy regarding immigration and asylum is undercutting their efforts at integration. Whereas the Scottish and Welsh Governments see integration as beginning the day an asylum seeker or refugee arrives in Britain, the UK Government sees this process as only starting once a person is granted protection (Scottish Government, 2019b: 23; Welsh Government, 2018: 4). This means that the UK Government pursues policies towards asylum seekers that run completely counter to processes of integration, from the application and appeals process, to accommodation and support, to immigration detention (Scottish Government, 2019b: 23; Welsh Government, 2019: 2). As the Scottish Government notes: 'The effect of these reserved matters on individuals and families, as they navigate the UK asylum system, has a direct impact on all other areas of integration.' (Scottish Government, 2019b: 23). The central Government's different approach to integration in the exercise of their reserved powers means that the Scottish and Welsh Governments are scrambling to circumvent the negative effects as far as is possible, working within their constitutional remit (Scottish Government, 2019b: 23; Welsh Government, 2019: 2).

### **2.2.2. Horizontal fragmentation**

Integration policies are not only fragmented *between* levels of government, but also *within* levels of government. Given that holistic integration encompasses so many policy areas, from education to health to community participation, it is crucial that the multiple functions which are currently tangled between several agencies are made to cohere (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2018: 44). While it is recognised that joined-up policies and service provision are crucial, this is in practice a challenging task. Despite several cases of integrated approaches, there are also many opportunities for greater coordination (Murphy and Vieten, 2017: iv-v). Several reports have highlighted the existence of overlapping and disconnected services (Murphy and Vieten, 2017: iv), as well as poor coordination between departments affecting implementation and delivery (Katwala et. al., 2017: 9).

Institutionally, there are numerous examples of departments with overlapping remits. The Department of the Economy and the Department of Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland both have responsibilities in the employment integration space (Murphy and Vieten, 2017), while in the UK, the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Home Office and the Government Equalities office all have responsibilities within the areas of immigration and community cohesion, resulting in ad-hoc policy-making (All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration, 2018: 44). The All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration has also suggested greater coordination and engagement is needed between the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Department for Education and the Department for Work and Pensions (2018: 41).

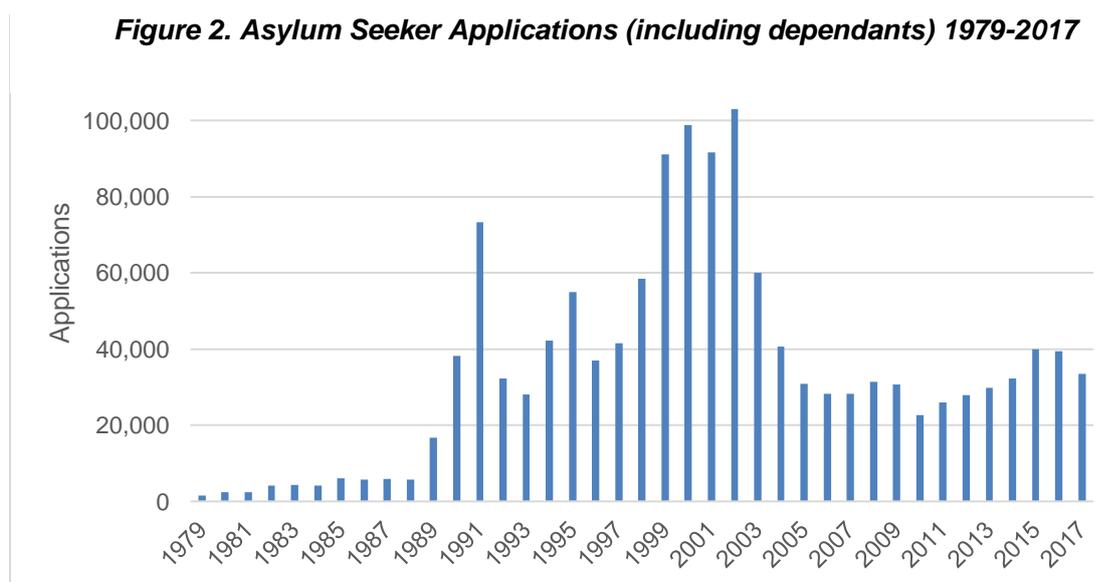
There are also missed opportunities for greater coordination in terms of service provision (Murphy and Vieten, 2017). For example, despite the existence of good health care services, there are challenges in the dissemination of information surrounding those services to

<sup>4</sup> Some examples of largely successful, multi-tier initiatives include the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), and Strategic Migration Partnerships which are funded by the Home Office.

refugees and asylum seekers. This is exacerbated by English language capabilities (Murphy and Vieten, 2017: v-vi). Researchers from Queen’s University Belfast have suggested combining health and ESOL strategies, so that by improving health knowledge and literacy simultaneously, English language ability is not an impediment to healthcare (Murphy and Vieten, 2017: v-vi). Better coordination of childcare needs and ESOL class provision is another opportunity (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 37).

### 2.2.3. Migrant specific approaches

A third dimension of fragmentation concerns the UK’s two different integration approaches depending on the category of migrant. Concerning asylum seekers, the UK Government’s approach is one of segregation and marginalisation. Asylum seekers’ rights have been progressively eroded and their freedoms diminished under every tightening immigration laws and rules (Hirst and Atto, 2018). It seems as though the very strategy the UK Government is pursuing is one of making asylum seekers’ stay in the UK as temporary and as unstable as possible. The steady erosion of appeal rights, the curbing of support payments, dispersal accommodation, immigration detention and the criminalization of illegal working are all serving to prevent refugees putting down roots, establishing connections with local communities and planning a future in the UK. For historical data on asylum seeker applications, see Figure 2 below.



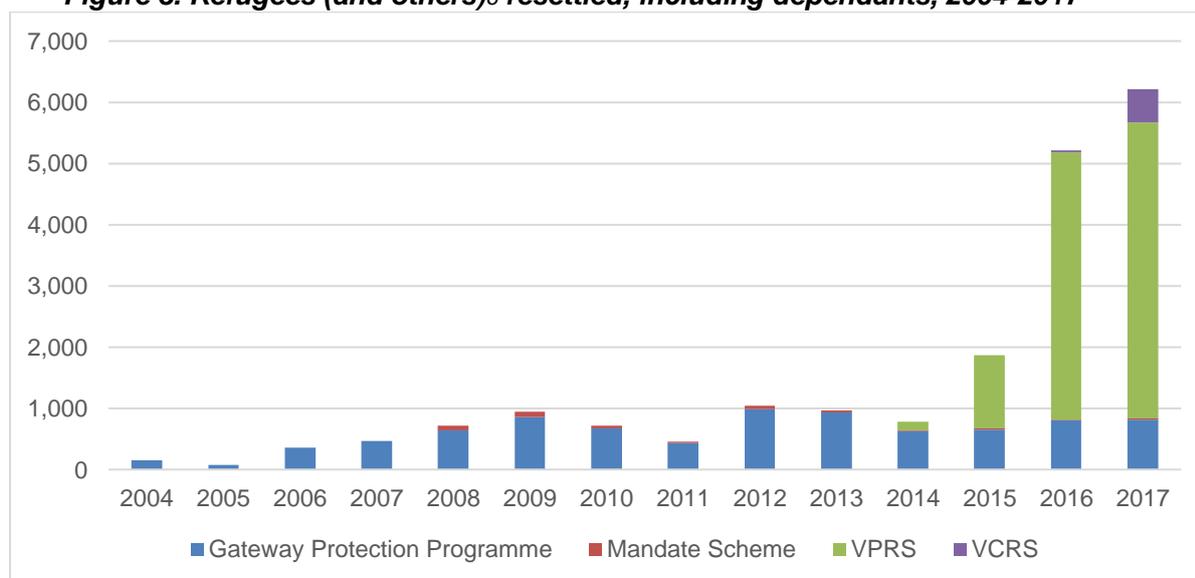
Source: Home Office, 2018d

In contrast to asylum seekers, those who arrive in the UK already as refugees via one of the resettlement programmes face a substantially different policy environment across all dimensions of integration<sup>5</sup> (Saggar and Somerville, 2012: 12). Refugees have free access to secondary healthcare, can access student finance and free ESOL classes straight away, have no formal restrictions on employment, are allocated a case worker to assist them in linking up with services, and can access mainstream benefits on the same basis as UK citizens. Syrians under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) attend a cultural orientation

<sup>5</sup> The UK Government resettlement programmes include the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme (VPRS), the Gateway Protection Programme, the Mandate Scheme, the Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) and the Community Sponsorship Scheme. For data on these programmes see Figure 3.

session run by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) before they depart, are met at the airport when they arrive in the UK, have accommodation pre-arranged, receive a welcome hamper with groceries as well as £200 per person so they can establish themselves before they start receiving benefits (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 24). This is of course not to say that the integration process is smooth for resettled refugees. They face numerous challenges which are elaborated upon in the subsequent sections of this report, not least that many of the resettlement programmes only grant a visa for five years, undermining long-term planning and stability.

**Figure 3. Refugees (and others)<sup>6</sup> resettled, including dependants, 2004-2017**



Source: Home Office, 2018e

## 2.3. Governance structure

The UK has traditionally been a ‘unitary state’, with greater moves towards devolution over time. Although there have been various attempts (for example the Localism Act of 2011), to shift away from the top-down government model, the Parliament in Westminster is still in charge and the UK has remained a *de jure* unitary state. As discussed in our WP1 report (Hirst & Atto, 2018), the governance of migration in the UK is complicated and reactive. The constitutional organisation of the state has contributed to these features of immigration policy. Evidence of the complexity, reactivity and restrictiveness of migration governance is found in the UK’s legislative framework, the legal status of foreigners, the reception system and post-refugee crisis reforms. Constitutionally, there are three tiers of government in the UK – the central UK Government, the devolved governments of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and local authorities. The central UK Government is responsible for immigration, nationality and asylum policy. However, the devolved legislations and local authorities have a role in providing refugee and asylum seekers support within their constitutional remit, including in the areas of social security, housing and health care. The structure of government contributes to the complexity of migration governance, given the sometimes-difficult task of distinguishing the functions and different objectives of the tiers.

<sup>6</sup> Including people granted other forms of protection status.

As outlined in the previous section, there is no UK-wide policy and institutional framework on integration. Integration is rather a devolved matter and each of the constituent nations of the UK has developed its own approach. Since the Localism Act of 2011, the UK encourages local authorities and devolved administrations to determine their own priorities, including in the field of integration.

In the governance of immigrant integration, we observe a multiplicity of actors, to be discussed further below.

### **2.3.1. Local authorities and devolved administrations**

Strategic Migration Partnerships (SMPs) are funded by the Home Office to coordinate, support and deliver participation in the asylum dispersal scheme, the refugee resettlement schemes, the national transfer scheme for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and the provision of ESOL training for eligible migrants. There are 10 regional SMPs: East of England, London, North East, North West, South East, South West, West Midlands, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.<sup>7</sup>

SMPs are local authority-led partnerships that work together with partners from across the public, private and voluntary sector as a means of supporting, coordinating and implementing migration governance at the local and regional levels. Key partners of these SMPs illustrate their status as cross-sectoral, network organizations: local authorities, the Home Office and other government departments working at the local/national level on different aspects of immigrant integration (from housing, health to education), civil society actors/organizations, business representatives and universities. **Local Councils** function as the glue in connecting local communities, driving social cohesion and play an imperative role especially in organising and coordinating immigrant integration in their local context.

### **2.3.2. State agencies**

#### **Home Office**

The Home Office is the lead government department primarily dealing with immigration (UK's borders, asylum, visa services), and to a degree responsible for immigrant integration, particularly for 'refugee' integration and for settlement and citizenship policy. The Home Office is the funder and an active member of regional strategic migration partnerships.

#### **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)**

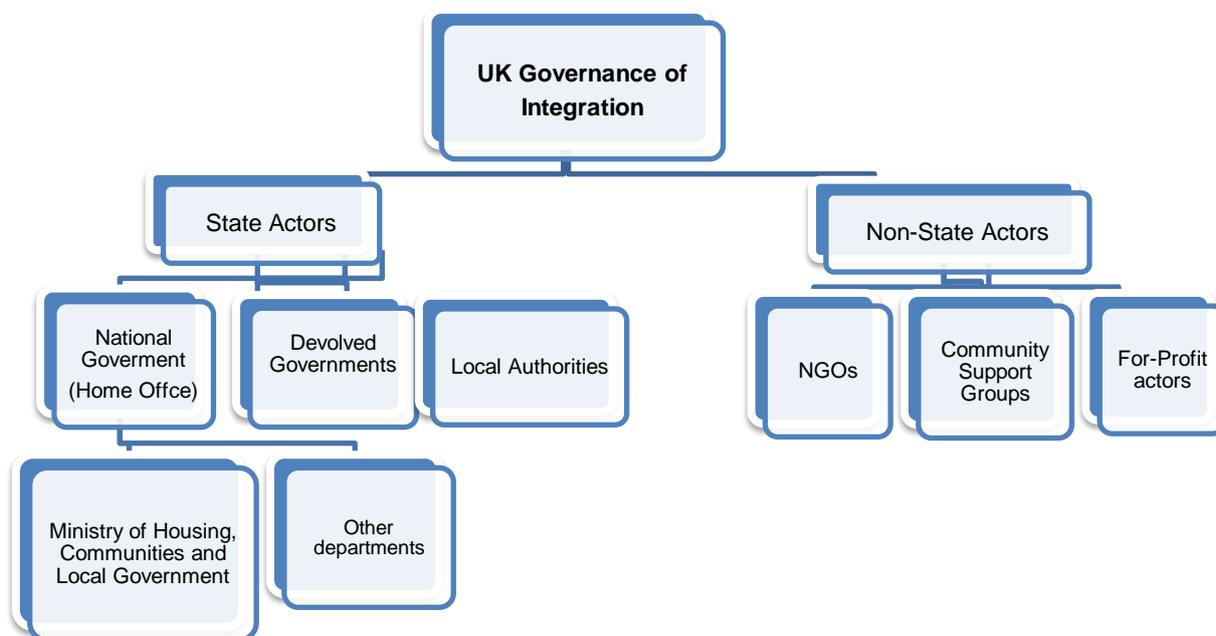
The MHCLG's (formerly the Department for Communities and Local Government) responsibility areas are three-fold: a) improving housing/increasing home ownership, b) protecting and promoting devolved powers in order to boost local growth, and c) supporting and empowering communities. It is the main central authority in charge of community cohesion in England and the author of the 'Integrated Communities Strategy green paper'.

<sup>7</sup>See further: [East of England](#), [East Midlands](#), [London](#), [Scotland](#), [Yorkshire](#), [Northern Ireland](#), [North West](#), [South East](#), [Wales](#), [West Midlands](#).

### Other departments

Other departments lead initiatives in their policy areas, e.g. education and health. The Government Equalities Office is responsible for the equality strategy, legislation and actions to eliminate discrimination and build a fairer society.

**Figure 4: Governance actors in integration policies and practices**



### 2.3.3. Civil society organizations and other stakeholders

Civil society organisations (CSOs) play an important role in immigrant integration programmes by providing services (legal aid and advice, education, employment, housing, health) both at local and national levels, as well as by campaigning and publishing research. Even though not directly permitted as consultative bodies on immigrant integration, the All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration and All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees have played/play a role in influencing integration policymaking processes through policy briefings, as well as research reports. These groups include representatives of non-profit organisations.

### 3. Labour Market

This section provides an overview of labour market integration policies. Furthermore, it discusses the experiences of immigrants when trying to enter the labour market, highlighting the main obstacles and how these affect their daily life and psycho-social wellbeing more broadly.

#### 3.1. Employment in the formal labour market

There is patchy recent data on employment rates among asylum seekers and refugees in the UK (Ruiz and Vargas-Silva, 2017: 4). The Office of National Statistics publishes data on the employment rates of foreign-born people, but it does not disaggregate those with refugee or asylum seeker status. Since January 2010 the UK Labour Force Survey has included a question on the main motivation for immigration to the UK, giving asylum seekers and refugees the opportunity to identify themselves (Migration Observatory, 2010). Relying on self-disclosure of a person's real reason for travel is a significant limitation. Vulnerable categories of migrants are less likely to give complete information due to weariness of authorities and language barriers (Migration Observatory, 2010; Ruiz and Vargas-Silva, 2017: 4-5). The UK Border Agency (now dissolved) conducted the Survey of New Refugees between 2005 and 2009, which captured the employment rate of refugees over time (Cebulla et. al. 2010: 1); however, this data does not extend beyond 2009. In terms of asylum seekers, UK Visas and Immigration does not collate data on the number of applications for work permits they receive and approve (Gower, 2016: 4; House of Lords Debate, 2014). The lack of accurate data notwithstanding, the number of asylum seekers in employment is likely to be very low, given the wait-time of 12 months before they can apply for work and the extremely curtailed list of occupations available to them (Walsh, 2016: 2).

Turning to the available data on refugees, the 2005-2009 Survey of New Refugees showed that after eight months of having refugee status, 34% of those surveyed said they were employed, which increased to 49% after 21 months (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 6; Home Office 2010: ii). A 2019 study which uses UK Labour Force Survey data is more up-to-date. However, the category 'asylum migrant' is based on self-reporting of a respondent's main reason for immigration, rather than their actual legal status (Zovanga et. al., 2019: 13). This study shows that between 2010 and 2017, the employment rate of asylum migrants was 51%, compared to an employment rate of 73% for those who are British-born (Zovanga et. al., 2019: 20). When demographic and social differences are factored in, this gap reduces from 22% to 12% (Zovanga et. al., 2019: 20). In terms of unemployment, 18% of asylum migrants were unemployed between 2010 and 2017, which is triple the unemployment rate of the British-born population (Zovanga et. al., 2019: 20). This reduces to a 12% gap once social and demographic factors are accounted for (Zovanga et. al., 2019: 20).

The UK labour force participation rate has been steadily climbing from a rate of 76.4% in 2011, to 78.5% in 2017 (OECD, 2018). There is some regional variation in terms of labour market statistics. The latest data, for the period August – October 2018, shows that the region with the lowest employment rate was Northern Ireland (68.7%), while the region with the highest was the south west of England (78.7%) (Office for National Statistics, 2018b). Unemployment was highest in the north east of England at 5.5%, and lowest in the south west of England and the east of England, which both sit at 3.0% (Office for National Statistics, 2018b).

### **3.1.1. Access of asylum seekers and refugees to the labour market**

The ability to work in the formal labour market is determined by legal status. For example, asylum seekers are generally unable to work, including in self-employment. An asylum seeker may apply to UK Visas and Immigration (a branch of the Home Office) for permission to work i) if an initial decision on their application takes more than one year, or ii) if their application has been refused but they have not received a response to further submissions lodged more than 12 months previously (Gower, 2016: 3). In both cases the delay must be due to circumstances beyond the applicant's control in order for them to receive permission to work (Gower, 2016: 3; Home Office, 2017: 4). Asylum seekers in these circumstances who have received permission to work are limited to jobs on the shortage occupation list – an eclectic list ranging from geophysicists, to old age psychiatrists, from visual effects animators to specific categories of dancers and musicians (Home Office, 2017: 4 and 2016).<sup>8</sup> Asylum seekers are allowed to volunteer while their claim is being processed (Home Office, 2017: 4).

The current limitations on asylum seeker access to the labour market are the result of policy evolution since 2002. Asylum seekers could seek permission to work if they had not received an initial decision on their application within six months, until this was revoked on 25 July 2002 (Gower, 2016: 5). This meant that asylum seekers could only work in 'exceptional circumstances', as determined by Home Office case workers, although there were no guidelines published on what constituted such circumstances (Gower, 2016: 5). An addition to the Immigration rules in February 2005 meant that asylum seekers could now apply for permission to work after 12 months of waiting for an initial decision on their claim (Gower, 2016: 5). In 2010 this was extended to refused asylum seekers who had been waiting on a response to further submissions for more than 12 months, following a Supreme Court ruling (Gower, 2016: 5). Limiting asylum seekers to jobs on the shortage occupation list was also introduced in 2010 (Gower, 2016: 5).

The UK complied with the 2003 European Directive on Reception Conditions for asylum seekers in terms of labour market access, but not the 2013 recast Directive. The 2003 Directive mandated that the maximum waiting time for permission to work was 12 months; the UK adjusted its immigration rules in 2005 accordingly (Gower, 2016: 5). However, the 2013 recast Directive reduced the maximum waiting time to nine months. The UK opted not to participate in the recast directive, along with Ireland and Denmark (Gower, 2016: 3). In contrast to asylum seekers, those who are granted refugee status or humanitarian protection have no formal limitations placed on their access to the labour market (Home Office, 2017: 4; Walsh, 2016: 3).

The UK-wide body charged with supporting all eligible jobseekers to find employment is Jobcentre Plus (part of the Department for Work and Pensions). As refugees and those granted subsidiary protection are able to work, they can use Jobcentre Plus's services. However, most asylum seekers cannot, given that they are barred from working (Walsh, 2016: 2). While Jobcentre Plus has no specific initiatives targeting refugees, refugees are considered a priority group which means that Jobcentre Plus advisers have the discretion to allow them to access services earlier than is usual<sup>9</sup> (Walsh, 2016: 3). All Jobcentre Plus clients, including refugees, have access to the same range of services as tailored to their needs (Walsh, 2016: 3-4). These services include training allowances, help with CV writing and job searches, work

<sup>8</sup> There are two shortage occupation lists; one for Scotland and one for the rest of the UK.

<sup>9</sup> In order for a refugee to access this fast-track process, they must divulge that they are a refugee and sign a consent form to allow them to be labelled as a refugee in the Jobcentre Plus system (Walsh 2016: 3).

trials, assisting with travel costs to job interviews outside their area, English for Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) courses, programmes tailored to single parents transitioning in to work and assistance with benefits (Department for Work and Pensions, 2010). Jobcentre Plus can arrange for an interpreter if needed by a client as long as advance warning is given, or a client may bring their own interpreter (Department for Work and Pensions, 2010: 5; Walsh, 2016: 3). A review of the Jobcentre and Department for Work and Pensions estate has led to announcements of multiple Jobcentre closures across the UK throughout 2016 and 2017, including the closure of eight out of 16 Jobcentre Plus premises in Glasgow (House of Common Scottish Affairs Committee, 2017: 3).

The UK Border Agency operates the Integration Loan Scheme. Under the scheme refugees, holders of humanitarian protection and their dependents can apply for interest-free loans to put towards rent, a rental deposit, essential household items, training or retraining, basic living costs while retraining, or work clothing and equipment (Department for Work and Pensions, 2010: 15; UK Government, 2018). The loans are repaid via deductions from the recipient's benefits (Department for Work and Pensions, 2010: 15).

There was also a highly regarded service that ran between 2008 and 2011 – the Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES) – which provided housing, education, welfare and employment support to refugees for 12 months (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 6). RIES was funded by the UK Government, and delivered by contractors, including the Refugee Council and Refugee Action (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 25). This service was available to both refugees who had been through the asylum process, as well as resettled refugees. Funding was cut and the service wound up in 2011 as a cost-saving measure in the context of reducing the Government's fiscal deficit (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 25). No subsequent support service has since been available to refugees who had received their status via the asylum route (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 6).

### **3.1.2. Validation of skills and recognition of qualifications**

The UK's National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) is responsible for providing official advice on the equivalence of professional, academic and vocational qualifications obtained outside the UK on behalf of the UK Government (UK NARIC, 2019a).<sup>10</sup> Their services may be used by both individuals and organisations. Individuals can request a Statement of Comparability from NARIC, which outlines how their overseas qualifications compare to UK qualifications. At the time of writing (2020), this service costs £59.40 (UK NARIC, 2019b). There are additional costs for the translation of certificates, the fast-track service and postage. Other services available to individuals include the provision of an English Language Assessment document outlining English language competence, which also costs £59.40, as well as documents to support entry into regulated industries such as the teaching and early years sectors, as well as the electrician, electrotechnical and construction trades (UK NARIC, 2019b). The cost of this latter service depends on the sector and the specific document requested (UK NARIC, 2019b). UK NARIC also aids institutions such as universities, colleges, employers, professional associations and immigration NGOs in

<sup>10</sup> NARICs operate in 55 countries, including in the European Union and European Economic Area member states, as well as in other countries such as the United States, New Zealand and Turkey (ENIC-NARIC, 2019).

determining equivalence of overseas qualifications, as well as certificate verification and fraud checks (UK NARIC, 2019c).

Although an official and highly regarded body such as UK NARIC is able to compare UK qualifications with those obtained overseas, this does not always mean positive outcomes for those applying. A UK NARIC statement of comparability doesn't guarantee a job or a place at a university – it is up to educational institutions, employers and professional associations to decide whether or not to accept candidates, based on their interpretation of the UK NARIC statement, alongside other factors (Ellis et. al., 2016: 10; Schuster et. al., 2013: 186). There are many examples of migrants whose qualifications aren't recognised in the UK, despite being qualified professionals in their home countries (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 31; Ellis et. al. 2016: 7). The Survey of New Refugees in the UK showed that more than 50% of refugees in work at 21 months since arrival considered themselves over-qualified in their current roles, with this figure increasing for those with degrees and high school qualifications (Cebulla et. al., 2010: iii; Ellis et. al., 2016: 6-7). There are also problems surrounding fragmentation, given that no single UK Government agency has specific responsibility for refugee accreditation and equivalence recognition, with the Department for Education, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy all having a role in this space (Ellis et. al., 2016: 11).<sup>11</sup> Further, there is no UK-wide qualifications framework, particularly regarding informal learning recognition. England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales all have different approaches (Ellis et. al., 2016: 10; Schuster et. al., 2013: 186). Finally, there are ongoing challenges surrounding best practice for the recognition of undocumented qualifications, which is a particular challenge for refugees (Ellis et. al., 2016). UK NARIC and the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) have trialled a scheme called the Qualifications Passport for Refugees in Greece, in an effort to pilot a new approach to the issue of absent qualification documents (British Council, 2018: 31).

### **3.1.3. Vocational training**

In terms of vocational training and the acquisition of work skills, individuals who have arrived in the UK as resettled refugees have the same entitlements as British citizens (UK Government, 2018: 12). Although asylum seekers do not face formal restrictions in accessing skills and training courses (unless this is specified in their particular bail conditions), there are significant financial barriers given they are charged international student fees, are not able to take out loans, or to work or receive mainstream welfare payments (Asylum Information Database, 2019: 73). The intersection of immigration and vocational training is somewhat complicated by the fact that all immigration, refugee and citizenship matters are centralised in the hands of the Home Office, whereas administration of publicly funded vocational education and training is devolved to the governments of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales (British Council, 2018: 15). There are different support initiatives available to refugees and asylum seekers in each of these jurisdictions. For example, England offers vocational education subsidies to refugees who meet very stringent conditions such as employment and residency status, the specific training course, as well as age (British Council, 2018: 19-20). Asylum seekers are only eligible for these subsidies if they have not yet received an outcome on their application for asylum after six months (British Council, 2018: 20-21). In Scotland, however,

<sup>11</sup> UK NARIC, while working on behalf of the UK Government, is not a Government agency. It is a private company that has operated on a non-profit basis since 2014. Further, its remit is not specific to refugees, but instead concerns all international qualification conversions (Ellis et. al., 2016: 9).

asylum seekers can access government funds for vocational training irrespective of how long they have been waiting for the results of their asylum application (British Council, 2018: 20).

Another initiative, the Building Bridges programme, assists refugee medical professionals in meeting the requisite standards to practice in the UK. The programme is funded by the NHS, and run by the Refugee Council, the Refugee Advice and Guidance Unit, and Glowing Results (Ellis et. al. 2016: 15). It is available to refugees who have the right to work in the UK and who live in London. The programme provides support and skills training for refugees to sit the Professional and Linguistic Assessment Board exams and the Occupational English Test, both of which are necessary to practice as a doctor in the UK. Building Bridges also provides language and communication skills workshops, additional clinical experience, assistance with job searches and professional development seminars (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017; 31; Refugee Council, 2019). A similar initiative, called the Refugee Doctors Programme, was rolled out in Scotland in 2017 (All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration, 2018: 32).

#### **3.1.4. Gender dimensions and vulnerable refugees**

Refugee employment also has a gendered dimension. Between 2010 and 2017, 34.5% of female 'asylum migrants' in the UK were in employment, compared to 63.6% of asylum migrant men (Zovanga et. al., 2019: 26). These data are taken from the UK Labour Force Survey. As outlined previously, one of the questions the Survey asks respondents is the reason for their initial move to the UK. The term 'asylum migrant' here refers to those who self-reported that their reason was asylum, rather than their actual legal status at the time of their arrival or during follow-up surveys (ibid.: 13-14). These are similar to figures derived from the EU Labour Force Survey, which calculate that in 2014, 38% of refugee women were employed in the UK, compared to approximately 62% of refugee men (European Commission and OECD, 2016: 20). Refugee women face specific challenges in entering the workforce, including affordable childcare, a lack of specialised services for refugee women, discrimination and lack of previous formal work experience (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 37; Refugee Women's Strategy Group, 2011: 8-9). Refugee women have found it challenging to move out of certain sectors, finding themselves trapped in cleaning, catering and care roles (Refugee Women's Strategy Group, 2011: 10).

Although there is no UK-wide initiative to integrate refugee and asylum-seeking women into the labour market, several smaller-scale initiatives have been piloted. One example is the 'One Step Closer' initiative which was trialled in Glasgow between February 2013 and May 2014. Funded by the Scottish Government, the Scottish Refugee Council and the Glasgow ESOL Forum, the weekly course aimed to grow the confidence and employability skills of refugee and asylum seeker women (Glasgow ESOL Forum et. al, 2014: 2). Despite the successful outcomes of the pilot (Glasgow ESOL Forum et. al, 2014: 4-7), it doesn't appear to have been rolled out on a larger scale or continued beyond May 2014. The reasons for this are unclear. There are other gender-specific employment initiatives operated by the not-for-profit sector. These include projects run by the organisations Bread and Roses, Routes, the Refugee Women's Association and the Refugee Council (which runs the Just Bread initiative among others).

There is very limited information on other vulnerable refugee and asylum seeker groups and their access to the labour market. For example, it is not clear how many refugees and asylum seekers with disabilities are currently in the UK, constituting "a largely 'hidden' population, unknown in size and need" (Ward, Amas and Lagnado, 2008: 7). Until 2016, the UK Government denied disabled refugees Disability Living Allowance and Personal

Independence Payments on the basis that they hadn't lived in the UK for two of the previous three years (Refugee Action, 2016a).

### 3.2. Employment in the informal labour market

As data on the informal sector is necessarily opaque, figures are approximations and up-to-date data is hard to come by. An estimate of the size of the UK informal economy during the period 2001-2002 puts it at 12.5% of annual GDP (Schneider, 2002: 20); whereas in 2012 it was estimated to constitute 10.1% of GDP (Schneider, 2012: 5; Williams, 2014: 9) and was projected to constitute 9.0% of GDP in 2016 (Schneider, 2016: 48)<sup>12</sup>. The informal sector in the UK is quite small when compared to other European countries, with the 2016 projections putting the size of the UK's informal economy behind that of Poland (23.0% of GDP), Belgium (16.1% of GDP), France (12.6% of GDP), Sweden (12.6% of GDP) and Germany (10.8% of GDP) (Schneider, 2016: 48). It is estimated that the UK informal sector comprises approximately 2 million workers (Barbour and Llanes, 2013; Williams, 2014: 10).

There are various different types of informal work. A 2007 Eurobarometer survey estimated that 60% of informal work in the UK takes the form of paid favours in close-knit social communities, 29% is paid work and 11% is self-employment (Williams, 2014: 3, 15). Despite the many disadvantages of the paid informal sector (e.g. risk of non-payment, mistreatment, no guaranteed minimum wage or sick pay), it can be a vital lifeline for those living in poverty (Barbour and Llanes, 2013; Shapland and Heyes, 2017: 383; Williams, 2014: 18).

Anecdotal evidence shows that there are asylum seekers doing cash-in-hand work to make ends meet while barred from working, given the inadequacy of support payments (Katungi, Neale and Barbour, 2006: 11). There are also cases of rejected asylum seekers remaining in the UK illegally, who support themselves through informal work (Katungi, Neale and Barbour, 2006: 12). It is interesting to note that this anecdotal evidence is from a report published in 2006, before the *Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006* and the *Immigration Act 2016* made it a criminal offence for employers to hire someone without the right to work in the UK. It is unclear what impact the so-called 'hostile environment' has had on asylum seekers' engagement in the informal economy.

In terms of refugees, it is estimated that only a small proportion work in the informal sector. For those that do, the main reason is to alleviate poverty as a result of difficulties accessing the formal labour market (Community Links and the Refugee Council, 2011: 5-7). Although refugees are entitled to work, obstacles such as language skills, qualification recognition and a lack of employer knowledge about refugees' right to work means that for many the formal sector is out of reach (Community Links and the Refugee Council, 2011: 5). Jobs in the informal sector taken up by refugees tend to be low-skilled and poorly paid, including cleaning, painting, care and retail (Community Links and the Refugee Council, 2001: 6). Some refugees may not realise that they are engaged in informal work due to a lack of familiarity with the UK employment context (Community Links and the Refugee Council, 2011: 7).

There are four policy approaches to dealing with the informal sector – doing nothing, eradication, deregulation and formalisation (Williams, 2014: 4). The UK Government's approach towards undocumented immigrants and asylum seekers without permission to work is largely punitive, designed to eradicate that component of the informal economy. While

<sup>12</sup> These are all different studies; these figures should not be directly compared or interpreted as increasing over time.

employers can be fined and jailed for up to five years for employing someone without the right to work, illegal working became a criminal offence in 2016, with punishments for employees including fines, seizure of wages and up to six months imprisonment (Home Office, 2018c: 10-11; UK Government, 2019d). While there is limited information regarding attempts by the UK Government to regularise the informal employment of refugees, wider trends in the Government's approach to the informal economy suggest a shift in gears might be underway, with small movements away from eradication approaches in pursuit of formalisation (Williams, 2014: 4).

### **3.3. Experiences in the labour market**

At the implementation level of policy, some of the primary issues highlighted are the multiple barriers to successful integration into the labour market and access to the professional sphere. Indeed, these are some of the first areas of significance mentioned by the representative of Asylum Welcome (Interview 3). Equally, the representative of the NGO Syrian Sisters (Interview 1), also emphasises that despite the potential for access to work in the UK, there is repeated difficulty in achieving employment that recognises the original skill-set of asylum seekers and refugees. This is, partly, related to language problems, and a lack of available English language-learning classes, and/or a persistent inability to acquire a professional-level of English. However, it is also intrinsically connected to the inaccessibility of funding and/or more general economic issues, as well as a lack of recognition of asylum seekers' and refugees' original qualifications within the UK context (see above for a more detailed contextual/historical analysis of this issue). For example, on being questioned about work in the UK, the representative of Syrian Sisters, who is also a refugee, responds:

Its language, but not just language. Like most of the people who come here are without education. But if you are educated, you will be in trouble. Because you can't find... like my husband ... He was teaching in Damascus University and Latakia University. He is very experienced. He had his PhD from Cairo University. And he came here; when he passed ... [the] English exam, he was, like he speaking English, but like not academic language. ... And he was very depressed. He started work in [a] restaurant... You see how it is difficult they are? It is very hard, like it is very hard in the UK to find your kind of job. For me I really want to be [a] social worker as [I was in] my country, and I have a very good experience here also, and in my country. But they ask for me for a certificate called HSP, I don't know what this certificate [is]. They don't allow us to work [in] what we wanted to work [in]. (Interview 1)

Not being able to continue the professions they occupied in their home countries is also pointed out by the representative from Asylum Welcome. However, for this respondent it was also seen as resolvable given effective intervention by other involved NGOs or other organisations:

Some professions are more common than others: taxi drivers, working in fast food restaurants. Asylum Welcome's employment programme is good as it sees what job they did in their home country, and then we get them into that same job. For example, a guy was a civil engineer back home but in the UK he was working in a fish and chip shop. Through our programme we got him into a civil engineering job. The basic problem is filling out job applications and interviews in a way that is normal in the UK,

which we help them with. ...In terms of qualifications, it does depend on what the job or qualification was. In a lot of cases it is not insurmountable to get their qualification recognised. Medical qualifications are a particular hurdle, but in other professions it is not that big a deal. (Interview 3)

In slight contrast to these statements by the representative of Asylum Welcome, the lack of acceptance of original qualifications has specifically been problematised by the representative of Syrian Sisters, stressing a lack of governmental support, and thus not making full use of the available potential of immigrants. For her, this has been more influential as a barrier to work than a language problem alone (e.g. lack of English, or no access to English-learning):

It is expensive, yeah. My friend she recommends me to do, like she suggest 'why ... you don't do another Masters?'. I looked I should pay £9,000 every year! ... It is so expensive, honestly. And also, I have my Masters, why am I going to do [another] Masters? You know, but if they help me a little bit I can work [as a] social worker again. I have three languages you know – I have Kurdish, Arabic and some English. Because you know when social workers use translator, .... If I speak in Arabic it is not how I speak in English. ... But honestly [the] Government they don't help us, they should help us more. Especially people who are coming with [a] degree. Use these people for helping Government, why are they not using these people who are coming with degree[s] already? (Interview 1)

While observing the costs of additional UK qualifications, this highly educated respondent from Syria then continues to comment on how this lack of access to appropriate work that recognises the existent skill-sets of asylum seekers and refugees goes beyond economic and financial limitations. Explaining how it is more complex than an inability to locate funding/pay for additional qualifications; the issue, in her response, being a complete lack of ability to enter the original field of work and/or make use of her qualifications, even at the volunteer level. For her, the problem is one of recognition of former-achievement(s) and a blockage at policy-level that does not allow either a transition or a renewal of qualifications into the UK employment market. Stating that this is a government-level flaw in promoting the integration of refugees and asylum seekers who have higher, university-level qualifications and/or careers within their original countries:

Yes, it is very, very hard here to work in your field. I know a doctor who worked for 15 years in Syria as [a] children's doctor, she [is a] woman, and here she still needed to pass exam. And she can't pass this exam. ... They are not very flexible with this kind of stuff. If you come here without education you can work in anything. It is fine. But if you have a degree you can't work. This doctor she can't work [as] anything – she worked 15 years as [a] doctor. They don't let her volunteer. She wants volunteer job and they don't give her [a] volunteer job. It is something miss[ing] from government. They should look [at] this one. And if this doctor she will be depressed if she can't find a job. She can't [be] involve[d] if she doesn't work in her [field]. (Interview 1).

A representative of an organisation in the east of England working in the field of immigrant integration puts this experience regarding the validation of qualifications and the difficulty with gaining a position in the job market into context:

The barriers for refugees to integrate, I think it is integration in the job market, is tough, because they won't necessarily come with their school certificates, and evidence of their previous work, and qualifications. When their qualifications, when they do come with them, they are, umm provided with what's called NARIC, which is umm... equivalence agency... so it allows you to transfer across, so okay an Afghan doctor's qualifications make it possible for them to work in the UK, or no they don't, or whatever it is. So you have this exam equivalence thing. Mostly it, from what I've read about the way that process works, the people who get a Masters overseas are told its equivalent to a graduate course, those that have got a graduate course are told its equivalent to A-levels. So they feel, their qualifications are suppressed if you like, the level of their qualification doesn't equate to what they think it does when they come to the UK. (Interview 4)

This experiential description of the UK labour market by these stakeholder respondents was reinforced by a number of interviewed migrants. Notably, they echo the effects of UK employment policies for their psychosocial health and wellbeing. These migrant interviews offer further insights in to the significance of depression, emotional difficulty and impacts on wellbeing, as mentioned by the stakeholder quoted above in the context of employment and the labour market. For example, a young Yazidi female asylum seeker from Iraq explains her understanding of, and involvement with, the UK labour market in the following terms:

For two years I live without work, only as a volunteer for two NGO's. Every week we get 35 pounds. I can't go out. And I am always alone. No family, no one. ... I looked for volunteer work because mentally I did not feel good without work; I could not sleep. I went to the doctor and told him I could not sleep and I feel bad. ... These months I have always stress. If they refuse me [asylum application] I do not know what to do. (Interview 17)

A young adult Yazidi man living in England expresses how difficult it has been to make ends meet as an asylum seeker because he has not been allowed to enter the job market:

... sometimes. ... I'm helping an NGO for ... here. And sometimes I help with translations. Sometimes survivors of Isis who contact this NGO. ... I have not tried to work because I am not a lucky man they [police] would catch me the first time [if I would try to work illegally] [laughs]. But I think they should provide jobs to asylum seekers because five pounds a day is not much. When I go to college [for English language classes] I have to walk five miles to and five miles back. .... Now, I do not receive any [financial] support from the UK government [survives with financial support of NGO]. (Interview 19)

As both Yazidi respondents and the representative of Syrian Sisters indicate, not being able to enter the job market – whether during their asylum application or after being granted asylum – has caused problems with both their economic as well as their psycho-social health and wellbeing. Representing both Syrian Sisters as an NGO but also speaking on behalf of a Syrian refugee household with a high educational background who have not been able yet to find a job at their level, this female respondent uses her own example to point to what she sees as urgent issues when building a new life in the England:

I really hope from Government to focus on, give the opportunity to work in speciality. Because if the man doesn't work there will be problem in the family. You know, man and woman sitting at home without any job. They just chatting, they will be fighting every day. It is normal, not just Syrians. It is normal... if English people.... ... Help us, help us as foreign people, as refugees, as any people, help us to find a job. Because it is important you know. We should focus on this, on work. ... Because also the [welfare] benefit is not enough. ... It is not much at all, really. (Interview 1)

Here, psycho-social difficulties are manifesting as problems with family wellbeing and home dynamics; and they are seen as either fixable or avoidable via a focused shift in available (and *appropriate*; i.e. 'speciality') work opportunities, and related changes within UK governmental policies regarding employment. Below we shall focus more on the language barriers as we touched on in this part, in entering the labour market.

### **3.3.1. Language barriers**

Language barriers have been highlighted above specifically in relation to immigrants who have higher-level educational qualifications (i.e. Masters and PhDs) and resultant careers and who then have subsequent difficulties finding the same form of employment or, indeed, any employment if not eligible to work within a UK setting. There is a broader trend supporting the findings above (e.g. All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 31; Ellis et. al. 2016: 7). However, while extremely significant, this is not simply an aspect of the lack of recognition of qualifications and former careers. A lack of English or an inadequate level of English for the professional sphere is perceived as an additional block to transferable skills and work experience. Language barriers have also been represented as the primary difficulty in obtaining employment no matter what the level of former qualifications, educational background or work experience. For example, a representative of an organisation working with immigrants in Cambridge explains:

The biggest obstacle to employment is language. If they had language they would all be in work. There is huge variation in English levels, but everyone is motivated. It is much harder for illiterate people. ... Qualifications are not an issue. Most have no recognisable qualifications. ... There are not many issues in terms of employers taking on refugees. There are loads of Arab business and normal business. The only thing is that the local authority will check out the employer for safe-guarding issues, which could be off-putting for the employer. (Interview 2)

These difficulties with language-learning are explained by another stakeholder working with immigrants in the East of England as being intrinsically connected to both economic and linguistic inhibitions towards integration. For this respondent, it is also relevant whether the subject has prior higher-level qualifications or not, and whether educated in their previous country of residence or not:

Absolutely. So you then have the economic decision to make, which is, do I then go back to studying, in order to bring my qualification up to the level that I think I've already got, but I don't have the proof or can't prove that I have, or do I think well in

that case I'll work at the lower level, because I can work there immediately. But then you also need the English in order to be able to do that. (Interview 4)

Levels of language, or language-learning, are also seen as fundamentally inhibitive towards labour market accessibility by the representative from the Scotland based Asylum Seeker Housing Project:

Ok, so the biggest one [barrier to employment] is that people don't speak English. Sometime people don't understand that but it's kind of at the core of everything. A barrier can also be if people, if local people are worried about the asylum seekers and they're not confident to speak to them. So barriers are raised by... (Interview 6)

These barriers towards learning English/not knowing English on arrival, and subsequent lack of employment access and social inclusion are outlined strongly here. Individuals arriving in the UK through the refugee resettlement programme get the opportunity to learn and/or develop their language within 3-5 years; a right that others do not enjoy when they apply for asylum upon arrival in the UK:

Yeah, ... we think that most of our learners should acquire enough English within three years through the refugee [re]settlement programme. Because most arrive with what's called pre-entry level English; they are required to have at least nine hours a week of English every week, umm, and with that amount of input, you should move up one level a year. ... Entry-level three, is the level at which the Home Office says you are job ready. ... Three years is a long time, umm, but we have got, they have got 5 years on the resettlement programme, so it's about saying well actually, can you do it in three? (Interview 4)

Still, even given the available opportunities, this respondent in Interview 4 clearly outlines the amount of time needed to learn English to an adequate, government-recognised standard for integration into the employment sector (this being one of the largest issues for migrants). For the representative of Asylum Welcome this is also the case (Interview 3). Language remains the largest inhibiting factor towards labour market integration. Here, again, this is not because of a lack of higher-level qualifications, or recognition of qualifications, nor is it specifically seen as a consequence of governmental policy. Rather, it is seen as an integration barrier across all groups of asylum seekers and refugees, with the amount of time needed being a fundamental component of this:

Language is a big issue. Some refugees who arrived through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme have not made a huge amount of progress in learning English after one or two years. (Interview 3)

Representatives of Asylum Welcome and of an organisation in the East of England indicate that it is very much a *timing* issue within the context of language-learning for employment. This was reinforced by individual immigrant respondents, many of whom described language barriers and the difficulties in obtaining language-learning via classes or otherwise as integral to integration problems. The amount of time needed for language-learning is key to many of their employment difficulties and financial problems. At the individual level, however, this is

more closely and directly associated with obstacles in emotional health and wellbeing than it is at the stakeholder level of representatives of organisations working with migrants.

However, while many of the interviewed immigrants identify language and (English) language-learning problems as one of the most influential and fundamental barriers towards integration into the UK labour market and ability to work, this is not always perceived as being entirely inaccessible or negative. Being motivated and emotionally ready and prepared to dedicate oneself to learning a new language is also key, as the young adult and highly educated male Assyrian refugee from Syria says:

... Good integration starts with the language. Anyone coming in should start with learning the language, speaking and writing. Because if you do not know the language you will never settle here. That is the key to settle and integrate here. Work! Because otherwise it won't be good for you; not psychologically, not physically. A lot of people think we are going to take advantage of the system. To be honest, I earned minimum wages in the UK and it was sufficient to get a loan from the bank for a nice wedding and I have a nice flat. ... Do not moan that the language is difficult or that it will take a lot of time. Just do it ... (Interview 20)

Here, clearly, 'effort' (i.e. 'Do not moan ... Just do it') in learning the English language, and achieving a proficient level of English, is seen as necessary and integral to positive integration, economic stability and the ability to work. It is also described as being a matter of choice, rather than systemic discrimination or barrier for asylum seekers and refugees. As this example shows, the educational, socio-economic background and general motivation and attitude of newcomers play an important role in their responses to the requirements of living in a new country. The Assyrian respondent quoted above arrived in England with a high-level degree, already a good level of English and the strong hope that he would be able to establish himself in this English-speaking country. In his specific case, his hopes for being able to establish himself well were expressed in a positive attitude towards upgrading his level of English and his already acquired academic degree. At the time of writing he is working in his profession; he managed to do so within a period of about three years.

However, as illustrated above with many examples, this is not the case across the different experiences of immigrants. An Iranian female respondent thought the required level of English obstructed her in the first place from entering her profession as a hairdresser:

I was a hairdresser in Iran and so went to a few hairdressers here and asked for work and they asked if I had certificate from here and I said no, but I have lot of experience and I could show samples of my work, but they said 'no, you have to have the certificate from this country and your level of English should also be good'. ... Well, it is for English, since if I want to study it (hairdressing) I will need to know English better and so the biggest obstacle now is English. (Interview 23)

Equally, for this Iranian woman, learning English is *not* simple or a matter of choice; she experiences it as difficult especially because it is grammar-based, something with which the respondent is not familiar:

You see the course is grammar-based but our problem is conversational English. My issue and not just mine, all of us going to the college is speaking and so this ESOL

course helps me very little in this regard. ... If I could be involved in the society, for example doing a voluntary job and speaking to people would help me a lot more, I will have to speak then, this way I am not learning much at all. (Interview 23)

Here, the standard English-language courses that have been made available to immigrants are not perceived as being functionally suitable and newly arrived immigrants do often not have the required minimum educational background to start or continue at the required level of language learning. This migrant feels the courses give very little support either conversationally, or in terms of the spoken English that is needed to pursue work or to be actively involved within the UK labour market. Interestingly, for this participant, this is – again – related to concerns regarding community acceptance and integration. However, volunteer and NGO work positions and/or organisational interventions are *not* seen as a solution as they are for some of the other respondents. Indeed, these volunteer roles are spoken of as being equally inaccessible and therefore not aiding in terms of psycho-social health or language acquisition, as this Iranian woman explains:

I still have lot of difficulties now. We went to look for some voluntary work here and they didn't even accept us for free, voluntary work here. We thought we would go and do some free work and that would help our mood, my husband's and mine and be part of the society. ... They don't accept us at all. They just repel us fully. ... Just the ordinary people. They repel us so sometimes that I think to myself sometimes that I was somebody in Iran and now here they won't even let me work for them for free. (Interview 23)

This quote echoes the problems outlined previously regarding the recognition of qualifications and former skills/employment experience. Again, these difficulties can be linked to issues of wellbeing, integration, and feelings of social acceptance. Demonstrating how, given the experiences of our respondents, problems with language-learning seem to be a core barrier to integration into the labour market among immigrants, while problems with the recognition of qualifications seem to affect a smaller group (those with higher level education/work experience in their country of origin). Yet these two issues are clearly mutually reinforcing and are often experienced together. They are also seen as being fundamental to other barriers towards employment, such as accessibility – even within volunteer roles.

However, these issues are also stated as being exaggerated by attitudes of potential employers (for example, the experience of being 'repelled' by volunteer organisations and NGOs described in Interview 23). They are also perceived to be made more severe by the organisational frameworks currently in place to provide adequate language-learning within appropriate time frames and by governmental policy concerns. This is described further below.

### **3.3.2. Systemic barriers**

As discussed in the sections above, stakeholder respondents in particular recognise language problems as one of the main factors delaying access to, or integration into, the labour market, and as an issue that affects diverse groups of asylum seekers and refugees. Flawed government policy is often seen as a crucial problem in this regard. This is expressed by the representative of an organisation in the East of England in the context of a discussion about labour market integration:

Yeah it is Government policy that prevents asylum seekers from being allowed to do the sorts of things that would help with their integration. (Interview 4)

This respondent outlines language-learning barriers as indicative of the UK governmental policy differences *between* asylum seekers and refugee-status migrants. The respondent reinforces other findings that the ability to work in the formal labour market is determined by legal status, subsequent to policy changes in 2002:

Okay. Again, it is different between asylum seekers and refugees. The way our policies work, and our laws are framed in the UK, is very much that asylum seekers sit to one side of society whilst their asylum claim is being decided. Because we have around about 30% acceptance rate of asylum seekers... that changes on appeal, and it lifts it up nearer the 50% mark. But it does mean that effectively you are looking at a population where only half will be given the right to remain in the UK, and therefore be able to access public services and work and become a refugee, and you know, become a normal integrated citizen in UK society. So, the policy feels like, it just says asylum seekers sit to one side, and unless and until you have a positive decision, you are, you are in UK society but you are not necessarily part of it. ... So that's why you're not allowed to access ESOL for the first six months, because we don't know that you're going to stay. So why do you need English if you're not going to stay. ... You're not allowed to work, because we don't know that you can stay. We don't want you to put down roots if you're not allowed to put down roots. (Interview 4).

As the representative of Asylum Welcome (Interview 3) has also indicated, this respondent also illustrates that issues with entering the labour market can be resolved by NGO intervention and help, in the absence of appropriate governmental support or policy:

You're there, watching what's going on in society but you're not allowed to take part in it. So, it's really the NGOs, charities that help provide those additional services that stop... you know, because you don't want people's skills to fossilise really. You don't want them to feel like they don't belong... because that creates problems in itself. And yeah, it's just, it means you've got meaningful activities of some sort. (Interview 4)

Similarly, the representative of Just Right Scotland links inhibitions towards entering the Labour Market as directly linked to UK government policies regarding working-rights for asylum seekers:

They will always go on to benefits because who can get a job? Who's got a job? Nobody's got a job at that point. *They're not allowed to work.* (Emphasis added. Interview 10)

This is also made very clear by the Councillor for The Scottish Green Party, stating very clearly what he sees as the flaws within the governmental system. He also highlights devolution to Scotland as a possible way of improving the labour market integration of asylum seekers:

Like the whole thing is absolutely rigged against people and that kind of bureaucratic, it is like torture you know. Like you know, you can't work, you have to just wait and you are forced to choose between working illegally which might severely harm your case but at least you have got food for your family, or do you not work and starve and you know, be freezing cold. So, there are so many things that are completely inhumane. Yes, I would devolve it to Scotland. I would have a system that is consistent and transparent and fair where the appeal process is do-able and clear and has clear timescales and that there are clear points at which you can challenge that and that you will be given a fair hearing. (Interview 7)

There are different views among respondents as to the role government policy can play in facilitating labour market integration. For example, the representative of an organisation working in Cambridge states that linguistic barriers are more closely linked to local community intervention and interaction than *directly* to governmental policy. Instead, the respondent sees government policies as playing an indirect role by shaping, supporting and influencing these community circumstances. Divergent views on how and when government policy affects labour market integration is an interesting area for further research, with important implications for future policy change.

Asylum seekers and refugees often made clear connections between: policy, systemic support, citizenship and human rights. As seen previously, many problems are due to timing issues, with migrants having to wait for either support, access to language-learning, or availability of employment. These experiences are integral to how our respondents perceive government policy. The difficulties surrounding the asylum procedure, go economic stability and integration into the labour market are mentioned by a middle-aged male Yazidi respondent from Iraq:

It [asylum procedure] was a nightmare for all of us, you cannot do anything. ... Situation gets worse because you are not allowed to work, you don't have enough income for your family, for a holiday or anything, not even in the UK. You cannot take your family to a different city. ... because of economic reasons you cannot take them and enjoy a holiday elsewhere. And we are in this situation until today. ...  
... I did not receive ... child support after applying for asylum. Home office supports with 36 pounds per week per person. ... But nobody can live with this. In my area, I have to take the bus to take kids to school. I have to pay for this. If you have kids at home you need internet and TV; you have to have this one. You have to pay for all of this. ... and you are not allowed to work. That is a big problem. You just have to wait doing nothing. ... (Interview 21)

Here, one of the most striking problems is the need to be passive – to 'wait' and be patient, 'doing nothing', while taking care of several family members with different demands. The psycho-social concerns surrounding the need to 'wait' for asylum procedures, approval, and legal access to work are described by another respondent, a middle-aged male from Iran:

The situation for refugees [asylum seekers] here is bad, when they don't give a decision about their application they get depressed, they should be given some advice, also they don't have work permits, they can't work. If they can get work permit and can get some advice, it would be very helpful for them. (Interview 22)

For this Iranian respondent, as for others, the effects of 'waiting' in order to gain legal access to the labour market are a key obstacle in their daily life, affecting their life economically, psycho-socially and emotionally. Another middle-aged male from Iran expressed this in existential terms (Interview 24): 'Waiting is worse than dying. So all our life is hanging on, waiting for them [government decision].'

The long waiting periods have been attributed to deficiencies in structural organisation and government policy. Access to job centre support and eligibility to register with job centres are the most frequently cited problems. This lack or little job centre support has been, in turn, associated with the broader themes of citizenship and human rights as an asylum seeker or refugee in the UK. For example, a middle aged Iranian male respondent says:

There are many refugees who are begging in the streets now. They [government] shouldn't think they are dealing with refugees well. There are people at the job centres, who unfortunately is not possible to raise a complaint about them. As a refugee in this society I wonder if I have the rights of a citizen or not? 'If I have the rights of a citizen why didn't you register me (at job centre)?' ... They tell me that I have the same rights as any other English citizen but that is not true. I have seen that an English person come and gets his benefits sorted out in two days but I had to go over there and try for three months. I had to cry in front of the woman [staff] at the job centre and then she felt sorry for me and said Ok will pay your benefits from the next month. These things exist in this country, yes. ... I am better but need to get a job, so that I won't have to see job centres again, need to learn English and find a job. (Interview 24)

An Iranian woman whose asylum application had been granted at the time of writing expresses a similar experience:

Yes, I want to work, when I am asked if I work and I say no, the looks I get are terrible. I don't know, I don't have a problem. They treat me and not just me all of us in a way that shows they don't accept us at all. ... [A]nd one more thing, if the people here don't like, accept us, why does their government accept us [being granted asylum] here? (Interview 23)

The challenges associated with job support services were raised by several interviewed immigrants. Another respondent – a Palestinian-Syrian man in his thirties – draws a clear link between systemic failings and other barriers towards successful integration and access to work:

Then I went back to the job centre and spoken the advisor. I said how can you do this to me? How can you send me there? What is the benefit? Is it only about you ticking a box so you sent someone on a workshop? Of course, it didn't end well because I was so vocal. People go there and they are worried that the benefits would be cut if they go harsh on the advisor. So I had a bit of row with the advisor. Then they changed my advisor. This is about ticking boxes. This is what I did not like because actually, this is not beneficial for you to integrate into the country. They ask you to integrate into the country but every time I go to an interview, they ask do you have experience

in the UK. I was like no. So that was really bad in terms of integration. We have been asked to integrate but we are not really offered any opportunity to integrate. So you start thinking that maybe it is the system which needs to be fixing. (Interview 25)

For this respondent, there is a discrepancy between formal rights and entitlements and de facto access to the labour market. Although he is legally able to work, he cannot in practice due to a lack of UK experience. The UK Government policy of allowing refugees to work and to access employment services does not necessarily translate into jobs for refugees. There are other systemic barriers at play that need to be addressed.

The importance of opportunity and 'experience' has been mentioned by others. Again, a contradiction has been identified in the demand for 'experience' when applying for a job, and the inability of refugees to gain such experience in the first place. This is perceived as occurring at the higher government-level, as well as at the more immediate level of interactions with potential employers. It is also not always seen as being entirely dependent on language-related issues. Indeed, for some of the respondents, opportunity/experience concerns are more significant than the language barrier. For example, as a high educated middle aged Syrian male respondent says:

Yes, it was very difficult, because all the jobs ask about experience. So how I can provide experience if nobody accepts to employ me. So, the first step is experience. Maybe the first one, people said English barrier, but you can overcome it through time. But the problem is with the experience ... (Interview 26)

'Experience' as barrier to enter the labour market cannot be overcome easily, whereas language-learning for employment only requires time. This is a common theme raised by our respondents. Experience isn't just about employers, but also the government policy of not allowing asylum seekers to work, which prevents the acquisition of crucial work experience while they are waiting for their claim to be processed. A Palestinian-Syrian male respondent elaborates:

Something else, refugees and asylum seekers do not need sympathy and empathy. They need a chance. They need to be allowed to that platform. We often see the help that is targeting those groups, people being sympathisers. This is fantastic, very humane but you need to allow asylum seekers and refugees to utilize skills that you have got. I think this is more important than being sympathetic and being helpful with food or money. Never ever think that if you give someone food regardless of who that person is. You can't train this person that subconsciously that they will get help without working. If you allow them to work, they will be able to contribute more. I am talking specifically regarding the campaign which lifts the ban for asylum seekers to work. I think this is a fantastic campaign. Everyone should be vocal about this. ... They should stand a fair chance to contribute to the country where they are, either with their expertise, or anything they have. ... (Interview 25)

Again, for this respondent, barriers to work opportunities and experience are fundamentally understood to be a breach of individual human rights and perceived personhood. Here, a change in both policy and the behavioural approach of employers is considered to be integral to effective labour market integration. Further, employment is seen as addressing the root causes of many of the challenges that asylum seekers face, beyond

the short-term solutions of food, money, or 'sympathy and empathy'. Responses such as that of the Palestinian-Syrian man suggest rich further veins of inquiry, such as analysing labour market access and job status as an expression of personhood and basic rights in the UK. The differential policies regarding refugees versus asylum seekers could be particularly interesting in this regard, with an analysis of the discrepancies between legal status and labour market access for these two groups

To conclude this section, the barriers that immigrants encounter when trying to gain access to the labour market in the UK are numerous. At the systemic policy level, asylum seekers are denied the right to work (except in a narrow set of circumstances). This limits their ability to put down roots, establish connections with local communities and plan a future in the UK until they receive a positive result on their asylum application. Even once formally granted the right to work, refugees face both direct and indirect discrimination practices towards newcomers. Our respondents have emphatically expressed their frustrations at being in a situation where they lack sufficient English proficiency and working experience in the UK, blocking their entry in to the job market. Respondents have clearly indicated not only the economic but also psycho-social aspects of having a job in their new home country. Having a job is associated with being able to root themselves in their new communities and to connect with society more broadly; in other words, to integrate. Employment, together with housing, are two cornerstones of a successful integration process which nurtures wellbeing, belonging and participation among newcomers.

## 4. Education

This section includes a short overview of the legal-policy framework with a specific focus on asylum seekers' and refugees' access to education in the UK. It further looks at formal and informal educational opportunities provided or available to newcomers of different age groups. Finally, it provides ethnographic accounts of the experiences and difficulties encountered in accessing education, derived from interviews with migrants themselves.

### 4.1. Policy overview

There were 32,117 schools in the UK in the academic year 2017-18 (UK Department for Education, 2018: 3). Of this 20,863 (65%) were primary schools, 4,190 (13%) were secondary schools, and 3,037 were nursey schools (9%) (UK Department for Education, 2018: 3). In the 2016-17 academic year there were 142 universities and 371 further education colleges (UK Department of Education, 2018: 6). Reliable data is not available on the number of refugee and asylum seeker children accessing education in the UK (UNICEF, 2018: 18). The vast majority of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) are either in further education (approximately 55%) or secondary education (approximately 40%), with only a handful of UASC in the UK of primary school age (UNICEF, 2018: 17).

#### 4.1.1. Early Childhood and School Education

It is compulsory for all children in the UK in the age group 5-16 to attend school full-time, irrespective of immigration status (Asylum Information Database, 2019: 72; UK Government, 2018: 12). It is the responsibility of each local authority to provide this education for free (Bates, 2016: 15; Coram Children's Legal Centre, 2017). In England, the requirement is slightly more stringent, with children between the ages of 16 and 18 required to be in either full-time education or employment that has educational elements (UK Government, 2018: 12). Although asylum seeker, refugee and other immigrant children have the same de jure access to schooling as local children, financial difficulties may be a barrier. For example, children from families relying on Section 4 support are not allowed free school meals (Asylum Immigration Database, 2018: 72-3). While catch-up or preparatory classes are usually not available to facilitate entry into the school system, once in the school system any child with special educational needs must have these needs met, British or otherwise (Asylum Information Database, 2019: 73; Coram Children's Legal Centre, 2017). Local and regional authorities receive a financial contribution from the Home Office for each refugee resettled in their area, to support the local authority in meeting their obligations in schooling provision (UK Resettlement Programme, 2018: 5-7, 21; UNHCR, 2017: 19).

There is variation across the UK as to how well teachers and other school staff are equipped to meet the specific needs of refugee children. The National Union of Teachers, which covers England and Wales, notes that whether or not teachers are given adequate training is dependent on the local council and NGOs, leading to uneven outcomes (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 38). However, a growing number of resources for teachers are becoming available, including the National Union of Teachers' online hub and the *Welcoming Refugee Children to Your School* guide (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 38).

Despite the many benefits of refugees taking up teaching positions in UK schools (not just for refugee children but for the rest of the class too), the road to becoming a teacher in the UK is challenging. Barriers include English language attainment, recognition of prior qualifications,

lack of understanding about the UK education system, and complicated requalification pathways (Bearne, 2017). Not-for-profit services to assist refugees into teaching positions do exist, however. Between 2003 and 2017, the charity Reconnect supported 54 refugees in attaining Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), while the Refugee Council provides informal advice to refugees wanting to re-enter the sector (its *Refugees into Teaching* project wound up in 2011, due to a lack of funding) (Bearne, 2017).

No information could be located on mandatory intercultural education modules in the UK state school system. Lesson plans on diversity, equality and the law, however, have been developed and linked to the national curriculum, while subjects such as 'Citizenship' in England, and 'Learning for Life and Work' in Northern Ireland tackle questions of diversity, religious and ethnic identities, alongside the importance of equality and mutual respect (Education Service, 2017: 1-2; UK Parliament, 2019).

Access to free early childhood education and care differs between the four devolved legislatures in the UK. In England, all children aged three and four are able to access 570 hours (15 hours per week for 38 weeks) of free early education or childcare annually (Coram Children's Legal Centre, 2017; Poulter et al., 2018: 11). This is extended to the age of two for children in families receiving certain kinds of benefits, including some types of asylum seeker benefits (Coram Children's Legal Centre, 2017; Poulter et al., 2018: 11). There are also additional entitlements for working parents (Poulter et al., 2018: 11). All three- and four-year olds in Scotland are entitled to 16 hours of free early learning and childcare per week, while Northern Ireland provides one year of early education (Poulter et al., 2018: 13-14). In Wales, the Flying Start programme provides part-time free childcare for children aged two and three in certain disadvantaged areas, while all children in Wales aged three to seven years of age are entitled to a minimum of 10 hours per week of early childhood education (Poulter et al., 2018: 12-3; Welsh Government, 2017). Although refugee and asylum seeker children have access to early childhood education and care on the same basis as their local counterparts, challenges such as cultural unfamiliarity with early education, daunting application processes and transportation costs to available services may prevent children from using their entitlements (Poulter et al., 2018: 15-16).

#### **4.1.2. Higher Education**

Although refugees, holders of humanitarian protection and asylum seekers can all pursue higher education, their fee status and ability to access finance differ according to immigration status (Asylum Information Database, 2019: 73). The only exception is if a limitation on higher education is stipulated in a particular asylum seekers' bail conditions (Asylum Information Database, 2019: 72). Refugees can access higher education in the UK on the same basis as British citizens (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 32). This means they are charged domestic fees and can take out student loans (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 32). Holders of humanitarian protection have to wait three years before they can access student finance, and with the introduction of *The Higher Education (Fee Limit Condition) (England) Regulations 2017* on July 31 2019, also have to wait three years before they can access domestic fee rates (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 32). Asylum seekers are not eligible for student loans and are generally charged international student rates, placing higher education all but out of reach (Asylum Information Database, 2019: 73). An exception is in Scotland, where asylum seekers under the age of 25 and the children of asylum seekers can qualify as domestic students if they meet various residency criteria (Asylum Information Database, 2019: 73).

### **4.1.3. Adult education and language learning**

There are no obligatory classes for adult refugees and asylum seekers. However, in order to receive UK citizenship, it is necessary to pass the 'Life in the UK' test and demonstrate English language proficiency. Further, recipients of Jobseeker's Allowance and Universal Credit must undertake language classes if their English skills are below a certain level, in order to continue receiving payments (Foster and Bolton, 2018: 7).

The provision of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) is a devolved matter, with funding for classes varying across jurisdictions. In England, refugees are entitled to receive free classes on the same basis as other UK residents – ESOL classes, up to and including Level 2, are free to those who are unemployed and over the age of 18 (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 28; Foster and Bolton, 2018: 4, 6-7). All those who do not meet the unemployment criterion are co-funded by the Government. Asylum seekers can only receive funding for classes once they have waited more than 6 months to receive an outcome on their application (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 28; Foster and Bolton, 2018: 4, 6-7; Refugee Action, 2016b: 10). In Northern Ireland and Scotland all asylum seekers are entitled to free ESOL classes immediately, without the six-month waiting period (Refugee Action, 2016b: 8). Refugees in Northern Ireland do not have to be unemployed in order to access classes (Refugee Action, 2016b: 8).

In 2016, the UK Government announced that £10 million would be allocated to English language tuition for those resettled under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme (VPRS). This amounts to 12 hours of classes per week for six months, on top of classes they are already eligible for (Foster and Bolton, 2018: 10). This continues the two-tier system that differentiates between those who are resettled and those who enter the UK as asylum seekers.

Funding for ESOL classes has been significantly reduced, resulting in waiting lists of more than 1,000 people, waiting times of months or even years, and reduced teaching hours (All party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 28; Refugee Action, 2016b: 9 and 2017: 5).

There is no information about government-funded language tuition in refugees' home languages. Community groups, however, are filling this gap. For example, the social venture *Kalamna* offers Arabic classes for refugee children in the Cambridge area.

## **4.2. Formal and Informal Educational Opportunities**

Both for interviewed stakeholders and asylum seekers and refugees, education has been a recurring issue and often a source of anxiety. Remarkably, it is often discussed as a 'mediating' factor, rather than as an independent concern. Education is framed as either a 'symptom' of another problem, such as lack of access to the labour market (and so inaccessible due to economic or social barriers), or as indicative of difficulties within broader UK governmental policy. It is also represented as a 'causal' factor – contributing to other, perceivably larger scale, issues. In particular, these include an inability to properly integrate into the broader society (at any level) due to the multiple problems of language barriers, seen as the result of a lack of access to education facilities offering language-learning classes and resources. There is also a noticeable generational discrepancy; education is often spoken of differently in reference to children as opposed to adult asylum seekers and refugees.

In relation to formal and informal educational opportunities, our asylum seeker and refugee respondents often make a distinction between adults and children. While children have access to formal schooling (even without citizenship), adults often experience greater difficulties in finding any form of structured education. This is particularly the case for

language-learning opportunities; often a necessity amongst asylum seekers and refugees. This in turn creates both integration issues with the local communities and, also, family issues; with younger children learning more English than older family-members. These gaps in adult-educational opportunities are often seen as being 'filled' through NGO intervention; either successfully or unsuccessfully. This demonstrates the differences in formal and informal education that are most commonly felt to be significant amongst our respondents.

As an example, the representative of Syrian Sisters spoke of cross-generational educational opportunities for families in Oxford. However, in her response this was very much to do with community-integration and/or community-building. While language-learning opportunities via informal NGO-based education were emphasised, they were not the priority of the group in comparison to building social networks and community:

We do it [English classes] as a partnership with Oxford University – class[es] for women with children, and also we doing training – we did a hygiene food certificate for our women, for them to try to cook. Because most of them they are without education, but they have skills like cooking. You know we are Syrian we are very famous in cooking. Also, we do activities for children in the half-term and Easter holidays, and we do parties like an Eid party, Christmas party. We celebrate together. *My aim for this group is to meet each other, chat, have a chat, sharing our stories you know, like all of them come with these big stories and they had a hard life in Syria before they came here, or they come from the camp. Yeah.* (emphasis added. Interview 1)

This was run by the NGO Syrian Sisters and supported by Oxford University which was involved more in an extra-curricular role rather than providing a conventionally 'educational', formal learning opportunity. English classes are seen as significant, but not as relevant as providing a forum for 'meeting' and connecting. This was not the case for all respondents either representing NGOs or commenting from an individual perspective. Rather than NGO intervention being primarily about creating an ethnic community, some respondents saw a role for NGOs in filling gaps and addressing barriers to adult education, whether financial (i.e. unaffordable for migrants) or resulting from government policies. The representative of the NGO Asylum Welcome says the following about the weakness of government policies for adult language learning:

Children are entitled to the education system here, but there are no entitlements for adults. There are courses made available, for example the provision of free English classes. This is a cyclical process. The Government realises English classes are a good thing. But then these classes are one of the first things to go in the face of budget cuts. The Government then realises how important English classes are. Provision of free English classes goes up and down. Education is cyclical. Cuts and then provision. ... Education is one area where the entitlements are quite detailed ... You have to pay fees for higher education. (Interview 3)

This need for access to education, and the importance of NGO-based support in order to circumvent barriers to adult language-learning opportunities, is also stated by the representative of an NGO who provides language-learning opportunities for adult asylum seekers and refugees. However, the barriers to obtaining this assistance are not seen as

insurmountable by this respondent. Here, both Home Office and NGO support for facilitating language-learning opportunities are presented as accessible:

Language is a key thing. Children learn through mainstream schooling. Adults take ESOL classes. ESOL classes are a requirement from the Home Office – six to eight hours per week. We provide 15 hours a week. ESOL classes are run through Cambridge Regional College. But childcare is an issue. So we have also developed informal classes run by retired ESOL teachers on a voluntary basis, for mothers and toddlers. We pay for a venue, and provide a small creche which is also volunteer-run. There are of course safe-guarding issues, so the creche is in the same room as the adults with a half-folded dividing door. These classes are three days per week, totalling 9 hours. The Cambridge Regional College classes are for families with children at school, and so they are modelled on the basis of school hours. The toddler group/cheche is also during school time. Charities offer one-to-one classes. Online learning is also endorsed by the Home Office. (Interview 2)

One crucial aspect in the differences between the observations offered by respondents regarding levels of educational support for asylum seekers and refugees could be location. A number of stakeholder respondents commented on what they perceived to be regionally-specific educational access for adults, either provided governmentally or by NGOs. For a former Red Cross employee, access to ESOL (and any other form of adult language-learning) is portrayed as being largely unobtainable and as insufficiently facilitated by the government in a very particular city-environment. He relates this strongly to a lack of resources in this region:

ESOL is the absolutely major thing and is a less existential need than the other ones, but ESOL is phenomenally oversubscribed in [city]. I think there is something like a centralised register and it well over ten thousand. ... I think it is a shortage of resources. I don't know about teaching availability but I think there is just less resources to do it. For the colleges because obviously it can move to ESOL which works really well for some people if they have kids or they can't commit, but college is really, you know, it's quite intensive. (Interview 8)

This suggests a locational discrepancy in terms of help, support and provision of adult language-learning amongst asylum seekers and refugees when compared with the response from the representatives of Syrian Sisters and the organisation working with immigrants in Cambridge. Indicating, again, the 'mediating' or 'associative' role played by NGO educational interventions (specifically in language-learning) in both obtaining more educational opportunities and in general integration for these groups of individuals. This is an area of research that could benefit from further investigation into both regional circumstances for migrants, and also the systems in place (formal and non-governmental) to try to counter these problems.

The significance of such research becomes apparent from interviews with other respondents too. For example, the need for local intervention and organisations to deal with these barriers to education and to integration (factors also creating potential community divisions), are all highlighted by the representative of the Govan Community Project in Scotland:

The idea is that anyone from any background can access our services. But, yeah, the homework club was an example that something that was set up by a refugee parent who struggled with the school curriculum when she got there, so the idea was to work with people to get a better understanding...It's led to a lot of different people from different backgrounds coming as well. It's just time to hang out and do your homework. (Interview 9)

This respondent highlights the need for NGO projects that are able to bridge the generational gaps in educational provision. This is necessary so that adult and parent asylum seekers and refugees can acquire the necessary support in linguistic skills and understanding to communicate at the required level of English with their child's school and curricular needs in the UK. It also indicates a possible difficulty that results from children having greater access to English language-learning than their parents, and therefore a communication barrier resulting *within* the family (primarily, it seems, around school work) between generations. These gaps between adults' and children's levels of educational access within the family were also observed and expressed by a number of individual-level participants, most often in connection with concerns surrounding cultural-identification. For example, the generational gap in access to education was experienced by an Iraqi-Yazidi respondent through his primary school-going child. His son identifies more strongly with his English learning than with his Yazidi background and language:

... Our youngest finds it very difficult to speak with us in our language Yazidi. He speaks English and has a big problem with his mum because sometimes he speaks but she does not understand him and she gets angry. He is full time in school. It is a big thing when you move to another country ... We have a few Yazidi families in [region in the UK] but their kids they also speak English and not their mother tongue (Interview 21).

This example indicates that this Yazidi father associates access to formal education for children explicitly with broader cultural identification and integration:

... You will find first few months [in the UK] difficult. But now, my kids are more British than Iraqi. They even don't speak Arabic. They speak Yazidi. But if they go to Iraq now, nobody will speak Yazidi because they all left [forcibly displaced, in refugee camps and abroad]. ... and they are used to live this life here [UK]; they have friends in school and many social events that they attend. We have a centre here and have contacts also through that centre. Interview 21

The father emphasises the positive benefits of education for cultural involvement and for developing links with the local British population. Still in the asylum phase, this respondent was speaking in the context of his children already being so well integrated that they are now more part of British society than Iraqi society. Implicit in his statement is the argument that it is about time that they are granted asylum, and the serious challenges they would face if their application was denied and they were sent back to Iraq. The family context described also shows the generational divide between parents and children and the difference that education can make. While the father is well-educated and speaks good English, the mother has not

enjoyed higher education and has been confined mainly to the domestic sphere, taking care of the children and thus cut off from broader society.

With children being seen as more easily able to connect with broader society, they also become more vulnerable to this potential loss of the cultural background of their parents or the ethnic group they are born into. Indeed, the children are often described as arguing with their parents on these terms. Education is perceived as being pivotal in this process. It is unclear how much of this divide is due to differing choices (i.e. between children and adults), and how much is the result of systemic differences and the inaccessibility of adult education for some respondents. That is, how much is it to do with individuals and how much is it the result of policy, whether direct or indirect?

This has also been expressed by interviewed stakeholders. The representative of Syrian Sisters speaks from the perspective of both a refugee and a parent. When asked about formal education, she (Interview 1) immediately highlighted both generational discrepancies and also barriers in the English school system. She mentions easy language-acquisition for children, while language-learning for parents often remains inaccessible. The representative of an organisation working in Cambridge also observed the strong language skills of children due to their access to education, with bilingualism often being an asset later on: 'The children are bilingual. They do better in school and are higher achievers later' (Interview 2). He indicates how English language proficiency has led to an increased level of integration into the local community in Cambridge *and* a dissociation from their countries of origin. He argues that it is difficult for children to move back to their home countries after five years.

The representative of Syrian Sisters also has clear ideas about the broader English curriculum provided to her son at primary school in Oxford. Here again, she speaks both on behalf of her NGO and as a refugee mother struggling to provide her son with a good education in the host country, stressing the important role that parents play in this process. She also indicates the importance of education for adults as parents, enabling them to take up an active role in the education of their children from home:

Honestly, we are not so happy with school in Oxford. Because I am connected, I connect with all family, with most families here in Oxford, and I don't feel they are teaching our children...they just teach them language, you know, they focus on language, and they forget to teach him...object, and, if you are in year five they should know about... [they should be] educated, they should be teaching him information and stuff like this. Because I push my school for my son. And I give him [a] teacher teaching him every day and I push him to read every day [for] 20 minutes. He [has] been good. But other children you will find some people who are not educated. ... Most families they are without education, they don't know about English, anything. I am trying don't [not to] teach my son because I don't want him to catch, like he speak[s] my accent. You see I am speaking English my way, if you met my son he is speaking [in an] Oxford accent, because he doesn't learn from me, he learns from school. Yeah. That is why I wanted him to learn the Oxford accent, not my accent. But I told him 'come and read with me', he is reading for 20 minutes with me. I am trying to correct for him...but... But people they don't understand this one. They don't have homework for children. My son has [only] one homework every week. And our children from [the] Middle East we are used to pushing our children. If we don't push our children, our children they never study. Never. (Interview 1)

As can be seen from this example above (Interview 1), educational barriers seem to be perceived as structural issues – i.e. as opportunities within schools, and governmental policies for integration within the education system. However, at the individual-level, they are also very clearly outlined as issues of cross-cultural integration and understanding. A cross-cultural requirement that is echoed by the representative of the Govan Community Project in Scotland, who stated, when asked about key-integration factors, that they consisted primarily of ‘English language support, health support, and orientation support. ... Orientation support. ... I guess I mean, location-wise, but culturally as well’ (Interview 9).

For the representative of Syrian Sisters (Interview 1), this cross-cultural aspect is manifested as parental guidance and ‘pushing’ of children *within* their wider education. As such, language becomes less the *focus* of education for children, but, rather, more a *barrier* towards effective educational opportunities for children within the UK, due to its exclusive emphasis within formal schooling. In contrast, for adults, language remains the most significant – and important – factor for any educational opportunity. Highlighting again the generational division amongst migrants within the educational sphere.

#### **4.2.1. Adult education and generational barriers to education**

Having outlined the fundamental discrepancies between formal and informal educational opportunities for asylum seekers and refugees, it is important to examine the issues surrounding adult education in more detail. Adult education seems to be a key issue and area of concern for most participants in this study, particularly regarding availability, access and awareness of adult-learning opportunities. The representative of Syrian Sisters stresses the role which NGOs and other community support organisations can play:

[I]f you are an asylum seeker, you don't know anybody, and you come to a different country, without language, most of them come without [the English] language...all of them without [the English] language. ... [O]f course, it is different, it is not the same family [to Arabic] you know, a different language. They find it very difficult. And you know, I was lucky. When I arrived, I had a friend who advised me where I am going [in terms of services], but for them, they don't know where is Asylum Welcome, [what the] other organisations are [to support them]. Where they want to go, where they should go. It is my aim to do in my group to advise people where they should go. Like one lady she has been here for two years and she doesn't know how she register for language class[es]. And she eligible for free class[es]. (Interview 1)

A lack of language skills makes it more difficult to find one's way to access educational systems. A similar ‘catch-22’ situation in adult education is identified by the representative of an organisation working with newcomers in the East of England, who highlights the difficulty in accessing the UK labour market. For this respondent, this is partially the result of an inability to speak English, however she also stresses the economic aspects of acquiring language skills. She suggests that the simultaneous provision of skills-based education/training and language-learning may avoid future integration barriers, including potential psycho-social aspects:

So, you then have the economic decision to make which is, do I then go back to studying, in order to bring my qualification up to the level that I think I've already got,

but I don't have the proof or can't prove that I have, or do I think well in that case I'll work the lower level, because I can work there immediately. But then you also need the English in order to be able to do that. And, there is an assumption that people have to have fairly high levels of English in order to try and access the UK job market. Umm, which isn't necessarily true, umm, and actually in some instances, skills should trump English levels, but invariably what happens is that, people are told that they cannot access any vocational course, until they've reached a level of English. Rather than saying well let's have a vocational course running alongside the English, which is motivating because you can see how transferable your skills are. And also, actually if your skills are stronger than your English, you can at least feel a bit of, you know, feel some level of self-esteem, rather than, you know, 'I'm back in the classroom, learning English like a child'. (Interview 4)

Meanwhile, for the representative of Just Right Scotland, a practicing lawyer, access to education is a 'catch-22' scenario that significantly affects asylum seekers, *but not* migrants with refugee status. Highlighting an educational division within the migrant community based on legal status as determined by UK governmental policy, they state:

For asylum seekers and people who are not yet refugees, yes [there are barriers to education], because there is a certain point in accessing further in higher education which you are not fundable, so you are prohibited from accessing the funding you need in order to progress. So yes, that's a serious barrier and it leads on to barriers to pathways to other forms of integration, work and so on. (Interview 10)

Once again, adult educational possibilities within the UK are frequently identified as being impeded by both economic and structural factors. The impacts of flawed governmental policy and provision (which necessitates recourse to either private supply and/or inadequate governmental classes) is expressed clearly by the representative of Syrian Sisters, herself a refugee:

Nothing is free. I don't have any courses that are free. ... Refugees, people who are coming through the Government project [VPRS] they have extra days. Like for me I have two days, they have four days. These ... two days, they [the Government] pays for them. But for me two days is not enough to learn English. Two days, two hours. ... It is nothing. If I go to a private school it is huge money I will pay. Huge money. ... Yeah...if I go to school here every day, I will pay £200 every week. I never can pay this money. ... It is good, but not like every day [for] four hours. (Interview 1)

It is very clear that this respondent has higher expectations regarding governmental provision of free language classes for asylum seekers and refugees, creating frustrating situations for newcomers who are well-educated, ambitious and hardworking, and who are going beyond the opportunities that are offered to them. A middle aged, well-educated Kurdish male respondent from Iraq, living in Scotland, explains some of the difficulties people in his position can get into when arriving at an adult age:

[I]f you are younger, if you are going to school, ... probably you have more the chance to find out your next step. But, if you are just coming, because of your age you cannot go to local school because you are an adult, it's very, very hard to go to university or

college. Not just English, you know. But to find job and to study, to find your dream career, you know. Even if you study, you finish, still you have a struggle to find job, probably because of not enough support, how to get job...or because of the discrimination you will get. Or because of the less job, not the right job for you. I think this is a really big area, for government or any other. ... I worked for [inaudible] as an IT person, helping lots of communities, helping people about the computer, IT. Again, voluntary work with a community base, stuff like that. That stuff helped me...and my studies as well...And the job was not straight forward, I have to study another three years. So overall, I've studied seven years to get to this stage, which is really hard and challenging in so many ways. So, it's not easy to go back to your dream job, or change your mind, go study somewhere else, because of the challenge and the barriers and the lack of support or information. (Interview 27)

For this respondent, there was a clearly defined generational gap in the educational provisions available and accessible within the UK system(s). He also relates this discrepancy to a perceived difficulty in pursuing the same employment as he held previously (i.e. within the 'home' country), or to aspiring towards a 'dream job'. This is a barrier that is connected both to problems with linguistic integration, and also to broader educational delivery (i.e. 'university or college'). One will have to be eligible to follow a certain path and/or have the economic means to do. In many situations, adult newcomers do not find themselves in such a position, and have to adjust their expectations and future goals.

This generational division in the provision of free education is also expressed by a well-educated Yazidi middle aged man from Iraq, describing the situation of his son – who has been living in the UK for several years, but has not been granted asylum. The son has transitioned from compulsory, full-time education to being unable to access further education as a legal adult:

... My older son was not allowed to start university; we are not able to support him and the government is not supporting him also. ... to start university, you need permission from the home office. The education in this country is free and compulsory until the age of 18. After that you pay yourself or you take a loan from the government. But we are not allowed to apply for a loan. ... And some universities offer few spaces for asylum seekers. He applied to two universities but .... He was refused twice. He is at home now. ... only kids under 18 are going to school. (Interview 21)

While this respondent draws attention to generational-legal discrepancies in access to education, other respondents perceived these issues as being more generally dispersed (that is, not always exclusively divided between children and adults in terms of availability). For example, a middle-aged Iranian male also draws attention to the difficulties surrounding adult education and English language-learning once in the UK, but also identifies the problems with accessing language classes – and any form of language support – for both adults *and* children:

I went for about a year [to English classes] but then children arrived and because of my son I can't go any more, shifts don't work out, since if I go to a college it is till 1 pm but I need to be at home at 12 to take my son to nursery and go and get him at 4 pm and so it is quite difficult to manage it. ... [Y]es, as I said I was in the waiting list for over a year to go to an English class. Even for my children, it took 8-9months for them

to be assigned to an English class, so what they should do during these 8-9 months. It was quite hard, if there was an English class then it would have been much better. (Interview 22)

This respondent points to the additional barriers to education imposed by private demands on his time. He notes that classes became unavailable to him once his children also arrived in the UK and he had to begin to organise his time around caring for them. However, he also specified the very long wait for both adults and children in obtaining such classes in the first place, identifying a potentially multi-causal block towards successful adult language-based education in the UK for asylum seekers and refugees.

This difficulty in accessing English language-learning classes also frequently leads to the further inaccessibility of other forms of education for adults. For example, as a middle-aged Iranian woman stated:

No, no one can help. I am just putting up with the situation. I went to the hairdressing college to enrol and they have given me some material to read, but haven't explained things much. I should find someone to explain things to me. ... Yes, but I don't think anywhere would help with this. They say that the college would help me with enrolment. I went to college once they said that since my English wasn't good enough I couldn't take their courses yet. (Interview 23)

However, this inaccessibility to education – and, particularly, the wait involved with government-provided ESOL classes – does also seem to be very relative to economic circumstance. It also seems to be directly affected by levels of available support, and, additionally, English-speaking abilities before arrival in the UK. Indeed, some participants described: greater economic stability; strong family connections within the UK prior to arrival; a familiarity with the English language (not necessarily fluency). For *these* respondents, family frequently became a source of support – as opposed to a potential barrier towards the accessibility of state organised ESOL language classes. For example, a well-educated young Assyrian refugee from Syria noted:

I did not receive any legal advice. I did not need it to be honest. My uncle helped me a lot. ... When I arrived, I took intermediate classes in English for two months. ... I paid for that; they were short and intensive. Those provided by the government would take a while; maybe a year. And I don't want to wait a whole year to wait before I can do the AILS exam. ... (Interview 18)

For this respondent, his ability to pay for his language classes eliminated any possible wait. His uncle also supported him with his integration process, meaning that his family was a source of support rather than an inhibiting force. However, this respondent does not have any dependents and is unmarried, so his experience of family was less responsibility-based, and more organised around his own support and/or advancement. Equally, his ability to already speak some English on arrival allowed him to take intermediate classes – and also facilitated access to other forms of higher education within the UK.

This was also the case for another Assyrian refugee from Syria (Interview 20), who had a high-level of spoken and written English on arrival, and so then was able to register for a UK professional degree in a medical field. This interviewee also referenced his access to family support in this process; and he too – although married – does not have any dependents, and

so does not have to care for family *around* his education in any manner (as is the case for some of the other participants; e.g. Interviews 21 and 22). As he described:

They wanted to get an interpreter but I said I do not need an interpreter I know very good English. ... I did the Ailes English exam straight away. I bought a book from Amazon and then started preparing it. ... (Interview 20)

What is clear from these multiple respondents is that adult-education opportunities for asylum seekers and refugees are strongly affected (either positively or negatively) by the following core factors: economic status; place of living; former education levels/knowledge of English; family status and/or number of dependents; level of existent family/community support/connections/friendships. These can, it seems, be moderated through available NGO intervention and/or systemic support; although further research into these areas would be beneficial moving forwards.

In short, the discussion above shows the influence of contextual factors on access to education within the UK. Additional research into these factors could help both to understand migrant individuals, communities, and also with providing appropriate help and support. Other factors (e.g. region, economic status, family, gender, age, country of origin, and status within the UK) *do* certainly play a very significant role in the availability of education to migrants. In particular, economic status and family situation seem to be very significant. Region also seems to play a part in some cases (not all) – with the respondents based in Scotland seeming to describe a harsher (and possibly more isolated) experience of the educational system (for both adults *and* children), than is the case for the respondents in England and Wales. For example, in the case of available compulsory formal school education for children, an Iranian woman living in Scotland explained:

They helped me a lot but unfortunately, I had lots of other problems, for example my son was being bullied at school, they beat him up, throw pens or bottles at him, the children ... Scottish children, even the school knew about my son's bullying. ... My son's school had even put a request saying his school is best to be changed since they couldn't control the situation, even outside of the school they would beat my son. ... I don't know why, there were not many refugees in that neighbourhood at the time. They were all white Scottish around there actually. ... When we went back to that school [a different school, in another area of the city] they said it was full then and however I begged them to help me, no one did. ... So we couldn't enrol my son there. Now, my daughter's school's is quite far, we walk 45 minutes every day to it. I wanted to enrol my children in good schools since they were bothered a lot in their previous schools. I wanted them not to lose their enthusiasm for going to school at least.' (Interview 23)

It is important to note, however, that regional influence is certainly not a universally defining quality, and may not necessarily have a dominant impact on educational accessibility/support. Indeed, the impact of economic circumstances on education was certainly more significant for respondents and was not necessarily regionally-specific. A Yazidi middle aged refugee male from Iraq said:

... Yes, I followed two English courses in the college and two courses in the church. One NT2 and NT3 and two courses online. .... They [authorities] give 35 pounds per week, so 5 pounds a day. You have to be really careful, if you have to travel somewhere, you have to really save money [for that]. I don't know how you can save money. .... (Interview 19)

Respondents referred to a limited extent also to NGO support in the context of educational help and the use of that context to volunteer themselves in providing help to asylum seekers and refugees. A well-educated Pakistani young adult male spoke positive about this volunteer experience, especially in relation to helping other newcomers:

I have been part of many groups [informal] in [city in Scotland]. One good thing in my favour was that, wherever I went, I was very warmly received, everyone was really nice to me. Everyone made me feel like I had a lot to contribute one way or another. So, after having gone through the system of claiming asylum, here you are meeting people who actually make you feel good about yourself. So, of course, I felt like I belonged here. Yeah, I had a chance to brush up my creative skills, to be part of some classes, I would say, the only classes that were available were ESOL, English Language classes, and I probably didn't need them, I believe. I volunteered with loads of organisations, I think. One thing that I did, which was a very rewarding experience for me, was I met other people who were going through the same system. And I felt, maybe I can help people feel good about themselves, familiarise them with the city, and also, some people especially they can't speak the language...I had no idea, even though I can express myself, that it was so difficult for me...Despite of being able to express myself, I know how challenging it was, just to be on the receiving end. People who cannot do that, I still cannot imagine how difficult it must have been for them, speaking through an interpreter, how they interpret and all that stuff...It's just awful. (Interview 29)

As this respondent indicates, the existence of 'migrant-to-migrant' informal groups and interventions in the educational sphere seems to offer a sense of community and help with integration into broader society. This example shows that people may not feel 'alone' by virtue of being offered a warm reception and sense of belonging because they are able to connect to existing members of their new communities. The role of immigrants in the integration of newcomers is an area to be explored in future research.

To conclude this section, access and pathways to education are predominantly related to the legal status of new arrivals. Those who are legally categorized and treated as 'refugees' receive relatively better opportunities in accessing educational sources and they can start right after they have settled in the country, whereas asylum seekers have to wait.<sup>13</sup> A second point to mention is the limitations of governmental policy and resources, and the importance of NGO-intervention for providing language learning opportunities, especially for adult migrants. From a governance model perspective, NGOs here fill a gap in the provision of language education which is by and large regarded as one of the main cornerstones to the 'successful' integration of immigrants. A third point to note is the consequences of generational differences in accessing educational resources, which paves the way for the transformation of family

<sup>13</sup> See more on this in section 3.1.1

structures, and thus, norms and values. A final point is that the outcome of educational processes is closely linked to several contextual and individual factors. Among them are the place of living and educational resources available, someone's socio-economic and educational background, his/her legal status in the country, his/her individual responsibilities (within his/her family) and finally his/her social and cultural capital such as family and community networks.

## 5. Housing and Spatial Integration

In this section we will first look at the legal framework for housing arrangements for asylum seekers and refugees. Thereafter, based on our interview material we will elaborate on the structural barriers and difficulties experienced in the area of housing by refugees and asylum seekers themselves. Finally, we will explore the role of non-state actors, and family and community networks in filling in the structural void in the field of housing, and their contributions to the longer-term goal of integration.

### 5.1. Housing for Resettled Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Refugees resettled under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) are placed with a participating local authority. An exception is those VPRS refugees who are allocated to a community sponsorship group instead of a council (Home Office, 2018a: 8). The first group do not have a choice in which local authority they go to; however, their assessed needs are taken into consideration in the matching process (Home Office, 2018a: 8). The local authority is responsible for providing furnished accommodation for refugees upon arrival, which they are transported to after being met at the airport (All Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 24; UK Government, 2018b: 11). The refugees have tenancy agreements and pay rent, although like British citizens, they can claim housing benefits (Home Office, 2018a: 12; UK Government, 2018b: 11). If a refugee family leaves their allocated accommodation without agreement from the local authority, they will be considered to have withdrawn from the VPRS. Although this will not affect their immigration status, they will no longer be eligible for the support and services provided under the VPRS and their eligibility for benefits may be affected (Home Office, 2018a: 15-16). At the end of 2018, 14,945 refugees and their dependents had been resettled under the VPRS (Home Office, 2019a). The regions receiving the most resettled refugees were Scotland (2,599, 17%), Yorkshire and the Humber (1,721, 12%) and the West Midlands (1,445, 10%) (Home Office, 2019a). The greatest receiving local authorities were Coventry (462, 3%), Birmingham (346, 2%) and Belfast (335, 2%) (Home Office, 2019a).

Asylum seekers who are eligible for Government support (and who are not in detention) are usually housed in reception centres upon arrival (Asylum Information Database, 2019: 68). There are currently eight reception centres in the UK (Asylum Information Database, 2019: 68). Although asylum seekers are meant to be moved out of reception centres within 19 days, shortages of dispersal accommodation mean they can end up staying for longer periods of time in practice (Asylum Information Database, 2019: 68). The UK Government's dispersal policy means that asylum seekers eligible for Section 95 housing support are moved to local authorities throughout the UK who have agreed to participate in the programme (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 20; Asylum Information Database, 2019: 68). Asylum seekers have no say in where they are relocated (Asylum Information Database, 2019: 68). Participating local authorities are in Wales, Scotland, as well as the North, Midlands and South West of England (Asylum Information Database, 2019: 68).

Of the 39,389 asylum seekers in the UK receiving Government support in 2016, the vast majority were being housed in the poorest parts of the country (Lyons and Duncan, 2017). Fifty-seven percent were living in the poorest third of the UK, while only ten percent were housed in the richest third (Lyons and Duncan, 2017). The local authorities with the most dispersed asylum seekers were Glasgow, Birmingham and Liverpool (Lyons and Duncan, 2017).

Decisions as to who is eligible for Section 95 housing support are made by the Home Office, while the management of dispersal accommodation is contracted out to three companies, which in turn subcontract themselves (Asylum Information Database, 2019: 69). The most common type of dispersal accommodation is private housing, rented from landlords and managed by the private contractors. Nuclear families are usually housed together by themselves, while individuals are put in shared accommodation (Asylum Information Database, 2019: 69). There are numerous accounts of dispersal accommodation that fails to meet basic safety, hygiene and privacy standards (Asylum Information Database, 2019: 69).

Once an asylum seeker has been granted refugee status, they have 28 days before which they are removed from the asylum support system (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 19). This means that they have a 28-day window to find their own accommodation before they are evicted from their current, government-provided accommodation. Once they are no longer housed in government accommodation these refugees can ostensibly live wherever they choose, though multiple obstacles circumscribe their housing options in practice. Finding new accommodation is difficult because new refugees usually have no credit rating, no savings for a deposit, and no knowledge of how the rental market operates (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 19). Further, there is evidence of discrimination by landlords against those who do not appear to be British, and landlords can be reluctant to rent to people without seeing a passport, although refugees legally only need to provide their residence card to demonstrate they have a 'right to rent' (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 19).

Since 2007, refugees who have recently received their status can apply for an integration loan from the UK Government. These loans are interest free and can go towards housing costs, household items or education and skills training for employment (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 21). The minimum loan amount is £100, and the upper limit rarely exceeds £1,000 (All Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 21). Such a sum is often not enough to pay for a rental deposit and the usual requirement of advance rent, while the loan application process usually takes longer than the 28-day 'move on' window (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 21). Altogether this means that the integration loan system is inadequate to prevent new refugees from experiencing periods of homelessness, which is not unusual (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 21-3). Despite the frequency of periods of homelessness amongst the refugee population, no information could be found about the existence of informal asylum seeker settlements.

Once an asylum seeker is granted refugee status they can access public housing on the same basis as British citizens. Public housing, however, is notoriously strained in the UK, with long waiting lists and stringent criteria being imposed on who can use the system and who is eligible for priority access (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 19-20). An example is that a 'local connection' to the area needs to be demonstrated in order to access public sector housing in a given local authority. This means that newly designated refugees must stay in the area of their dispersal accommodation, as they are unable to demonstrate a local connection anywhere else. This can prevent refugees in need of public housing moving to other parts of the UK to be closer to family, friends and work opportunities (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 20). Scotland is an exception where there is no 'local connection' criterion (All party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 20).

## 5.2. Structural barriers to housing

Our stakeholder respondents frequently identify housing and spatial integration amongst asylum seekers and refugees as being one of the most immediate and enduring barriers for any individual or family entering the UK and attempting to settle securely. These issues are often seen to be structural and policy-based, resulting in insufficient housing and inadequate housing conditions, or a lack of access to housing altogether. For example, the representative of the NGO Asylum Welcome observes:

There is a system in place to provide basic reception conditions. There are minimum provision systems as per EU agreements. Asylum seekers are housed in rented housing – which are absolutely bottom of the market, usually a rented room in a house, with disgusting conditions. There tend to be particular cities where accommodation is available, which are cheaper. Big reception centres don't exist in the UK. Asylum support payments are much below the level of welfare payments. ... In order for a city to be a dispersal city, the Home Office needs the agreement of the local authority. But the direct agreement is between the Home Office and the landlord (Interview 3).

Close coordination between governmental and private intervention was observed by our stakeholder respondents, with such public-private collaboration having a big impact on housing provision and/or barriers. This is far more evident in our interviews with stakeholders regarding housing than it was for any other area of this study. For example, as the representative of The Asylum Seeker Housing Project, Scotland, commented:

The COMPASS contract is the private arrangement that the Home Office makes to have asylum seekers, accepted asylum seekers accommodated and supported in the UK. At the moment it is divided into six neighbourhoods and has three different private providers providing the support. It's at the end of a 7-year period and it's now out to tender. A similar contract, not exactly the same has gone out to tender and the results of it will be out any day. But, it is all private providers again that are providing that new contract and it will be for ten years. (Interview 6)

The privatisation of the housing provided to newcomers seems to be an important reason for their bad condition, as a former employee of the Red Cross (Scotland) explains:

I think the fact the housing is being delivered by private companies means that the prime motivation is profit rather than quality of housing, so that inevitably means that they are looking for cheapest accommodation available rather than the most suitable. I think it is the base, fundamental issue with the way housing is delivered. That it is driven by profit. (Interview 8)

Our stakeholders frequently make note of the difficulties faced by asylum seekers and refugees in integrating into these housing environments and into their local communities, as well as the policy-based barriers to changing housing and/or region(s) of habitation. In addition, housing is also interlinked with deportation-related difficulties and/or visa-status issues. This is sometimes indicative of the discrepancy between the entitlements of asylum seekers versus refugees, resulting in one group having access to housing and the other facing

eviction once they receive their refugee status or not even being housed initially (often resulting in homelessness, as is explained above (for further information, see, e.g. All party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017). As the Councillor for the Scottish Green Party commented in his interview:

Well, Serco, who have the asylum seeker housing contract, who are contracted by the Home Office to provide housing here announced that they would be changing their policy and that they would be enforcing evictions for so-called overstayers [i.e. referencing visa status] and that they would be changing locks so that people could not get back into their homes. ... [A]ll of the statutory services then were completely alarmed, that they would apparently have no warning of this and then all of the third sector and grassroots were saying we don't have the capacity to suddenly deal with 300 hundred people who are evicted with no notice. ... [L]ike a lady who was pregnant gave birth and came home to her locks changed and things like; that so it's just, yea, this isn't new. (Interview 7)

Other stakeholders link this explicitly to benefit status, economic difficulties, and barriers to locating housing. This is seen as the result of both governmental policy *and* the approach of private landlords. The representative of an organisation in eastern England elaborates on this:

[T]he Government sets what an LHA rate [minimum renting rate] is for each local authority, but now, on the commercial private rented market, most local authorities in our area have got very little housing that is rented at LHA rate. ... So the only way to secure an LHA rate is either if it's through social housing, because social rates are LHA. There are very few local authorities who will permit refugees to live in social housing, because of the political sensitivities around queue-jumping. ... So effectively the only way we can secure housing is through philanthropic landlords ... [T]here's also the so-called 'right-to-rent' checks the Government introduced for... ... So again, it means, if you're presented with two, two people on welfare benefits, one who has to go through a right-to-rent check and the other one who doesn't, you're a landlord you just go line of least resistance. (Interview 4)

This respondent shows how government policy (particularly regarding economic status, access to housing and modes of housing provision) works in tandem with local dynamics; either from private landlords or from members of the local community who also have housing needs and request government support. This creates a situation where 'political sensitivities' among the local community can sometimes come to the fore; i.e. complaints around so-called 'queue-jumping' or perceived preferences given to asylum seekers and refugees vis-à-vis UK residents also seeking government housing and related benefits.

### **5.2.1. Legal status and government support**

As with any field of support provided to individuals and their families, legal status in the UK is determinative. Those who arrive in the UK via the highly regarded VPRS are in a very different position to asylum seekers. As noted by the representative of The Asylum Seeker Housing Project, based in Scotland: 'It is very good that that resettlement program exists in the UK

because it gives us something to look at to use as a standard because it is way better and much better funded for five years actually'. (Interview 6). This view of the resettlement programme is affirmed by the representative of the organisation in eastern England, who speaks specifically about the role of local government in it:

I think most local authorities now that are working on the refugee resettlement programme are pretty, umm, pretty good. They know their stuff. We've got lots of infrastructure organisations that are delivering that service. Some of them had experience of working on other schemes before this refugee resettlement programme, others worked with asylum seekers before. Umm, so all of them... I think all of them were probably about at least 50% of the way there and knew what they had to do before the first families arrived [in 2015]. They've done some learning since then and I would say they're all around the 90% mark now. (Interview 4)

The representative of Syrian Sisters who has not arrived in the UK via the VPRS notes the discrepancy between asylum seekers and refugees in terms of access to housing:

There is lots of demand. Councils they say we don't have enough houses for all people. ...These people [that] are coming [via VPRS] they already have a house ready. ...It is very different, very, very different [for asylum seekers]. Because you know I was an asylum seeker and I'm working with this Government project, it is very different. Because when they come [as invited refugees] they find everything [ready]. Everything is done for them. The paperwork ready, people welcome them, but if you are an asylum seeker, you don't know anybody, and you come to a different country, without language, most of them come without [the English] language ...all of them without [the English] language. (Interview 1)

It is interesting to note, however, the relative ease with which this respondent and other Syrians were able to gain the legal status of refugee once in the UK:

Yeah... honestly, the Government in the UK has been very helpful, they helping Syrians; especially Syrians, because they know we escaped from [a] very dangerous [situation], we escaped to save our children. They've been very helpful, they've given us residence very easy, they believe our story, because you know like everyone knew what happened in Syria. It is very clear. Very clear. We escaped to save our children, and they've been very helpful honestly. I don't remember any hard [difficult] stories in our group, no, no, no; most of them they get their residence very quickly, not quickly, quickly, some of them they take six months, but it is still good. (Interview 1)

The importance of legal status and allocated rights in terms of access to secure housing has taken up a central place of discussion among our respondents, showing the discrepancy in experiences between the people in these legal categories. Unlike the example above of the former asylum seeker and representative of Syrian Sisters, many refugee respondents described their experiences as a refugee as being more difficult than their time as an asylum seeker in the initial period after arrival. In particular, this is related to no longer having the level of support offered as a resident in dispersal accommodation, and instead having to rely solely on local council support. For example, a middle-aged Iranian male respondent describes his experience of the transition from his status as an asylum seeker to his status as a refugee as

being extremely difficult in terms of his housing situation. He claims that his housing situation was much better when his legal status was that of asylum seeker than after he received the status of refugee:

The problem with our housing [currently] is that we are there illegally really since it has one less bedroom than it should [legally, according to family size] ... When I was an asylum-seeker, it was all right; Serco looked after us well. It was a very good organisation, would pay us some money too. I am satisfied with Serco. ... But there were some issues with it, for example it wouldn't come and check how refugees are doing. For instance, we had a caseworker who wouldn't help with our boiler not working, they wouldn't give us any information, for example how could we turn on the boiler, or how to pay for electricity. ... so I didn't know how to make it work and so stayed in darkness for several nights, until I found out how to make it work. There were other problems with the bath and I didn't even have water, the toilet flush was not working either. (Interview 24)

Here, their legal status has been an important factor in access to housing, support with housing, economic stability and official rights. As this Iranian respondent describes:

To summarise my story, when I was an asylum-seeker, it was easier regarding the payment of electricity and water bills, when I became a refugee it was as if I was left alone. (Interview 24)

This respondent stresses that everything is taken care of by the state during the asylum procedure; 'I was left alone' after gaining asylum suggests that he experienced difficulties after the change of his status and that he felt unprepared to take care of his own life when he gained refugee status. This indicates that people are made to be somewhat passive during the asylum process because they have a limited set of rights, and get used to living a life as organised by the Home Office and their sub-contractors. This unpreparedness for life after gaining protection status is like being thrown into a sea without being able to swim, with many feeling unprepared for the bureaucratic and practical hurdles they must confront in order establish themselves in a foreign country:

Even when I was hungry, it was for a month, I didn't have food. I would go to them and ask for help, explaining I didn't have any benefits and my disability situation wasn't sorted out yet, asking for a bit of help. With a lot of difficulty, they would give me £10 or £20 that I would have to get from PayPal and use it very gradually to buy myself bits of food so that it will last. A month it was coming to Christmas time and then for a whole month the SRC was closed and so I was nearly dying of hunger at home for a month. I would just lie down on the bed and keep phoning here and there, 'Hi Carolina, where are you, you are my caseworker'? They would say she was away on Christmas holidays. But I was dying in that flat, with no electricity or water and it was very cold. ... No, Serco's job was finished then, it was through [community] centre. (Interview 24)

Such problems with the Local Housing Association in terms of fundamental needs have also been mentioned, such as by a middle-aged Iranian woman:

Then they gave us a high-rise flat on the 16<sup>th</sup> floor somewhere which was very cold. We didn't have money for quite a while but still had to pay about £70 a week for heating there. ... I even remember one day I didn't have enough money to buy bread even. It was so cold ... that my son used to sleep with his coat and shoes on, it won't get warm. I used to go to Hamish Allan centre every day and ask for our place to be changed but nobody would help there. ... After several times going there in the end they found us a place in [estate] and by the way didn't help us at all with moving house. In [place] I am not sure if it is their duty to provide this service, I know they helped some people gave them cars and helped them with moving house but unfortunately, they didn't help me at all (Interview 23).

For this respondent, as with the respondent in Interview 24 (above), housing issues are closely related to personal financial limitations and to a lack of local government support in finding a place that meets the needs of people who have gained asylum. Equally, interviewed stakeholders make a connection between the availability of housing and provision of funding. These barriers towards locating housing, integration and stability differ between asylum seekers and those refugees who arrived in the country through the resettlement route as recognised refugees. The path to refugee status is also indicative of yet another discrepancy in access to housing *and* support:

Those that have come as refugees and have come through the asylum route, don't come with funding attached. And they have 28 days to leave their asylum accommodation, to sign on and get their benefits, and find a house, and get bank accounts set up ... And some of them don't realise it's a pressure of time either, they will come to the Red Cross as an example in Peterborough with a letter saying 'what does this letter mean?', and the Red Cross advice worker will kind of fall on the floor and go 'that means you've got to move out in two days, why didn't you come to me 26 days ago,' ... It's a struggle because of course it's people on welfare benefits and so on, so yeah, there's the asylum seekers, and then there's refugees that come through the asylum route and refugees that come through the other... the resettlement route, and they are not all the same. (Interview 4)

The representative of this organisation in East England indicates that as soon as asylum seekers are granted asylum, they are expected to stand on their own feet and find their own way in society, with little support from the authorities. While during the asylum procedure they had to wait passively and were not allowed much autonomy, suddenly they are thrown in to the big sea and are expected to be pro-active in the management of their life. This can be experienced as challenging due to economic and cultural factors but also because many won't speak the language sufficiently or know the system and society well enough to navigate it. A representative of The Asylum Seeker Housing Project (Scotland) illustrates some of the difficulties experienced after this 28-day period:

No, you get 28 days and then you're meant to leave but if you leave you don't immediately get offered a house. You don't even get offered temporary accommodation. They say that they don't have anywhere and you get asked if you can go and stay with a friend. ... I have had a lot of people in really bad circumstances during that awful period, getting their benefits through, having to borrow from friends.

Then afterwards how do you furnish your house? Even how do you choose which neighbourhood to go to? I think the refugee council is doing some new training session about that now, which is good for asylum seekers or refugees to go to. (Interview 6)

Many of the issues in housing, economic status, security and availability of support are attached to the discrepancies between the status of asylum seekers and that of refugees, but not all. During the asylum procedure people are not allowed much and are made to be passive, causing a 'disintegration' from society. This is expected to change after people gain asylum in the UK, though people are not being prepared sufficiently. How people survive will therefore depend on additional support from local NGOs and the individual social network of the individuals concerned; something that we will elaborate on below.

### **5.2.2. Role of family and ethnic networks in 'home-making'**

While legal status is clearly very significant in the interviews with both stakeholder, asylum seeker and refugee respondents, it is sometimes also seen as being superseded by other factors such as family and community. For example, the middle aged well-educated Yazidi male from Iraq stresses the importance of family, local community relations and educational opportunities for his children in an attempt to establish a new life and home in the UK, while awaiting his asylum application for about ten years:

Yes, from the first day we said it is our home. My wife, the kids and I cleaned the house as our house and still until now, it is like our own house. ... First couple of months, the landlords come to the house and saw that this house changed; I took care of the garden, cut grass, trees. He said, really, did you do it. I said I did everything ... and since then he did not come to the house because he trusts me. ... Yes, we have good relations with the neighbours. It started first with the kids who became friends with their kids and now we have become friends with their parents. ... Yes, they feel free and safe to do whatever they want. ... The [local] community here is organised around the church. When they organise something, they invite us and we participate there. (Interview 21)

As Yazidis have a distinct religious tradition, this family participates in the activities which the church organises at a social level in order to connect to the community they are living among and with. This participation in the local community is very much valued, especially because there are not many Yazidi families in the area where this family lives, who would otherwise be the first circle of community to be part of. The example of this family indicates a pro-active and positive approach to 'home-making' and developing their space in society, despite the fact that they have been in the asylum procedure for 10 years now.

Other respondents who already had family members living in the UK upon arrival express that these family members have been instrumental in the process of establishing themselves in the country. It should be stressed here that earlier established family members play a central role in informing the newcomers about 'how' and 'what' to do in society in order to thrive, or even just to function. Though not discussed explicitly, this becomes apparent in the interviews. The well-educated Assyrian young adult from Syria who established himself in England in 2015 shows how swift the process of his asylum application was and the role which his already settled broader family in the UK has had in establishing his life in the country:

[a family member] ... came to collect me and I stayed in their house; I gave their address to the Home Office. And already after one week I was asked to come for an interview .... So already one month after arrival I had this interview and two weeks after that I was granted asylum and accepted as a refugee. I got 5 years to stay. ... My journey was not as bad as that of other people ... I lived with [family members] [for six months] ... and then moved to [university city] to move in with... [with family member]. We had a shared room in a shared accommodation. And he studied at the [local] university ... I had 150 pounds when I arrived here [provided by another family member abroad]. I did not pay rent when I got here. (Interview 20)

Not having to pay for housing during the first period while living with already established family members in England, being introduced to society and its many systems and regulations and to the local community have been important. One should stress that being able to rely on family as a safety net for both psycho-social as well as economic reasons is very important here.

Another well-educated Assyrian male from Syria expresses similar ideas about the importance of family for stability and for a developing a sense of hope and perspective for the future:

I live with my family. We share rent. The council helps mum in the rent but I pay my share. ... Absolutely, I love the place. [Mum] moved houses [a few] months ago. It was a much smaller house. This place feels like home. My mum wanted a more spacious house. Now we are with 4/5 families here [in the area]. ... We need a big space. When we get together ...

When I came to the UK I started with London. The reason for moving to [university town in south England] ... is that I find London very busy and in a rush. Even alone; it is fine to catch up with life but ... I prefer to come to a small place and to focus. In London I would not be able to focus on my degree. And [his university town] is more than fine for families. Everything here is nice and safe. If I would get a good job here ... I would stay to be honest. ... (Interview 18)

The fact that he can make comparisons between London where he used to live and the town where he is living now, indicates that he is in a position to make choices and that he stands behind the choice that he has made; now being in a stable position where he feels at home and in a position to focus on his career and life. It is interesting that this family made the choice to live in a bigger house in order to accommodate gatherings for the five Assyrian families living in the area. Being able to do this as newcomers shows they are clearly in an advantageous position, compared to many other newcomers who cannot do this for a diversity of reasons. The following example of a highly educated Yazidi young adult female in England also shows how life can change when not being able to live with or near family in the early period of settlement, and what this means at the socio-psychological level:

... Yes, for a year I stayed at a [Yazidi] friend's house. After I was refused asylum I stayed in a hostel. At the moment I live in [town in England] and share a house with African and Iranian women. ... Yes, that goes well; they are nice people. ... In the shared house I have my own room and share bathroom and kitchen. ... Yes, I feel it

is my room. ... some of the people in the house are nervous, some want to be alone. ... we respect each other ... No I do not have contact with my neighbours. You know, English neighbours [don't interact] but in work [as a volunteer for NGO] I have a friend. ... I live in a quiet place. It is not crowded. (Interview 17)

Although she does not express herself negatively about the hostel where she shares a house with other migrant asylum seekers, she also does not indicate that she interacts with them socially; instead they live beside each other and not as a close community under one roof. This has caused her to feel isolated, especially because she does not have any interactions with her neighbours or with broader society either. Elsewhere in the interview, she does indicate that she had to visit the GP for psycho-emotional reasons, indicating a lot of stress and anxiety in her life (see section 3.3).

The fact that asylum seekers do not have a choice as to who they can live with when they have to share accommodation may have a very stressful impact on their life. To be able to choose who to live with allows people to develop and arrange their social life to a certain extent which can have a positive impact on their psycho-social wellbeing. For example, a middle-aged male Iranian respondent, based in Scotland, says:

So, it used to take 3-4 days at least until they [Serco, housing and support] would come, we didn't speak the language well. So, they should arrange sessions to discuss these things. ... We couldn't choose who to stay with. I preferred to stay with an Iranian, from the same culture. So, what is the problem with it, they might put you with a Sudanese for example and they are usually not very clean. Us Iranians are usually very clean people, honestly. ... So, I have a problem with this. Why do you put me together with him, put me with an Iranian. They would just say 'don't speak', excuse me but that means shut up, do you understand? (Interview 24)

That housing policy and practice does not consider the background and/or communal issues among asylum seekers as communities with different historical backgrounds may also lead to the development of disturbing situations. A highly educated young adult Yazidi male reflects on his first shared accommodation in the UK:

... no, I could not choose where to stay [at the detention centre]. My [Yazidi] friend was attacked by Muslims in Manchester. So, even in the house where I stayed, they [Muslim housemates] asked me why I am not praying [with them] why you are in the wrong religion and living the wrong way. ... Yes, they knew I was Yazidi. They noticed because the accent is different from theirs, both in Arabic and in Kurdish. So, they always try to convert you. ... I just tried to keep distance and stay in my room a lot of the time. ... Once they brought someone to the house who lived eight months with us but I never met him because I kept distance. This is to show how I tried to keep to myself. ... In Germany I heard that some Muslims [in the asylum camps] attacked Yazidis. (Interview 19)

The fact that this Yazidi respondent fled to the UK because ISIS fighters attacked the Yazidi population in August 2014 in order to diminish his people, has made him acutely aware of how religious extremists could possibly harm him even while living in England. The way he is treated in the house where he lives with religious Muslim men reminds him also of his daily

experiences in Iraq, of when he was attacked and beaten up by Muslim extremists in the Calais jungle for not being Muslim, and on his flight to the UK. Therefore, for newly arrived people such as this Yazidi respondent, it is important to be able to choose accommodation among people where he will not be discriminated against and where he can feel safe, especially because his sense of safety is imbued with earlier experiences both in Iraq and while fleeing to the UK. A place where people can create their own space and feel comfortable will allow them to develop a network of their choice and lead a less stressful life, to say the least, in which they can prepare for their future in the host country.

Across our respondents, none indicated that they were able to influence their living situation. A representative of The Asylum Seeker Housing Project (Scotland) indicated that asylum seekers are offered relocation support when they can show that it is urgent and necessary:

The other thing that we deal with is the issues that people have. If they are in inappropriate accommodation for whatever reason, the housing officer is meant to deal with getting the person relocated. Sometimes the housing officer doesn't advise the person on exactly how to do that. If someone's on a top floor and they've got bad legs and can't get out, they must provide some kind of official medical information to back up a request to move to a lower down house. Sometimes people don't know that, they haven't provided the evidence they need. We do quite a lot of support about that as well. ... The system to do with relocations has just changed and it's all done now through Migrant Help and it's taking far longer than it used to. Migrant Help then promotes it to the Home Office. The Home Office has always taken the final decision on relocations but the intermediary of Migrant Help seems to be making it take a lot longer to get a response. The Home Office is not always sympathetic .... (Interview 6).

This stakeholder points to the degree of bureaucracy involved, and to the strong probability that the Home Office will refuse any relocation requests from asylum seekers. Further, this strong probability may mean that case officers do not communicate the relocation option to asylum seekers.

Another point raised by some respondents is that they have unfriendly relations with their neighbours, making them feel as if they 'don't belong' as well as an 'unwanted guest', especially when neighbours don't show interest in socialising with the family. The respondent quoted below seems to be in an awkward situation especially because his family has not been in a position to choose appropriate accommodation suitable for their young children's needs. This middle aged Iranian male respondent living in Scotland says:

The house is given by the council ... we don't [pay rent; due to health problems]. ... [I]t's two years now, and it is a temporary place. We are at the 22<sup>nd</sup> floor and because we have small child it is a bit difficult. ... [W]e would like to live on the first (ground) floor, since we have a small child who runs around a bit and our neighbours downstairs get upset above and underneath. ... we feel safe but as I said they look at us not nicely a bit. ... [W]e would like that very much [the chance to socialise with neighbours] because as you also know us Iranians like to socialise a lot with family, neighbours and friends but here that is not the same. (Interview 22)

A middle-aged Iranian woman, also currently living in Scotland, identifies analogous issues:

Situation was that my house was quite bad. Even one Christmas night we went out with my son and people even threw egg on his head, not sure who it was children probably. ... We had a very bad neighbour too. Whenever my children went into the house yard to play they would not allow them and say to them to go back to their own country. ... [T]he situation with the neighbour even went to the police. We had to raise a complaint about them, we were quite scared at nights me and my two children there. So Serco changed our house then. ... Well, where we live now is on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor and when we walk it makes noise. My daughter used to be a very energetic girl, used to jump up and down but now she stays quiet and also is mostly anxious that she may make noise and the neighbour downstairs may go and report us. (Interview 23).

This and other examples in this section show that although there are formal procedures in place to ensure that asylum seekers are housed in appropriate accommodation, this does not always lead to appropriate accommodation in practice. A representative of The Asylum Seeker Housing Project (Scotland) confirms that housing officers have the obligation to make sure that tenants live in a safe space, though this can be widely interpreted:

... Well obviously it's very bad for people's health... not to be in good quality housing and sometimes the externals of the houses are very inappropriate as well. Sometimes the housing officers don't seem to do what you would expect them to. We have the experience of a single parent who was living on the top floor of a tenement... There were people actually sitting on the stairs shooting up drugs. This was a primary school child that was having to walk past this, it was smelly. There was an old sofa at the bottom of the close which was just a fire hazard and it smelled. ... So they [the housing officer] said that they couldn't do anything. It's just untrue. (Interview 6)

The theme of the negative impact of UK housing policy has been repeated by our respondent throughout her interview (23), indicating that it has been impacting her family's life greatly with even long-term effects on the psychology of her child, expressed in a heightened sense of fear. In addition to the bad condition of the house, she also refers to issues of bias and racism towards the family based on her perceived ethnic background:

[T]hey were asking lots and lots of questions and even said that 'although you don't look like terrorists, but the route that you took is similar to the one terrorists can take and enter our country'. And in my opinion, they were right in asking me these questions but didn't treat me badly. [T]hey asked me lots of questions every day. They had taken me to [estate]? They gave me a house in Shettleston, which was not nice. The sofa was full of scratches; my daughter was quite scared. Her toilet going behaviour had changed and reduced. The bathroom was very dirty. My daughter won't use the toilet easily since then, she would go with lots of difficulty. [M]y daughter wouldn't use its toilet seat even after I cleaned it very well with Dettol and all. She would prefer to soil herself but not sit there. I have this issue for two years now with my daughter. We even changed the toilet but she wouldn't still sit on it, although recently she is getting a bit better with me talking to her a lot. (Interview 23)

Also, the trauma responses that this respondent describes for her child are echoed in her husband's reaction when he arrived in the UK and was confronted by his family's housing situation.

This house when I moved first was very bad. There was lot of nails and pieces of wood around. We didn't have gas or anything. I used to go around look for mobile little gas and couldn't speak or explain it well either. My husband had just arrived and was quite disappointed with the house. ... He arrived when we had just moved. He kept saying 'why have you come here, is this what you have come for, please let's go back.' This caused lots of arguments between us. This even caused the downstairs neighbour to raise a noise complaint against us since we were arguing a lot. ... He kept asking me to go back and our situation was really bad. There were no carpets. I put a little carpet in one room and we just lived in that one room for a month, until they [the Housing Association] came and carpeted our living room. (Interview 23)

As this family communicates their issues with housing and settling in society, it is very clear that these have been sources of conflict in their daily life and affecting their future, especially when considering the effects on their psychological wellbeing. People are expected to accept housing facilities passively, no matter their family situation, needs or the condition of the house. It is presented as if they have to be thankful for whatever is provided to them. A former employee of the Red Cross, Scotland explains how the location of the allocated housing may lead to the development of animosity towards newcomers from established communities:

... I also think people do encounter racism and kind of hostility around why they are being given accommodation and that kind of thing. I know just a lot of people have had different issues and kind of comments made to them, neighbours being difficult and the person perceiving that they are being particularly difficult because they are from a different country and so I think issues do come up. And I wonder, I do feel that is probably because the demographics of the places people are accommodated in are put in areas which are already high levels of need and deprivation and there is a perception that resources are in some way being re-directed and that's going to be an issue. ... (Interview 8)

This suggests that housing in areas of lower socio-economic status creates a situation where people are not wanted by the local population which may in some cases be expressed and felt among the newcomers. Where government support is not adequate, NGOs and other civil society groups often step in. The representative of an organisation in Cambridge indicates, for instance, the important role which NGOs, as well as faith-based organisations and others play in filling the economic gap in furnishings and additional housing needs and goods:

There are lots of actors involved, such as faith groups who give 'brown goods' or 'luxury goods' not provided by the Home Office, such as TVs, microwaves, bicycles and computers. Cambridge Refugee Resettlement Campaign help with clothes and other donations. The not-for-profit sector also provide prams and so on. Churches and mosques both give TVs. The mosque bought brand new TVs. Second hand goods are risky, as they could blow up. The Council can't give a second-hand TV. But community groups can give these items to the refugee families directly. Churches

have also provided bicycles. An organisation outside Cambridge built bikes out of second-hand bikes and has given them to refugees for free. (Interview 2)

In contrast to the less positive experiences outlined in the pages above, a young Assyrian family who has settled in England managed to find a small flat in an ethnically mixed neighbourhood after they were granted asylum, and felt sufficiently financially independent to rent their own accommodation rather than continuing to live with their family. Interviewing them during the Christmas period, the interior of their house was fully decorated with the Christmas theme, including a Christmas tree and window decoration. The husband says about living in the flat:

I would say it is starting to feel like home here. I think we have managed to get our mental state where we want; we know this is going to be our home. Try your best to make it your home. ... I live in a complex of flats. .... Maybe two or three are English and all the others are Polish, Brazilian, Greek and many students. We have good relations with the neighbours, we have barbeques with them [in the communal garden]. .... (Interview 20)

The asylum seeker and refugee experiences of housing in the UK discussed above indicate the central role that family members and local community play in establishing a life in the host country. It follows that housing and spatial integration are a crucial means by which people root themselves in a society.

To summarise, the conditions of housing provided through government-private company schemes are frequently criticised by both stakeholders and asylum seekers. The importance of legal status and allocated rights in terms of access to secure housing has taken up a central place of discussion among our respondents, showing the discrepancy in experiences according to legal category. Indeed, housing quality is repeatedly seen as a primary barrier towards integration, as well as leading to other difficulties, such as the deterioration in physical and psycho-social wellbeing and mental state for the people involved. Another recurring theme is that people are made passive during the asylum procedure. Their limited set of rights means that their lives are largely organised by the state, local authorities and NGOs. This unpreparedness for life after gaining a protected status is like being thrown into the ocean without being able to swim. There are numerous bureaucratic and practical hurdles that must be navigated – a particular challenge in an unfamiliar society and without the requisite language skills. As revealed in many interviews, having a family member already settled or a supportive community network is an important asset for newcomers in the process of making new homes.

## 6. Psychosocial health and wellbeing

This section provides a brief overview of the policy framework for accessing healthcare (including mental healthcare) for asylum seekers and refugees in the UK. Based on ethnographic insights from micro-level interviews in this section, we focus specifically on the role of psychosocial health in the integration process of immigrants.

### 6.1. Policy overview

As healthcare in the UK is a devolved function, there are four separate national healthcare services, covering: England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Established in 1948, the NHS is publicly funded and is the fifth largest employer in the world (Triggle, 2018). There are competing analyses of how well the NHS performs. The Commonwealth Fund ranked the UK's healthcare system as the best out of 11 OECD countries in 2017 (Commonwealth Fund, 2017), whereas a Bill and Melinda Gates-funded study based on 2016 data ranked the UK in 23rd place out of 195 countries and territories (Fullman et al., 2018). Faced with a growing and ageing population, the NHS is coming under increasing pressure (Duncan and Jowitt, 2018; Greer, 2016: 18). There are significant workforce shortages, financial deficits across the NHS are widespread, and there exists long waiting times of sometimes more than a year for non-emergency hospital services (Anandaciva, et al., 2018; Duncan and Jowitt, 2018). In 2018, public satisfaction with the NHS was 53%, a level that low not being seen since 2007 (Robertson et al., 2019). Although there is a strand of public discourse that claims immigrants are responsible for increasing pressure on the NHS, this has not been borne out by the evidence (Matthews-King, 2018).

#### 6.1.1. Access to healthcare

Although the UK performs well in terms of equitable access to healthcare vis-à-vis other European countries (Baeten et al., 2018: 7), there are still several important disparities that need to be addressed. A key dimension of inequality concerns the health outcomes of people living in the poorest parts of the UK. Men who live in the most disadvantaged ten percent of England live nine years less than those in the most advantaged ten percent (Public Health England, 2017). There is a greater clustering of disadvantaged local authorities in the north, leading to 'a persistent "north-south" divide in life expectancy and healthy life expectancy. Those in southern regions can on average expect to live longer and with fewer years in poor health than those further north' (Public Health England, 2017). Another dimension of inequality concerns not just outcomes, but funding. A gap in primary care funding in England between the north and the south has been created by the Carr-Hill formula, which has been used to allocate funding throughout the country (Burch, 2018). Although the Carr-Hill formula initially made sense when it was introduced in 2004, it is now out-of-date leading to those in most need of healthcare missing out on crucial funds (Burch, 2018).

Immigrant access to healthcare in the UK is an extremely complicated area. Access and costs charged depend on the type of service, the relevant devolved administration as well as the immigration status of the individual. The rules are also frequently changing. The below discussion of refugee and asylum seeker access to health care is intended as cursory only. For detailed and up-to-date information please see UK Government's guidance on NHS entitlements (UK Government, 2019a).

Every refugee in the UK is able to access the NHS free of charge (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 33). Despite formal access, however, there are several barriers

preventing refugees receiving free services in practice. Confusion about entitlements amongst health workers can mean refugees are charged for, or blocked from, services (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 33). Further, language barriers and a lack of understanding about how the NHS works and the services available can prevent refugees from using services they are entitled to (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2017: 33). In contrast to other categories of refugee, refugees resettled via the Gateway, VPRS and VCERS receive support from their local authority or community sponsor in navigating the registration process with their local GP (UK Government, 2018b: 11, 12; Home Office, 2018a).

Access to free healthcare for asylum seekers varies between devolved administrations. Hospital services in England are free of charge to asylum seekers with an outstanding application, refused asylum seekers in receipt of Section 95 or Section 4 support, and unaccompanied children who are being looked after by a local authority (Asylum Information Database, 2019: 74). Asylum seekers with a current claim in progress are also able to register with a GP, although the process can be difficult to navigate (Asylum Information Database, 2019: 74). Northern Ireland permits all refused asylum seekers to receive free health care irrespective of whether they are receiving Section 4 support or not, while all asylum seekers in Scotland and Wales are eligible to receive full health services for free (Asylum Information Database, 2019: 75).

Every person in the UK is able to access accident and emergency services, treatment for specific diseases and primary health care for free (e.g. GP services), irrespective of immigration status (Asylum Information Database, 2019: 75; UK Government, 2019a). This means that even undocumented migrants are entitled to free care from a GP. However, in practice, the complexity of the rules and confusion surrounding proof of identity documents means that access is not always given (Glennister and Hodson, 2018). Especially since the creation of the 'hostile environment', numbers of people being denied registration at GP practices have increased (Glennister and Hodson, 2018). A study has shown that one in ten people were prevented from registering with a GP in 2017 due to their immigration status, despite their legal entitlement to do so (Glennister and Hodson, 2018).

### **6.1.2. Access to mental health services**

Although all refugees, asylum seekers with an outstanding application and their dependents are eligible to receive free primary, secondary and tertiary NHS care, there are in effect several hurdles (Fassil and Burnett, 2015: 10). Stigmatisation of mental health issues in immigrant communities, difficulties navigating the system, unavailability of independent translators and the lack of a permanent address to receive correspondence are all key issues affecting access to mental health services (Fassil and Burnett, 2015: 10-11). To compound these issues, mental health services in the UK are not of the same standard as physical health services. Providers are trying to cope with increased demand for mental health services, leading to shortages in psychiatrists and nurses with training in mental health, as well as a need for more funding (Duncan and Jowitt, 2018; Gilbert, 2018).

A limited number of specialist trauma psychiatrists, psychologists and counsellors work within the NHS, making it very difficult for refugees and asylum seekers to access their services. Treatment for torture and trauma victims is largely provided by the not-for-profit sector, with notable charities in this space including Freedom from Torture, the Helen Bamber Foundation and the Refugee Therapy Centre (Asylum Information Database, 2019: 75). Although in principle undocumented migrants can access free primary mental health services, fear of engaging with professions linked to the government and denial of GP registration by

misinformed health staff can impede access (Fassil and Burnett, 2015: 11). Compulsory psychiatric treatment is free to everyone irrespective of immigration status (Fassil and Burnett, 2015: 10).

In reflecting upon the access of refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants to healthcare in the UK, a number of key themes emerge. First, despite formal entitlements to health care, many refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants are not making full use of these due to a lack of information about their rights and the services available to them. A lack of information in languages other than English is an issue. Although some leaflets in Arabic have been created, more topics in more languages need to be covered (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, 2014: 34). Some categories of immigrants are in a better position than others. For example, refugees resettled under the Gateway scheme, VPRS and VCRS are allocated caseworkers who assist them in registering with a GP and can offer advice about mental health services (UK Government, 2018b: 11-12). This is yet another characteristic of the two-tier system where resettled refugees are treated more favourably than those who enter the UK through the asylum route. A second dimension of inadequate information distribution concerns healthcare practitioners. The complexity and frequently shifting rules governing healthcare access mean that workers in the health sector are sometimes not informed of immigrant entitlements themselves. As outlined previously, this means that services may be denied to people who are entitled to them, or charges may be levied when the service should have been provided for free. Finally, given that refugees and asylum seekers are integrated into mainstream healthcare in the UK, the gaps, deficiencies, and areas for improvement in the NHS are an issue for refugee health and integration too.

## **6.2. Psychosocial health of asylum seekers and refugees**

Both interviewed stakeholders and asylum seekers and refugees have frequently returned to psychosocial health and wellbeing as one of the most persistent areas of difficulty facing new immigrant settlers. Poor psycho-social health is often perceived as being the result of other barriers to integration. Key factors that have been mentioned are an inability to successfully link up with a community or to build up a new community, the difficulties experienced with entering the labour market, economic destitution, inappropriate housing conditions, detention, isolation, concerns about family members and the future, discrimination, a difficulty in locating and/or accessing provisions for asylum seekers and refugees, and a weak understanding of UK governmental policy (often connected to language issues). As with other areas of concern, respondents observe a discrepancy between different legal categories of migrants – i.e. asylum seekers and resettled refugees.

### **6.2.1. The impact of legal status on psychosocial health**

... now imagine the emotional impact of that when you think you're going to be released and you may be a single guy, you may be a single woman, you may be a mother, you may be a parent, you may have your children waiting for you to come out, and you're handed two pieces of paper. One says 'we intend to make a deportation order against you. You have 14 days to tell us why we shouldn't', and secondly, 'you're now detained under immigration powers.' (Interview 5)

In this quote, the representative of a London based organisation in the field of deportation and detention identifies detention and the possibility for deportation as factors that affect the psychosocial mental wellbeing of asylum seekers and other migrants. She makes a strong connection between emotional distress and the effects of UK policy towards immigration, deportation/administrative removal and/or detention:

People are not in an emotional frame to sort of sit around ... Its, its ... they're very angry. They feel they've been really hard done by. ... You know, just real anger, and like, not wanting ... 'why am I sitting here, this is pointless, why don't you represent me [legally]'. You know it's that kind of thing. (Interview 5)

As indicated in this quote, asylum seekers scream for more legal support in order to be granted asylum. Although legal policy and restricted healthcare affect all migrants, these effects are not felt consistently across all legal categories. There is a clear discrepancy between asylum seeker and refugee migrants in terms of emotional wellbeing, as well as notable divisions in emotional health between those in detention or those who have experienced detention. For many of the respondents, this is attributable to the difference in UK governmental policy regarding these groups. For example, the representative of the charity working in the field of deportation and detention specifically identifies an active policy (Adults at Risk), its perceived failings, and its subsequent impact on asylum seekers detained for removal:

[T]he latest protection is the Home Office 'Adults at Risk Policy', and, they have a gatekeeper system, a detention gatekeeper system, which is supposed to prevent people from being detained if they fall into a particularly vulnerable group. ... The only requirement then is for the Home Office to respond to that report. There is no requirement upon it to release the person. Umm, and as part of that process they are designated, under the 'Adults at Risk', a level 1 adult at risk, a level 2 adult at risk, or a level 3 adult at risk, with 3 being the most serious. Even if they're designated any of those categories, the instructions to Home Office case workers are that immigration considerations can outweigh the risk assessed. So, in our experience, that is always a trump card. ... So, it's not doing what its designed to do in any shape or form. (Interview 5)

For this respondent, there is a very clear sense that the Adults at Risk policy is not doing what it is intended to do. Such failures are seen as further aggravating or causing difficulties with psychosocial health and wellbeing amongst asylum seekers. For example:

Of course, it wasn't working in practice, but that was where the problem was, the gap between the policy and the practice, ... We see vulnerable people being detained routinely. Daily. With little regard paid to their vulnerabilities. If any. Just an example ... a client ... he developed really severe mental health problems. He was detained by the Home Office to be removed for not exercising treaty rights. ... And he was a self-harmer. He was suicidal. He became unbelievably unwell, and had an adult at risk level 3, to which the Home Office never, has never responded. He has only been detained for two months, but he's now become so unwell that they've actually had to

take him to hospital accompanied by two guards. And he had removal directions for Friday. (Interview 5)

This respondent indicates that ineffective support and a lack of regard for vulnerability – in the context of detention and deportation – has caused increasing issues with mental health and wellbeing. Some of the interviewed asylum seekers express this too. A middle-aged Iranian man explains how governmental policy and associated legal processes have impacted his mental health while in the UK:

I would like to work but can't now, because of my depression. ... [M]y physical issues are all from Iran but my emotional/mental state has become worse here. ... They give me a court date for after a year then and it got cancelled also once or twice so it took 1.5 year to get a reply and so it affected my emotional, mental state quite a lot. ... I was getting scared what they would decide. The more I heard about other people's experiences of the courts, I got more scared and I was lonely too. ... I was alone at home constantly and thinking about things a lot and so became a little depressed then. ... I am not so well these days either. (Interview 22)

This respondent also describes how this has negatively affected the psychosocial health of other asylum seekers and refugees, going on to suggest ways in which the official system and provision of support could be altered to possibly counter and correct this. Explaining how the intervention of psychological support has been particularly beneficial for him and how it could help others in his position, he says:

I used to go to doctors; to a psychologist actually every 2 weeks saw one and we talked. ... [I]t was helpful when we used to talk but they had to cut my sessions off since they were a bit busy and my children had arrived too, I wanted to continue with my sessions but they couldn't offer more. ... [T]he situation for refugees here is bad; when they don't give a decision about their application they get depressed, they should be given some advice. ... I mean about speaking to someone [i.e. a psychologist]. ... Yes, so that someone would speak to them, it would be very good. ... [Y]es, for example when someone immigrates here they have hopes and when their files get closed, what should they do then [?] ... [F]or example, I knew a few people who wanted to commit suicide. (Interview 22)

This sense of more effective interventions being needed has not always been attributed solely to a change in policy. NGO and governmental help are often discussed together, requiring strong collaboration to realise more effective and efficient interventions. The Iranian respondent in Interview 24 mentions psychosocial difficulties such as isolation, stress, physical health, mental health, belonging and integration ('exile feelings'), refugee status, systemic/policy difficulties, *and* family. These difficulties are all seen as inter-relational and mutually affecting. However, the positive impact of external support (from the British Red Cross in this case) was clearly emphasised by the respondent, particularly regarding the practical assistance he received in reuniting with his family. Equally, though, this respondent has also noted the frequent ambivalence of, and lack of support provided by, external organisations in terms of psychosocial and/or physical health:

They were not Scottish. They were migrants themselves. Pakistani and the Iranian person, Mr [name removed]. Well I am your fellow countryman, I have a problem, I need to speak to you. I would say hello to him, he wouldn't reply back. I mean the worst organisation is [X], it's called [x] but it is actually [X] No Help really. I had lots of problems then, serious mood/mental issues, had no money, no food and he threw bread in front of me, one of these dry long Baggett. Well I didn't have any money, the £5 a day that I am entitled to, give me that much. ... The dark days that I was here [Organisation x] didn't help. (Interview 24)

Despite these negative accounts, NGOs and charities are largely perceived positively by respondents. They are seen as working with local authorities to assist – and possibly 'fill in the gaps' in – official government policy implementation in the broad area of psychosocial health. This is noted by the representative of the NGO Syrian Sisters, who clearly states her intention to work with the County Council in order to address psychosocial health and associated needs. She also explains that there are already a lot of NGOs organisations willing and active to help with mental health amongst the asylum seeker and refugee communities:

Now I'm focusing to work with [the] County Council in this area, because all Syrian people who are coming from Syria, or any refugees they need this issue [addressed], mental health and stuff like this. Because you know when you found if your people, like, your home destroyed, of course you will have in yourself some problems, you know? You will be not normal people. You need help, always you need help in mental health area. But we lucky we have a lot of organisations helping in this way ... not government, un-government. I'm trying to work with County Council to do something. Hopefully I can. (Interview 1)

This respondent recognises that interventions to assist with psychosocial health and wellbeing must be fundamental to national governmental policy, council policy, and NGO support. These are represented as being integral to any support systems set up for asylum seekers and refugees. The respondent's demands are couched in terms of personhood and humanity:

I'm really working in this kind of stuff, to give my voice to Council and [to] all organisation who are here. Please work now. Not new house, or language or food. Now you should work in mental health. Because human, used to this one, it be normal, you know. We are human. (Interview 1)

This declaration of 'we are human' alludes to a strong sense of human rights – a principle that is consistently held up as being a systemic necessity at all levels of response. Human rights are seen as what should be prioritised in governmental policy. Basic human rights are frequently associated with the difficulties regarding insufficient support and a lack of psychological care, in addition to the systemic barriers to successful integration and the negative (often perceived as 'abusive') impact of current detention and deportation policies. For example, the respondent working for an organisation concerning detention and deportation in London reports:

[I]t [detention] is absolutely devastating. Immediately, from that point on you are powerless. You're at someone else's mercy. And that has a dreadful effect on people. ... That is our point of principle. That is our starting point. All detention is harmful ... you have a system where a parent can be separated from their child by detention. You have a system where people with mental health problems are detained. You have a system where torture survivors are detained. ... people with physical health problems, people with cancer, people in wheelchairs, you know, that, there are supposed to be protections and safeguards against the detention of particularly vulnerable groups. But our experience is that that doesn't work at all. (Interview 5)

This respondent draws particular attention to the emotionally and physically destructive effects of detention; articulating detention as a specific systematic and policy-based failing in UK governmental 'protections' and resulting in practice that 'doesn't work at all'. The importance of human rights and of peoples' sense of choice, individuation, and of respect (i.e. 'powerless'; above), is also expressed in terms of psychosocial health by a stakeholder respondent who is based in the NHS:

So, from an EU perspective we do put barriers up for people meeting or reaching the destination of choice and I know that's very emotive in terms of whether there should be a choice or not be a choice. But in terms of peoples' human rights and dignity then that's harsh .... (Interview 13)

This respondent also highlights how human rights have become an important theme in some public agencies:

However, from a health perspective ... So, what was our Corporate Inequalities Team is now called Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Team in terms of the board trying to put human rights as a basic fundamental around healthcare and probably being less medically driven and looking at the causes of the causes ... (Interview 13).

The respondent, working at the NHS, continues in his interview to introduce suggestions for improvement, and, much like the respondent in Interview 5, to identify current weaknesses in UK policy towards asylum seekers and refugees. In particular, he expresses the need for a sense of 'security' and 'safety' in addressing vulnerability and trauma-response:

And with welcoming we need to inform, and we need to listen. So, in our experience health is a high priority ... Not in that kind of immigration status way but about psychological protection and stuff as we don't make informed decisions about how we place people. ... We don't do that bit very good, I think, around the support and advice that we give them. And again, the change in the contract [for support] ... isn't adequate to supporting people through a complex, harsh asylum process. So, that's the kind of stuff, at the beginning, about how you create safety and security for people because after all that's why they're coming here. ... People don't feel safe. They don't feel secure. It doesn't develop any aspirations for hopefulness or the kind of future. So, there is a lot of that around as well. (Interview 13)

Here, the difficulties experienced in the 'asylum process' are seen as aggravating issues around security, causing greater problems in wellbeing and mental health. These are not

perceived as being adequately accommodated by the current support systems, with changes being needed so that 'informed decisions' can be made, and higher levels of support and intervention provided in terms of health and 'psychological protection'. This is stated in more detail by this respondent; again, connecting the need for changes in policy and practice surrounding basic rights to healthcare:

... our bridging period is much shorter for people in the asylum process because people are then moved into dispersed accommodation quickly. So, our focus is always to link people into universal healthcare and into mainstream services ... a lot of my role and the team's role is advocating for peoples' rights and entitlement to access mainstream services and probably it's not dissimilar around homelessness and asylum seekers just in terms of the barriers to accessing health around producing documentation and in terms of proof of address, proof of ID. (Interview 13)

The 'asylum process' is here seen as preventing access to adequate healthcare – a problem that is recognised by both stakeholders and asylum seekers and refugees. Detention and deportation, and the legal differentiation between asylum seekers and resettled refugees are described as both causing psychosocial health issues and as prohibiting effective healthcare intervention.

### **6.2.2. Post-migration stressors: Increased trauma, isolation and coping**

Undoubtedly, post-migration stressors have a decisive impact on people's further integration into the host society. As also revealed in our interviews, experiences in a new country have added to migrants' traumatic pasts. Problems surrounding security, safety and integration have often been identified as key elements. One recurring theme is 'isolation' which has been identified in interviews as both a cause of increased psychosocial difficulties in a new country, and also as a symptom of previous traumas and compromised health and wellbeing. At a more contextual level, isolation is attributed to the 'asylum process' itself.

Trauma responses discussed by our respondents are seen as the result of experiences in original countries, as well as a consequence of the migration process. They are also seen as being the result of experiences following arrival in the UK. The trauma responses that occurred once in the UK are certainly not seen as restricted to individuals held in detention, or to individuals who had experienced detention. Nor are they perceived as being specifically experienced under immediate threat of deportation; deportation as a permanent or potential threat is frequently understood as inevitable within the asylum seeker and refugee communities.

In fact, trauma is consistently identified within more settled groups. It is frequently expressed as an evident barrier towards integration – as well as a possible consequence of the stresses of integrative processes. Both of these challenges are often portrayed by respondents as being dealt with by NGO and other 'non-official' intervention, as opposed to any of the more 'official' formal governmental policies. For example, the representative of Asylum Welcome, Oxford (Interview 3), very clearly outlines the persistence of trauma responses – and other psychosocial issues – amongst these settled communities, as well as discussing some of the NGO and charity groups taking on the role of trauma-support:

In terms of mental health, lots of people carry a mental health burden. Trauma, people they have left behind. It is part of the refugee experience. People cope with that in

different ways. For example, people's main concern is often to work on the practicalities – wanting help with benefits, and then coping with mental health issues themselves. The biggest need for mental health services is for unaccompanied minors. They are the ones who most often need professional intervention. If they are under 18 services are provided by local authorities. There is a charity in Oxford called Refugee Resource, who provide counselling in addition to, or instead of what local authorities provide. Asylum Welcome work with Refugee Resource on this. (Interview 3)

As this stakeholder states, trauma is perceived as 'part of the refugee experience' for a large number of the interviewed asylum seekers and refugees. For many, mental health and integration issues are also clearly related to trauma. Trauma responses are seen as being caused primarily by experiences in their countries of origin. However, trauma responses are also presented as being the result of experiences within the UK, with the original trauma seeming to make participants more vulnerable to further trauma(s) once in the UK in some cases. This is not consistent amongst respondents. For example, an Assyrian young adult from Syria articulates how he has had traumatic experiences and strong psychosocial responses both in Syria and on his journey to the UK, which he undertook illegally. However, he does not seem to give these traumas space to play a role in his everyday life in the UK, being very positive about the development of his life:

Unfortunately, I could not finish my education because on 15 Jan 2013 the college was bombed and if you search it on YouTube you will find the clip. I got injured; I could not walk for a while and I lost some of my friends over there. Psychologically I could not focus anymore. And I said: ok I will skip this year. Me and my sister decided to go back to our hometown [in Syria]. As you know the problems started in 2013. ... To be honest, the only thing that drives you at those moments [on the journey] is your adrenaline [laughs]. You are psychologically destroyed; mentally, emotionally, of course. A couple of times, days when you are caught and in jail I called – I didn't call them [his family] crying but you know when I am tired inside I called them, you always miss them [family]. (Interview 18)

In contrast to this respondent, some others who have arrived in the UK with traumatic experiences continue to live their traumas and mention new difficulties in the new country which prevents them from living a happy life. A Kurdish middle-aged adult from the Kurdistan region in northern Iraq says:

[Y]ou can see killing becoming normalised, so when you see killing become normalised, when you lose hope ... when they kill your friends and family and relatives and nobody take them to justice ... Not just me, millions of people lost hope. So you cannot stay somewhere. ... I decided, even now, I am a bad person, because I have left my friend behind and I think mostly they were arrested, many of them were killed, and so, morally, still, I am punishing myself sometimes. And I say, Why am I here? Should I be back there? ... You come and you believe everything is ready for you, you will be protected, you will be happy, there's a job for you because you had a good job [back home], you have good skills, because you are good people. ... My expectation was very high, in terms of social justice, in terms of government, in terms of the relation between human[s]. I didn't believe there was sectarianism in this country, ... When

you come here you face a lot of prejudice, racism, a lot of challenge. Apart from the policy, isolation, a lot of isolation. Indignity, makes you feel you are less. A lot of trauma. Plus, the trauma you carry from years and years previous, and then coming here .... (Interview 27)

For this respondent, his new experiences in the UK are an additional source of trauma beyond his earlier traumatic experiences in Iraq, in contrast to the Assyrian respondent who hasn't experienced the same traumas while settling in the UK – managing to start a new life with a positive perspective after graduating from university. The Kurdish respondent shows also a great disappointment after arriving in the UK, expressing that he had other expectations and ideals in relation to how he would be received and treated in the UK. Imaginations and ideals about a future elsewhere may play a substantial role in how new encountered difficulties are experienced and effect individuals' psychological wellbeing.

In addition to the responses discussed above, trauma has shown also a gender specific aspect among our respondents. A young adult female Yazidi from Iraq commented on the difficulties of her present life in the UK, after surviving a genocide and working on its documentation in the aftermath, more specifically the documentation of the experiences of female survivors:

I thought if there is a strong government, no racist government [in the UK], and I can live as I want to live and to not worry. For two years I live without work [since arrival in the UK], only as a volunteer for two NGO's. Every week we get 35 pounds [government support]. I can't go out. And I am always alone. No family, no one. In Iraq I was writing the stories of women survivors; the names of Isis members ... who raped them. And often I think a lot of them and their suffering. And sometimes I am awake until 2–3am. ... (Interview 17)

Life in both Iraq and in the UK has had a deleterious impact on her psychosocial health. Similarly to the earlier quoted Kurdish respondent, this female Yazidi respondent had certain positive expectations about a possible future life in the UK while still in Iraq. She outlines the stress caused by the official asylum-seeking process below:

... I am waiting for the next hearing. After the last hearing, the judge gave me 5 years of asylum but the home office appealed against that decision. ... Home Office told me ... They say you have to be raped like Nadia [Mourad].<sup>14</sup> But if they [ISIS] could do this to me they would. But they [Home Office] do not understand this point; I don't know. ... [Y]es, I am always thinking about my case and ask will they give me asylum? I feel like I have no future. Because I am always under stress. And alone; is so difficult, without family. (Interview 17)

Interestingly, in this case, gender-specific factors 'you have to be raped like Nadia' [Murad]) seem to have a causal role in psychosocial health and security in both the UK and the country of origin. However, what appears to be an equivalent factor – both for this respondent in Interview 17 and many of the other respondents (female or male) – is the

<sup>14</sup> Nadia Mourad is a Yazidi woman who escaped her ISIS enslavement and became an activist for the Yazidi genocide victims, for which she received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2018. Nadia Mourad is also the author of *The Last Girl* (2017).

prevailing impact of isolation and a sense of being 'alone' within the UK. In particular, what seems to have the most serious effect on psychosocial health is the perception of being separated from family and/or concern for their safety, as well as a fear of not being able to see their family again. For example, a middle aged male Iranian respondent explains how connection with his family, family security and support and marital intimacy, are the most powerful resources in counteracting the psychosocial impact of isolation, insecurity, anxiety, and lack of integration in the UK:

I arrived alone and after about two years my wife and two children ... arrived with a visa. ... I feel better after they arrived. ... [I]n Iran there are a series of stresses, like what would happen today or tomorrow or next week, but here we don't have that [meaning family safety and security]. ... [Y]es, it is good, I don't have any friends as such, but my relationship with my family is good. (Interview 22)

Another middle aged Iranian male respondent explains why connection with family is so significant to his wellbeing, outlining the difficulties with isolation for asylum seekers and refugees in further detail:

So I had quite a difficult situation in here, until the weather improved, it became warmer and my wife arrived from Iran ... Well the important person is my wife, and no one else really. Mum and Dad have become like zombies really because of Islam their soul is dead. The good thing about my wife is that she motivates me, says to me, 'don't give up'. I didn't have anyone else to support me, who did I have [?] ... She has annoyed me a lot but as the proverb goes, your teacher's beating is like whisper of love' (laughter), excuse me. ... We quarrel as well even over important matter but then carry on the next day and don't have anyone else either, just each other. (Interview 24)

Here, this respondent describes how reconnection with his wife (and children, mentioned elsewhere in the interview) has resolved his 'difficult situation' of isolation within the UK – his wife's support has meant a dissipation of the feelings of being alone. This man indicates that he and his wife depend on each other and support each other and of there being 'no one else really'. Being in the same place together has increased feelings of security, despite no extended family or community involvement being mentioned. To have at least someone to turn to while in distress proves to be essential. In contrast to his situation, the female Yazidi respondent indicates below that she experiences continued separation from both immediate and extended family as very significant to ongoing feelings of distress. A lack of personal wellbeing and feelings of isolation are clearly attributed to and exacerbated by a strong concern for the psychosocial health of other family members, whether still located in Iraq or elsewhere in Europe:

... Yes, I have good relations with my family. But my father and mother [in refugee camp in Iraq] do not have always internet. Every time my mother calls me she is crying. And every time she calls me I became sad. Sometimes I do not want to speak to hear because I do not want her to cry. ... my brother and sister received asylum in Germany and we talk sometimes. ... My brother has mental problems as well. Last year he said sometimes I am thinking of killing myself. ... ISIS took his girlfriend ... In

our city we knew each other and loved each other. It is ... socially different [relations between people] from the UK. (Interview 17)

Importantly, for both respondents (Interviews 24 and 17) it is the emotional impact of separation that is of the most significance. In Interview 24 these issues of separation have been resolved through reuniting the respondent with his spouse, whereas in Interview 17 the Yazidi female respondent is still struggling with separation even though she can still communicate with members of her family online. This seems to imply that physical connection and separation is highly influential for wellbeing amongst asylum seekers and refugees, as indicated by this Yazidi respondent:

Sometimes I talked with refugees and tried to convince them to go outside and not to feel alone. They were alone here without families. (Interview 17)

This aspect of separation is significant for further research as, while a number of respondents describe separation from family as the major cause of mental health difficulties and feelings of isolation, other respondents attribute this to more generalised feelings of being alone. This isolation and loneliness are seen as resolvable through increased intimacy, close relationships and inter-personal connection both in and outside of the family. Isolation and loneliness are sometimes also seen as being assisted by feelings of local community acceptance and integration. Increased connection, intimacy, and social relationships are also seen as counteracting the emotional effects of still being physically separated from close family members. For example, an Assyrian young adult from Syria (Interview 20), describes a sense of wellbeing and successful integration (despite difficulties) because of his marriage after arrival in the UK (having previously been on his own), and also a sense of concern for one another, connection, and acceptance in his broader social circle and work environment. This was initially obtained via (formerly unknown) people following arrival due to shared faith, and then – later – through family connections in the UK, his marriage, and other sources of social support. Although he, equally, still explains the stresses experienced as a consequence of the asylum procedure in the UK, he states that he is not undergoing perceived psychosocial difficulties now. This is in spite of continuing physical separation from his immediate family (parents and siblings) in Syria:

Nobody spoke to me [while detained at the UK border]. While waiting, I was very scared and stressed. I thought they might send me back because I did not know the law. I was very stressed and worried, concerned. The guy came back and said we are so sorry we are late. We have to take you back to prison. ... I think I am mostly happy here; still miss the rest of my family elsewhere. I am settled in the UK. I have friends here I work in a good place and so does my wife. I had a very nice wedding [family members flew in to attend]; which is very important for me to settle in. And I think generally I am happy. ... since then I have not had any problems. ... no, no health issues. .... (Interview 20)

To summarise; the impact of isolation and of physical separation from family is evident across sources. It is explicitly linked with psychosocial health, wellbeing, and integration; but, it is also simultaneously linked with other perceived difficulties (whether overtly or implicitly). These could include physical health, or more extended social problems – such as economic

stability, access to work, broader community security/acceptance, status within the UK or official support. Most commonly, descriptions – in extremely variable forms – interrelate many of these factors. Cause and response are often integrated, so that difficulties with psychosocial and/or physical health are frequently portrayed as being a consequence of their circumstances, as well as a contributing factor. Whether cause or response, psychosocial difficulties are still consistently aligned with loneliness (being 'alone'), a lack of perceived belonging, and concern about separation from family. As one middle-aged male Iranian respondent described emphatically:

You don't know how difficult it is over here to get the apply [to become a refugee], nobody knows. ... [silence and started to cry a little] ... No, no, since arrival of my children I am feeling better, the BRC [British Red Cross] brought my children here very nicely and easily but the Scottish and British societies cannot support a refugee who has suffered a lot, from mental health point of view. They cannot do it, especially for single refugees here. ... But I am really thankful to BRC who brought my children here, since they arrive I have felt happy and existing well and the loneliness and exile feelings that I unfortunately had, disappeared by the arrival of my children. I hope that my children won't feel those feelings. I hope that justice can be implemented in here. ... Yes, as I said, as soon as my family arrived I felt much better and if they hadn't who knows if I would be here and well. (Interview 24)

This respondent indicates here again the central role which his family has played in his mental wellbeing. Being able to live with his family is portrayed as an antidote not only to physical illness, but also as a counterpoint to the psychosocial maladies of isolation and being 'alone'. Indeed, both respondents draw attention to 'not having' any other sources of closeness, belonging and support outside of their families.

In terms of positive systemic change and improved psychosocial care for asylum seekers and refugees, what is consistently identified as integral to success has been: decreased waiting times, access to community/networks/one's cultural group, connections to family, a facilitation of 'hope' and increased access to sufficient psychological care and assistance. Trust of governmental services, systems, policies and employees is also an implicit but significant need and request. Here, as with the waiting times, the necessity of positive reassurance and support seems to also be a crucial factor in securing psychosocial wellbeing and reducing anxieties. This is even more evident if the individual has experienced detention, such as in the case of the middle-aged Kurdish man from the Kurdish region in Iraq:

Again, it's [detention] uncertainty. You don't know what's going on after that. Will they send me back to my terrible country? Will they leave me here for months, years? Or what's going to happen? Where am I going? It's uncertainty. And just worrying, stress, trauma. So, yeah. Sometimes indescribable, and you only think, 'I only hope, I hope I will leave this room'. You become smaller and smaller and smaller. 'I wish, one day, hopefully tomorrow, leave this.' Next stage, next stage, every time you have .... (Interview 27)

The interconnected factors at play discussed above are summarised by a well-educated young adult Pakistani man, currently living in Scotland:

Hope is what motivates me. It's weird, because, the future is uncertain, and I know it's uncertain, but the more I think about what else I would be if it wasn't for me being in [city in Scotland], I can't see life beyond that. This is everything now, [city], here I've got friends, and that circle becomes part of your daily life. I've lived the most formative years of my adult life over here. So who else would I be if it wasn't for .... Am I hopeful? It's weird, because if I was to go back and go through the process, I would need a lot of reassurances as well, because, a reassurance in a way, can I trust the system, or can I not? I'm going to have to go ahead with it, but somewhere, I think, I should tell myself that if I wasn't meant to be here, I wouldn't be here. I'm still here, and hope is a good thing. Maybe the best of things. And no good thing ever dies. (Interview 29)

For this respondent, as with others, the facilitation of 'hope' and the psychological support of asylum seekers and refugees should be a systemic matter – a governmental priority – in order to secure (and possibly rebuild) the psychosocial health and wellbeing of migrants in the UK. This is a need derived from original trauma-based responses in the country of origin and often on the journey to the UK – *as well as* trauma and distress experienced *in* the UK. Specifically, through a lack of psychological support, problems within the systemic structure and policies, a lack of understanding of circumstances, and isolation – both through separation from family, and a sense of inhibited community integration. This is expressed by this same respondent:

So I don't think, the system the way it is, it's going to change. And we have to be realistic about that. What I would like is, I think, I would like more support networks. So one thing that's clearly lacking, within Scotland and perhaps all over the UK as well, is proper mental health support for asylum seekers. And, I think, this is so crucial. This is something I would like to do in the future. I've spoken about, I'd like to establish a charity that would provide mental health counselling to asylum seekers. It possibly should be run by asylum seekers as well. Because, there are counselling services just now, very limited, people have to wait ten months. But, how can someone empathise with an asylum seeker if they have not been through the system? They cannot. It's impossible. You need to understand what that person is going through. (Interview 29)

In this interview, appropriate understanding of the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees is dependent upon empathy. For this respondent, such support is best provided by other migrants who have had similar experiences of seeking asylum and navigating the UK legal system. This requires further investigation and research into how to most effectively achieve and communicate such understanding(s), so as to integrate this support more fully into the UK system and also to facilitate the building of enhanced 'support networks' (above).

To summarise, as revealed in many interviews, experiences in a new country, challenges faced in the labour market and education, difficulties experienced in housing, access to healthcare and overall feelings of belonging and isolation all become factors affecting the psychosocial health and wellbeing of asylum seekers and refugees. In some cases, experiences can be categorised as postmigration stressors that have become sources of secondary traumas, having a direct impact on the outcomes of integration. Particularly, the isolation that is felt to be a major cause of, and response to, trauma and psychosocial health issues could be addressed in a number of ways – see for that the section 8 of this report.

## 7. Citizenship and Belonging

In this section, we first provide a brief account of the legal-political framework for citizenship acquisition in the UK (7.1). Thereafter, we elaborate on how the existing naturalization policy affects asylum seekers' and refugees' sense of belonging, as well as impacting their lives more broadly. This topic is particularly important for explaining the social-cultural dimension of integration within the framework of 'belonging', as well as the legal-political dimension of integration regarding citizenship acquisition and civic participation.

### 7.1. Legal-political framework

Looking at the early naturalization regimes in the UK, the Naturalization Act 1870 instituted the five-year residency requirement together with a loyalty oath and pledge (which included both a positive and a negative declaration, aiming to foster an internal moral commitment from the newcomer to the state). This historical act was the precursor to the 1981 British Nationality Act, which is the primary basis for the present law and which also instituted the 'good character' requirement for citizenship acquisition (or loss). The framing of citizenship in current policy (and legal) discourses is linked to the main trends in immigrant integration policies. For example, in the Home Office Report of 2013, the Government underlined that 'citizenship is a privilege and not a right' and that all applicants 'should demonstrate their commitment by learning English and have an understanding of British history, culture and traditions' (Home Office Report, 2013: 8).

#### 7.1.1. Regularisation of immigration status

As outlined in Hirst and Atto (2018), there are limited pathways to the regularisation of immigration status in the UK. Children who are born in the UK and who have lived there unlawfully for the first ten years of their life can apply for citizenship; children born in the UK and who have lived there unlawfully for a minimum of seven years can apply for leave to remain; a person brought to the UK as a child and who has unlawfully lived there for at least half their life can apply for leave to remain; and a person who has lived in the UK for at least 20 years, when at least some of that time was unlawful, can apply for leave to remain (Library of Congress, 2017). Those with leave to remain can reapply every two and a half years, and after ten years they can apply for citizenship (Library of Congress, 2017).

#### 7.1.2. Naturalisation

Refugees and holders of humanitarian protection can apply for indefinite leave to remain after they have been in the UK for five years, except for refugees who are resettled under the Mandate and Gateway schemes, who are granted indefinite leave along with their refugee status (UK Government, 2018b: 10-11). Application fees are waived for refugees and asylum seekers (UK Government, 2019b). After one year of holding indefinite leave to remain status they can then apply for citizenship (Asylum Information Database, 2019: 97). The same criteria apply to refugees as others going through the naturalisation process. Successful applicants for UK citizenship must be of 'good character'. Factors the Home Office considers in determining good character include criminality, the perpetration of international crimes, financial stability, notoriety, deception and dishonesty, transgression of immigration laws and prior deprivation of citizenship (Home Office, 2019b: 9-10). The discretionary nature of the

requirement makes it unsurprising that by 2012, 37 per cent of refusals were on the grounds of good character (Migration Observatory, 2014).

All applicants for British citizenship, including refugees, must demonstrate knowledge of both the English language and life in the UK (Home Office, 2018b: 5-6). Certain exemptions exist, however, depending on age and in some cases of disability (Home Office, 2018b: 5-6). English language proficiency can be demonstrated via: (1) possession of at least a B1 level speaking and listening qualification as per the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages; (2) possession of a degree conducted in English; (3) citizenship of an English-speaking country (Home Office, 2018b: 10). Knowledge of life in the UK is demonstrated by passing the 'Life in the UK' test (Home Office, 2018b: 20). The test is comprised of 24 multiple choice questions derived from the 'Life in the United Kingdom: A Guide for New Residents' handbook, takes a maximum of 45 minutes, and is completed on a computer. If a person fails the test, they can re-sit as many times as they choose (Home Office, 2018b: 20). The British citizenship application fee can cost up to £1,236, while the 'Life in the UK' test costs £50 to sit, the official 'Life in the United Kingdom: A Guide for New Residents' can be purchased for around £12.99 (UK Government, 2019c), and the B1 level English language exam costs around £150 (see, for example, Trinity College London, 2019). The UK allows dual citizenship (UK Government, 2019d).

In 2018, 158,795 people applied for citizenship, of which 157,080 were approved (Home Office, 2019c). The most common nationalities in 2018 were Indian, Pakistani, Polish and Nigerian (Home Office, 2019c). Between 2014 and 2018, successful applicants were most frequently from countries located in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. During this same period, 3,986 Iraqis and 1,170 Syrians were granted citizenship (Home Office, 2019c). Data is not available on grants of citizenship to asylum seekers and refugees.

Beyond the differential treatment afforded to British citizens vis-à-vis various categories of immigrants outlined in the preceding sections, the major benefit of British citizenship for refugees is stability, certainty, and the ability to live unconditionally in the UK.

## **7.2. The role of local actors and NGOs in fostering belonging**

The majority of participants stress that a sense of 'belonging', inclusion, involvement, and (civic) participation is fundamental to the wellbeing and integration of asylum seekers and refugees within their surrounding communities. This is often seen as being the result of work by local NGOs. The interviewed stakeholders frequently articulate that the inclusion of migrants is mutually beneficial – for the migrants themselves and also for their host communities. For example, the representative of an organisation working in Cambridge says:

There has been an outpouring of help [amongst the local community]. ... priorities are picking the refugees up from the airport. We do this ourselves, drive the mini-van and personally greet the families. It is the most rewarding feeling. We then bring them to their house. (Interview 2)

This sense of inclusion and care towards asylum seekers and refugees is presented as being emotionally 'rewarding' for members of the established local community, as well as being crucial for the acceptance and inclusion of new immigrant arrivals. All of this is perceived as being very much a *local-level* response, as opposed to that of national governmental policy and intervention. As a result of this regional emphasis, links between local councils and local networks/groups/NGOs are identified as being both straightforward and almost inevitable:

The [local] Council manages to find a way to overcome everything. The Home Office is the main constraint in terms of what can and can't be provided to the refugee families. Faith groups and other networks also help to overcome these constraints in Cambridge. Neighbours help by mowing lawns. The community is helping, and both refugees and the community are communicating even without a common language, and the Council encourages that kind of interaction with neighbours. ... Charities, specifically CRRC [Cambridge Refugee Resettlement Campaign], organise a monthly meet with refugees and volunteers, and see if there are any needs that they can help with. ... There are layers of support. Neighbours, councils, charities. The refugees are flourishing here. (Interview 2)

Here, this community cohesion and support is presented as a very local phenomenon, being a distinctly regional/local reaction to migrant communities:

There is a social conscience in Cambridge though, with the local community helping. A lady bought a house so that a refugee family could live in it, and she has accepted below-market rents from them. The community has been incredible. (Interview 2)

These integrative functions of local organisations – both governmental and independent – have been echoed by other respondents. For example, the representative of an organisation in the East of England actually perceives such functions as being the fundamental role and purpose of their organisation's intervention:

And we work with charities who work in the sector, and we work with the public sector that also provides services to, umm, new migrant communities. And we try to offer training and support to enable, umm, all of those people to do their jobs better, because we have got the ability to, sort of, bring people together. (Interview 4)

It is important to point out that this respondent's organisation is grant-funded by the Home Office in support of their community integration work for asylum seekers and refugees. This funding arrangement, as well as the interview extract above, show a degree of collaboration and coordination between multiple actors and sectors in cultivating a sense of belonging amongst migrant communities. The importance of cross-communication and integrated-support (financial or otherwise) is also acknowledged by the representative of Asylum Welcome:

[Funding the project is] Roughly 40% trust funds (as a result of applications to large grant-giving bodies), 40% small donations from local people, and the rest is local government money. (Interview 3)

This statement shows the multiple funding sources of integration work, as well as the importance of non-state support for newcomers vis-à-vis government support (in the case of this organisation). Forming support networks that incorporate different funding sources and participants is not always easy. The role of some actors constrains, rather than facilitates, the work of others:

Recently there have been much tighter interconnections between central government and local authorities. There are strong information flows. There has been a long-standing connection between local social services departments and the Home Office. However, the 'hostile environment' has resulted in much stronger connections between the Home Office and local governments. The Home Office cannot enforce immigration controls the way it would like to, so it needs to roll out immigration duties to local authorities. ... Funding is a restraint. We would like to provide more help than we can. The limited rights of asylum seekers and refugees makes Asylum Welcome's work harder. The legal restrictions on the rights of individuals by default restricts the work of NGOs. (Interview 3)

For this respondent, 'interconnections' between national and local government bodies are seen as being restrictive towards NGOs and charities with regards to both legal rights and financial issues. The Home Office, and its expanding links with local authorities, are seen as preventing adequate intervention in terms of community support and integration. The Councillor for The Scottish Green Party elaborates on the use of the terminology 'hostile environment':

I think the hostile environment is the perfect title for it. I think it is inhumane and it's deliberately designed, I mean, systems work as they are designed to, so this is a horrific system that builds in destitution, builds in mental ill health for everyone who has to navigate it and it is really pernicious as well. I have been astonished at how pernicious. (Interview 7)

This has encouraged a sense of NGOs needing to overcome or alter structural or policy-based inhibitions towards successful integration and a sense of community inclusion amongst migrant communities. This is often seen as being implemented at the practical level, frequently as the result of direct communication with both migrant groups and local government:

We are trying to support them. Asylum Welcome is trying to encourage them by letting them use our offices, giving money to help them with activities and events, and helping them to set up an organisation themselves. We are also trying to encourage the Council to invite refugee groups to meetings. (Interview 3)

Such direct intervention has been particularly successful amongst asylum seeker and refugee-run groups and NGOs, with the respondent from Asylum Welcome commenting on Syrian Sisters as such an example:

Syrian Sisters [a local NGO run by refugees and asylum seekers] is good for mental health. Gets refugees and asylum seekers out of the house, giving them a sense of community getting them together. (Interview 3)

More specifically, such organisations are facilitating the bringing-together of individuals and families with similar needs, wants, and experiences; and, out of this, allowing space for either the creation of a community, or a more successful integration into the existent community. As the representative of Syrian Sisters mentions while describing the community set-up via involvement in her organisation:

If we are just children and families, more [than] 100 people [are involved], but in our regular meetings, because we meet every Friday, we are usually 20 women, 15 women, like this. But more than 100 if we have an excursion or if we have activities, like last Friday's was half term, and when we do activities for children we are more than 100. ... We start to welcome anybody coming, like from Iraq, everybody coming, because you know, yeah, we have our story, but now we like to get involved in this community, now that we're a little bit set up. We welcome everybody and everybody is coming. (Interview 1)

Such successful support for migrant communities in terms of facilitating belonging and inclusion and for building connections, is also seen as a consequence of other, regionally specific factors. Firstly, as the result of a positive relationship between this NGO and local government:

No, no here in Oxford, I told you we [are] lucky because we have a very good Council. They've a meeting, they call this meeting 'asylum seekers and refugees welcome'. Council they sit, and County Council they sit and they invited us as community leaders, they let us [be] involve[d] you see. They [are] very good. We're lucky ... They invited us to ask us [what we want]. They don't do everything we want to, but they at least listen to us. It's good sometimes, [as] you find some people who are listening to you... they work very hard to do this kind of job. (Interview 1)

And, secondly, as evidence of an already multicultural regional community-base; one that is, therefore, subsequently more accepting of difference than communities in some other UK regions being the implication here:

Like especially in Oxford it is very multicultural, you don't feel you are [a] strange[r]. If you know a little bit of English you don't feel you are [a] strange[r] you feel are you [at] home because you find a lot of people like you .... (Interview 1)

Although in Oxford there exists an unusually good relationship between local government and local non-governmental organisations, the national government is portrayed as being unhelpful and inefficient: 'Yeah, but [national] Government should work more [for] asylum seekers.' (Interview 1) The situation in Oxford, characterised by a positive collaboration between various local actors, does not hold everywhere. Regionally-specific locations are also represented as negative in their particular local features. For example, the Councillor for The Scottish Green Party illustrates how regionally complex his specific area of Scotland is, because, he argues, it falls in between the remits of divergent local government authorities, policy approaches and resource levels:

But, yea, it's very geographically based so where I represent actually falls in-between two different integration networks. And, so the North Integration Network kind of covers where I stay and then the East one kind of does as well and in practice, people go to either of those but also those integration networks are really understaffed. People who are working extremely hard and doing great stuff with what they've got but also, it's like one guy for the entire East end which is ludicrous. And, also if you don't have a bus fare, like [location] is too far to walk for a lot of people, especially if

you have got mobility issues because of the trauma you have been through anyway. And, or, confidence to go about [city] or you are a woman maybe going out unaccompanied if that is not a cultural norm for you. So, yea, people are physically removed from services. There is not equity of services across the city and then like, [location] Community Project which is absolutely brilliant and so I've referred people to there because, because they can help people, but you know, that still means effectively my constituents have to go to [location], rather than actually having anything local for them. (Interview 7)

Although this respondent highlights the existence of cross-organisational or multi-level relationships to support integration and belonging, there are still improvements to be made in terms of closer coordination:

But, human rights groups were absolutely key as well, so we are very lucky in [city], there's a lot of different groups who are working extremely hard and I hope that things can get a bit more co-ordinated and that we can work together better and it seems like that's happened in response to the crisis this summer, that there are, there are now joint surgeries between the, some of legal advice providers, or the lawyers and some of the advocacy services which is really encouraging because they are absolutely crucial. (Interview 7)

This seems to suggest that national-level support is most frequently seen as inadequate by respondents across multiple locations in the UK, but that the effectiveness of local support and cooperation between local government and NGOs varies according to context. This was also highlighted by the interviewed asylum seekers and refugees. Some respondents perceive community-based belonging and integration as relatively straightforward for asylum seekers and refugees in the UK. This is in contrast to government policy, structure, and official pathways for obtaining citizenship which are portrayed as posing challenges for migrants. For example, the middle-aged Yazidi asylum seeker from Iraq refers to strong local support via his daughter's school, versus a lack of support at the national level:

Meaning in life is that one day we get our case solved. It is our hope to be treated and to be free as the people here, to travel ... Last year, my daughter was supposed to travel abroad with her class. My daughter was selected to go but she was not able to go because she does not have a passport. ... The teachers wrote reports about my children to the Home Office; that they are good students, socially, good friends. But the Home Office did not care about this report. ... (Interview 21)

Similarly, other respondents express how they manage to develop local connections and a sense of belonging in their local communities, something which is not supported at a national level, as expressed by a young adult female Yazidi from Iraq:

... I like about England that there is no racism, everyone had the right to live and nobody asks you where are you from and what is your religion? In Iraq, when we go out we have to wear a hijab and hide our religion; we are afraid to say we are Yazidi. But here we are not. I felt like in prison in Iraq. We had to dress according to their

rules. And here people are nice and there are good people here; I have friends here. But the government does not want refugees to come here. (Interview 17)

Or, as an Assyrian male from Syria framed it very succinctly: 'So people were really kind. So I would say the system was not kind but the people were kind' (Interview 25). All of these responses indicate the importance of further investigation into, and analysis of, the factors affecting citizenship and belonging for asylum-seekers and refugees at the personal, organisational, legal, and governmental/structural levels. This is particularly the case as contextual issues seem to affect the efficacy of local intervention, meaning that it is not simply a case of efficient local government/inefficient national government. Local government and non-governmental assistance with integration, belonging, and citizenship is of course complex. For our respondents, regional factors are very significant, with differences in locality seeming to be a major contributing factor in non-universal local support systems. This is often attributed to either: the amount of local support available, the degree of communication between the local council and regional NGOs and charities, and the level of acceptance of cultural difference in the area generally. For example, for the Yazidi female quoted above (Interview 17) cultural difference does not seem to play a significant role in either preventing or facilitating belonging and integration into the local community. Instead, access to work and involvement in local NGOs seems to have a greater impact on successful inclusion:

[Y]es, it is normal for me to mix up with English with Muslims with Christians, if they accept and respect me. I have a lot of friends in the NGO's I volunteer for. ... I looked for volunteer work because mentally I did not feel good without work ... Then I googled ... I found jobcentre. I went there and worked for them for three months, in [place in England] first. And then I moved to ... and found two NGO's. I also went to the Red Cross but they said we do not need any people; if we need we will call you. .... (Interview 17)

Here, integration into the local community, into the voluntary workforce, and general feelings of belonging, are not understood to be essentially difficult in the presence of 'acceptance' and 'respect'. However, the impact of local NGO involvement is very significant. Cultural difference is still presented by this respondent as being potentially problematic under other circumstances, for example, limiting interactions with neighbours:

... No I do not have contact with my neighbours. You know, English neighbours [don't interact] but in work I have one friend. ... (Interview 17)

A common idea about life in the UK is that the British are less social than people in and from the Middle East (where the majority of our respondents are from), explaining a stronger sense of isolation among immigrants. This is less of an issue among well-educated immigrants who have managed to start their education or to participate in the job market at their level. External factors that play a role in developing connections with the local population are also individual legal status and official citizenship. These are frequently described by respondents as being crucial to experiences of integration or exclusion and civic participation. This is very important for understanding how asylum seekers and refugees perceive their own level of access to UK society and is explored in further detail in the next section.

### 7.3. Experiences of belonging, integration and citizenship

For many of the respondents, a sense of belonging and of community acceptance are inextricably linked to their legal status, to their citizenship-rights, and to the long waiting times associated with the official asylum process in the UK. After arrival in the UK many develop feelings of disappointment and hopelessness. For many, this is clearly linked with the negative effects of detention on arrival and the psychological impact of being held in prisons, often described in terms of compromised human rights and feeling a lack of acceptance and belonging. For example, a middle-aged Iranian man explains:

Eight days [in detention], yes eight days with lots of worries too. We had heard that asylum-seekers in London or Liverpool were taken to a hotel or hostel on arrival, but I stayed eight days in a prison. A proper prison. Doors used to get closed at 8pm then open up in the morning, it was a proper prison and they treated us like prisoners. After eight days with severe depression, I managed to come here and a company called Serco started supporting me. But I had no information about anything initially. (Interview 24)

This initial experience of detention, and of being treated as a 'prisoner', is seen to have continued into the extensive asylum process, leading to a sense of humiliation. A middle-aged Kurdish man from the Kurdistan region in Iraq explains:

Not being able to work, go to college, not being able to buy a drink, a coffee. It's a sense of humiliation. In my country, I was doing well, a lot of money, this company, I was working here. My dignity, at least in my city, or at least around me, was da da da... You have, not everything. I have a lot of things. You come here, you don't have anything. (Interview 27)

For these respondents, their legal status was expressed as dehumanising; leading to an experience of community exclusion, lack of belonging and shame. In addition, legal status is described as having a very significant impact on access to work, financial status, and housing, meaning that community integration and civic involvement is further inhibited for these participants.

For the Kurdish respondent quoted above, this oppressive and unhelpful UK system has severely compromised any wider feeling of inclusion and individual rights.

But now there's a system, trying to systemise you. And, you don't want to be systemised in the way that they want, which is sometimes [due to] conflicting cultures. Why should I accept that? If you don't accept that, ... you might lose your paper. (Interview 27)

The 'systematising' of the asylum process, loss of personal choice and citizenship-rights, and 'conflicting cultures' is also described by other respondents, such as by the young adult Pakistani male, now living in Scotland:

Well, I would be lying if I said that it didn't impact on my health. I think any individual, it's like going through an abusive relationship. Any abusive relationship would just leave you very empty as a person, uncertainty, not knowing what the future leads

to...people who are trained basically to make you feel unwelcome, who are hostile to you for no reason. The only reason is because they are paid to make people feel unwelcome. How would that affect anyone, any single person? (Interview 29)

Both of these respondents expressed a negative interpretation of official UK systems; describing them in terms of 'abuse' and viewing them with suspicion and mistrust. For each of these participants, this was a consequence of the asylum process, their legal status, exclusion from citizenship and their resultant homelessness. This Pakistani man describes below how he has taken matters into his own hands after he has been refused asylum in the UK. In a way he has become more active in his attempt to restore his life, no longer relying on the Home Office and its official institutions:

I kind of made it my mission to know more about the legal system, so I started studying about it, I started learning about the Home Office. ... The more I learn about it, the less hopeful I was. So, came to [city in Scotland], had my substantial interview. By that time I probably knew from experience that they would refuse my case based on how they go about their cases, that I probably didn't have any chance. And once that was refused, I've absconded since. I don't have a status, legally I'm a destitute asylum seeker, I don't get anything from the government, I'm street homeless. I do not trust the Home Office, I don't trust them enough to let them decide what my life is going to be like. So I've taken matters into my own hands. (Interview 29)

This mistrust and lack of official support has developed feelings of hopelessness as well as the experience of a compromised legal status. Lack of citizenship and homelessness are also evocatively described as initiating a 'loss of hope', as well as prohibiting the more practical aspects of integration (e.g. housing; economic stability) and therefore preventing any successful community participation:

... you might lose your hope, you might end to be in somewhere else. ... Probably two and a half years [waiting for asylum], something like that. Then I got my status, I didn't know what I am waiting for. Then, through this process, I was homeless. ... You lose everything. Sometimes, you lose your hope. Even if you come with lots of hope, the system will crush you. Always trying to make you vulnerable, humiliating you. Because you cannot work ... Every day or every so often, they say, this is not yours, we're going to deport you. A level of uncertainty. Plus the other stuff .... Why are they treating you like that? So, you have a sense of...You become broken again. (Interview 27)

For this Kurdish respondent, systematic failings are associated with: homelessness, economic insecurity, lack of access to education, as well as a more generalised anxiety surrounding status and the potential for deportation. This is also described as being a cause of more personal 'humiliation' and loss of 'dignity', framed as being systematically abusive – asking: 'Why are they treating you like that?'. Consequently, this is experienced as a lack of safety, increased uncertainty, and of being 'broken again'. Such emotional responses – specifically the loss of 'hope', 'humiliation', and indignity – are described very similarly in other interviews. For example, an Afghan-Pakistani middle-aged male also mentions his experience of being 'broken':

I don't have any hope, this is true. I swear I don't have any hope. Because before I was so happy when I arrived. When I was refused everything, my case was damaged, my hope was burned. If they give me now, I am broke. My inside is broke. Before, when the paper is coming, I check every day at my door when the paper is coming, when the paper is coming, when the paper is coming... But, no, I'm not checking now, the door. I say to myself, 'If it's happening, it's happening – so what will I do?' (Interview 31)

For this respondent, a lack of 'hope' and sense of belonging is associated closely with perceived inequalities within the UK system, as well as with an inability to obtain asylum status and citizen-rights. All of these are combined into a descriptive sense of 'disappointment' on arrival to the UK:

Because people say, the UK have loads of human, is good human, they will help people, is a good country, a lot of opportunity, you can go to study or something. You will start new life. When I arrive, I'm so happy, I feel like I'm born new. I have arrived to the world now. But now, no, I'm not happy. I can't go to Pakistan, I can't go to here., I'm stuck. (Interview 31)

This feeling of being disappointed by the asylum process, by legal status, and by difficulties with integration into the community are reiterated in other interviews. For example, as an Iraqi Yazidi male who arrived in the UK with the student visa explains:

... What I knew about the UK was through this friend of mine in the UK. But still when you see it is always different from what you hear. ... But especially after I was refused asylum life became very hard for us, when you have a family, when you have kids in school and in university. It was like a nightmare every day. So life was first positive and then negative, 100%. ... I applied for asylum in 2015. ISIS came in August 2014 [attack on Yazidis]. A few months after that I applied for asylum. (Interview 21)

Being refused asylum has been a significant part of this difficulty. This is combined with economic problems, and issues with taking care of family while experiencing financial limitations. As with other participants, these reactions are partly attributed to extended waiting times within the UK asylum system. The Yazidi respondent quoted above arrived in the UK in 2011 with a student visa and was still going through the asylum process at the time of writing in 2020. Waiting for asylum status and increased citizenship-rights is also described by many other respondents as leading to a loss of hope and feelings of despair, after a sense of positivity or happiness on arrival in the UK. For example, an Afghan-Pakistani respondent describes his reaction of civic protest to the difficulties with waiting during the asylum process:

I say to them, then, suddenly I was on hunger strike. ... I say to them, 'Okay, where I should go'. They say, "we don't know". Then I go hunger strike. ... Now I am waiting eight, nine months, they still not give me result. If they will not understand, okay, example, if you working to somewhere, if you don't understand how I can give the decision, leave your job. Now, I'm stuck. ... I say to them, they say just one month, I am still waiting after eight months. I am still waiting, and I don't know what's happening. (Interview 31)

The frustrations from waiting are closely associated with experiences of disappointment and humiliation by many of the interviewed asylum seekers. These frustrations are often associated with uncertainty regarding legal status, civic integration, belonging and the potential for deportation. As our respondent in Interview 31 says: "I don't know what's happening." A high degree of uncertainty with the asylum process led this Afghan-Pakistani to hunger strike. In another example of feeling humiliated and excluded from participating in society is from the middle-aged Kurdish respondent:

Again, voting, I hate this. I am really angry about why I cannot vote. So many times, I wrote to City Council, and I was legally challenging that with my lawyer, and they say, 'No, you cannot vote.' And they keep sending me, 'If you don't register we will fine you £1,000'. When I say, yeah, they say, 'Sorry, you're not eligible'. It's another thing, you feel you're in provisional period, you're not full human, you're not full citizens. We are citizens here, well, we are living in this country, and I should have a right to vote. And, because I am refugee still, or because I was asylum seeker, I don't have a right to vote, which is really annoying and humiliating, again, and I am feeling less and different. (Interview 27)

For this respondent, the lack of the right to vote is experienced as compromising his citizenship and human rights. However, it is important to acknowledge here that, even for other respondents for whom human rights and the compromise of basic rights and citizenship are reoccurring, fundamental, and consistent concerns, voting is often not perceived as being of significance or of high priority. This is in fact a relatively rich and diverse area of discussion. For some, bridging discrepancies in culture, language, and understanding are seen as being of more value than a right to vote – in terms of belonging and integration – here, as expressed by a Syrian young adult:

Yes, the voting thing, we are ... there was actually a campaign in response in Scotland to allow refugees to vote for Prime minister. You know, to take part in the whole election. As much as I valued this and I told colleagues and people who were working on presenting that paper. I was not fully actually fully supportive of this actual action for specific reasons. Mainly, I would say, the stereotyping now that us refugees and I am talking about the countries mainly the refugees are coming from now, I am talking about Syria specifically. We didn't have the actual voting thing as a right that we practised. Because we don't believe in it. We were forced to do it [voting]. So it did not mean a lot to us. So when we came to this country we didn't feel that voting for someone is a right that has been taken from us. So it didn't mean a lot to me. It was a bit hard to explain this to my Scottish colleagues because they would say this is your right that you have to practice. I was like, I understand where you coming from but instead of me focusing on this, I would focus more on giving people more ESOLE classes. Because I think the key thing to integration is the language. You have the language, you integrate. It is extremely hard to integrate without language. You will be isolated in your own community that speak only that language. You will not be able to live. It's gonna be very hard. I have seen examples. I still stand for this. I understand that voting is an important thing. Practising that right is something very important. But I don't think that it has been taken away from me. I would focus more on helping

people get into knowing the system, language, offering more English language classes.’ (Interview 25)

This Syrian respondent prioritises other aspect of participating in society more than the right to vote, which may become more important as other needs are satisfied, such as learning the language and developing a broader knowledge about how society works; preparing himself to participate in broader society and to be included. Respondents who stress the long waiting time (‘provisional period’) for a response on their asylum application often develop a sense of not being recognised or treated as either ‘full human’ or ‘full citizens’. Again, this is also related to a more personal feeling of exclusion and isolation – a lack of belonging amongst the local and/or national community. This is felt as humiliation and difference – both of which are perceived as being a consequence of not having access to the same rights as the general population; resulting in feeling ‘less’. A Kurdish male respondent indicates how this has affected his everyday life:

It's a big thing, really, it's a big, big step. Sometimes it destroys your whole life, all your life. And some of this will stay with you forever. But I am still in the recovery position, the recovery moment. And hopefully by next year, I secure myself citizenship, that makes me a little bit secure and happier. But that is really hard ... They say, it's not our problem. And I just felt very, very sad, emotional. I went to Refugee Council and I just cried. They said, ‘Don't worry, don't worry, we'll help you’. But I'm not crying because...It's humiliating, really ... Why don't you have cash? Because the Home Office or the system prefers not giving you cash, because you don't deserve to be a normal person, having cash, buying a coffee, being in college. For a few years, for some time, I didn't have 45p for a coffee, I had to hide from my colleague, because I'm there, I have to pay for my coffee, or to buy them coffee, because sometimes they bought me coffee, so I had to hide during the coffee break. Not just me, other people are in the same situation. (Interview 27)

Here, a lack of ability to access the rights associated with citizenship have led to an experience of being unable to integrate or to ‘belong’ within the communities at work or educational institutions. This is felt in addition to the difficulties in obtaining NHS care, or other legally-based sources of support – but it is described as being of equivalent impact in terms of emotional distress and humiliation. Such feelings of shame, humiliation, and embarrassment – prohibiting belonging through enforced dependence – are stressed by many of the respondents. For example, the Syrian young adult male living in Scotland says:

Ahhh ... it was a strange feeling to digest to be honest with you because a part of me I am happy that someone is helping me [in the local community]. That is the side that I am being looked after but at the same time, I felt that I have no dignity whatsoever. I am waiting for people to donate stuff to me. You know this is something that I am not used to, I have never been in that situation so it was really hard for me even in the first instance having accepted, you know having a tin of food or whatever. Yeah it was disturbing but I can't starve, you know, so had to go through it. But mentally, emotionally it was very challenging. ... (Interview 25)

Along the same lines, the Afghani-Pakistani young adult articulates the consequences of the long waiting time for his asylum application and subsequent feelings of civic exclusion, loss of citizenship, and compromised rights:

We don't need nothing: if they can give to us insurance number, I can work myself, I can support myself and be happy. I'm not allowed for work, I'm not allowed to bring friends to my house, so what is this human right? Where is the human right? Is there no human right here? Where is the human right? Two, three years I am here. I've never seen human rights. Every people thinking, when is coming Saturday Sunday? We can go to the club. They are not thinking of human rights. I don't think they have human rights here. I am telling from my heart because I feel painful inside. (Interview 31)

This respondent states that with an 'insurance number' (i.e. right to work) they could ensure their own emotional security and 'be happy'. This is felt to be a fundamental human right and integral to belonging and community integration. This suggests that the paternalistic approach of providing support and care during the asylum application process while not being allowed to work and earn their own money constitutes a loss of autonomy to such a degree that many feel as though they have lost their dignity. This is also clearly expressed by a Kurdish middle-aged male:

You feel humiliated. You feel small, you feel different, you feel less, because you're not having the same rights. (Interview 27)

For the state, it seems as though asylum seekers are numbers to be dealt with in an 'efficient' system until their asylum application has been approved. Individuals feel the effects of this impersonal system, negatively impacting their psychology and mental health. For many respondents, volunteer work at NGOs had provided a crucial sense of autonomy and identity, mitigating some of the negative effects of the asylum process.

The responses discussed above show how the asylum process, and associated restrictions on rights and freedoms, push in the opposite direction to integration. The barriers to integration are multiple and interrelated, requiring further research and elaboration. As articulated by the Afghan-Pakistani respondent in Interview 31, the Kurdish respondent in Interview 27, and by a number of other respondents, there are many issues associated with an inability to integrate or to develop a sense of belonging within their communities in the UK. These include: a lack of civic rights and citizenship, legal status, the long asylum procedure, emotional distress and feelings of uncertainty, economic instability and the inability to work, responsibility for family members while experiencing financial difficulty, dependency, isolation (from friends or family) and cultural differences. These all seem to be mutually influential causes of diminished belonging and citizenship, with the respondents in these interviews either expressing or experiencing these factors to different degrees and in varying combinations, and with some respondents describing this as a breach of human rights.

To conclude, the asylum process is at odds with processes of integration, acceptance and belonging. Integration initiatives and the rules governing asylum claims have fundamentally different rationales and objectives, leading to the former being undermined by the latter in many cases. This is one of the main reasons for exclusion, alienation and segregation. The cumbersome legal processes in the acquisition of citizenship, long waiting times for asylum

decisions, feelings of hopelessness and uncertainty, asymmetric relations and a high level of dependency associated with financial difficulty, an inability to work, discrimination, and the 'hostile' environment at the systemic level (as expressed by our respondents) are all factors impeding a sense of belonging and integration. Our respondents link a sense 'belonging' to *local* responses and interactions, while 'citizenship' tends to be linked to relations with the national government.

## 8. Conclusions and policy recommendations

This report has mapped the integration policies (macro-level), practices (meso-level) and experiences (micro-level) of immigrants in the UK. Legislative and policy analysis, as well as interviews with refugees, asylum seekers, migrant-sector NGOs and government employees have shown that migrants face numerous barriers to integration. These challenges have been analysed according to the five thematic fields of a) labour market, b) education, c) housing and spatial integration d) psychosocial health and wellbeing and e) citizenship and belonging.

The primary contribution of this report is its foregrounding of the nexus between the individual, yet patterned, experiences of immigrants and the broader policy and legislative frameworks with which they interact. The three levels of analysis engaged in this study show how legislation and policy filter down into processes of implementation and are then felt and experienced by immigrants themselves. The simultaneous charting of these different scales, underpinned by the dual-methodological approach of interviews and policy mapping, tell an expansive story of immigrant journeys towards full participation in their host societies, constrained by *de jure* and *de facto* policies and practices.

We have identified three cross-cutting features of the UK's approach to integration: reactivity, burden-shifting and fragmentation. We argue that the UK's approach to immigrant integration has tended to be **reactive**, with long-term planning being overshadowed by more immediate concerns. This short-termism has also made integration policies vulnerable to politicisation, with heightened anxiety about numbers of immigrants arriving, security threats and the prospects of integration for certain categories of migrants affecting the UK's integration approach. Second – the UK Government has engaged in **burden-shifting**. Both local authorities and the migrants themselves have been compelled to take on much of the responsibility for integration into their new communities. Third – the UK's integration policies are **fragmented**. Compared to other European countries, the UK's integration policies tend to be **non-interventionist**, which in turn has resulted in a series of fragmented realities in policy and practice. This fragmentation occurs between tiers of government, within tiers of government, and in terms of different policies for different categories of migrants. The fragmentation of integration policies across the UK's three tiers of Government may be explained as a result of functions and duties delegated to each level. While the UK Government's reserved powers include those surrounding immigration, citizenship and nationality, the national legislatures of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are responsible for the delivery of education, health and social services. Further, local authorities are responsible for some social care, schooling and housing functions. The division of labour between the three tiers means that there is not one, UK-wide strategy, which has led to fragmentation, overlap and sometimes incoherence. Apart from Northern Ireland – which does not currently have a refugee and asylum seeker integration strategy, all devolved administrations have developed their own integration strategies – in some cases more proactive than the UK-wide administration. In Scotland, for example, the New Scots strategy is distinctive in centring its approach on 'integration from day one' meaning that asylum seekers should be considered in its integration policy after they settle in Scotland rather than being required to wait until they are granted asylum.

A key fault line in the debate on integration is where responsibility lies between the local and the central government. Even though local authorities are closest to many of the issues related to integration, they do not, however, control some of the levers that affect integration outcomes. The central government determines the extent of migrants' rights to participate (e.g.

rights to work and to vote); is responsible for key areas of policy such as discrimination law; and shapes, to an extent, national media and public discourse. It can incentivise civil society and employers to contribute to this agenda and ensure local authorities have an evidence base to inform their interventions. Some local authorities across the UK (e.g. Metro Mayors) have recently taken a lead in developing their own integration strategy for refugees and migrants, while others have taken initiatives without referring specifically to integration.

Integration policies are not only fragmented *between* levels of government, but also *within* each level of government. Given that holistic integration encompasses many policy areas – from education to health to community participation – it is crucial that the multiple functions which are currently tangled between several agencies are made to cohere. A third dimension of fragmentation concerns the UK's **two different integration approaches** to new immigrants. Concerning asylum seekers, the UK Government's approach is one of segregation and marginalisation. Asylum seekers' rights have been progressively eroded and their freedoms diminished under every tightening immigration laws and rules (Hirst and Atto, 2018). The steady erosion of appeal rights, the curbing of support payments, dispersal accommodation, immigration detention and the criminalization of illegal working are all serving to prevent asylum seekers putting down roots, establishing connections with local communities and planning a future in the UK. In contrast to the category of asylum seekers, the integration policy aimed at those who arrive in the UK already as (recognised) refugees via one of the resettlement programmes tend to encounter a much more accommodating integration policy and inclusive approach.

Of the five thematic areas analysed, interview respondents identified jobs, housing, and health and wellbeing as being the most crucial in their integration experiences. These three areas are of course closely related. Restrictions on work in the early period of the asylum process have major impacts on migrants' general wellbeing and integration, and their demand for participation in society. In terms of housing, barriers to housing stability and housing standards are of major concern. The lack of a secure and adequate home means that a critical foundation on which to build a new life is missing. Whether or not people have access to the job market and appropriate housing has a strong influence on their health and wellbeing. Our main thematic conclusions are elaborated upon below.

### **Labour market integration**

Our study has shown that at a systemic policy level, the regulation of access to the labour market has been fragmented. In addition to the economic impacts, the working ban for asylum seekers in their initial period in the UK has detrimental consequences for their health and wellbeing and further integration into society. These restrictions aim to limit the ability of asylum seekers to put down roots, establish connections with local communities and plan a future in the UK until they are granted asylum. The Immigration Act 2016 has made it a criminal offence for employers to hire someone without the right to work in the UK. The strict regulation of the right to work for asylum seekers forces this group (including rejected asylum seekers) into the informal labour sector; doing cash-in-hand work under challenging circumstances in order to support themselves.

Migrants who have settled in the UK and have higher qualifications, such as doctors, show that they often struggle with getting their qualifications recognised. Perhaps even more so than the less qualified, well-educated migrants express more disappointment that they cannot continue working in their former careers. In addition to the difficulty in getting their qualifications recognised, other obstacles such as language skills and a lack of employer

knowledge about refugees' or migrants' rights to work means that many are taking low-skilled and poorly paid jobs whether in the formal or informal sector. Some of our respondents have also mentioned perceived discrimination blocking their way to get a job or while they are in the job. All of these factors mean that it will take longer for people to work at their level of qualification and in their field, delaying their work experience in the country and sometimes meaning they have to pursue a new career.

Refugee women face specific challenges in entering the workforce. This is related to issues such as organising affordable childcare, a lack of specialised services for refugee women, perceived discrimination and lack of previous formal work experience. These factors explain also why they end up in specific sectors, such as cleaning, catering and care. Another group receiving less attention is migrants with disabilities who are currently constituting a largely 'hidden' population in the UK.

### **Education**

Education-related problems and challenges are a recurring issue and often a source of anxiety. Remarkably, education is often discussed as a 'mediating' factor, rather than as an independent concern. Respondents identify clearly and strongly language-learning problems as one of the most influential and fundamental barriers towards integration into the UK labour market. Education is also represented as a 'causal' factor – contributing to other, perceivably larger scale, issues. In particular, these include an inability to properly integrate into broader society (at any level) due to the multiple problems of language barriers. Such language barriers are seen as the result of a lack of access to education facilities offering language-learning classes and resources or the mismatch between offered educational sources and the participants' level. There is also a noticeable generational discrepancy in educational experiences. Education is often spoken of differently by children as opposed to adult asylum seekers and refugees. Adults often experience greater difficulties in finding any form of structured education, and in particular language-learning opportunities. Some respondents also mentioned the high costs of education as posing a barrier.

### **Housing and spatial integration**

The importance of legal status and allocated rights in terms of access to housing has taken up a central place of discussion among our respondents, showing the discrepancy in experiences among the people in the legal categories 'asylum seekers' and 'refugees'. During the asylum procedure people are not allowed much and they are expected to live a passive life while awaiting they asylum application, causing a 'disintegration' from society. This attitude is expected to change directly after people gain asylum, though people are not being prepared sufficiently. How people survive will therefore depend on additional support from local NGOs, the social network of the individuals concerned and their economic situation. In their new status they are expected to become independent from any of previous aid and to sort out their own life, not considering their health and mental wellbeing after a long stressful period of waiting for an answer to their asylum application.

The conditions of housing provided through government-private company schemes are frequently criticised by both stakeholders and asylum seekers for not meeting migrant needs. This is repeatedly seen as a primary barrier towards integration, as well as creating other difficulties, such as the deterioration in physical and psychosocial wellbeing for the people involved.

As revealed in many interviews, having a family member already settled in the UK or a supportive community network is an important asset for newcomers in the process of

establishing new homes. In some cases, already existing family networks play an important role in the experience of housing and settlement. Family networks enable newcomers to find housing or temporary accommodation and facilitate a much swifter overall process in integration. This also has a psychosocial effect on people. Family can play a major role in facilitating a sense of support, security, economic stability, and in further community involvement and integration.

### **Psychosocial health**

Despite formal entitlements to health care in the UK, many refugees and asylum seekers do not make full use of it due to a lack of information about their rights and the services available to them. In addition, the complexity and frequently shifting rules governing healthcare access mean that GPs or other staff in the health sector are sometimes not informed of immigrant entitlements. Given that refugees and asylum seekers are integrated into mainstream healthcare in the UK, the gaps, deficiencies, and areas for improvement in the NHS are a continued issue for the people involved, also competing for space and attention with all members of society.

The difficulty in accessing healthcare especially for asylum seekers is even more problematic because many arrive in the UK with already existing physical or psychosocial health issues. For most of our respondents, post-migration stressors have had a decisive impact on their health and wellbeing and indirectly on their integration in society. Experiences with the asylum procedures in a new country have added to their earlier experiences in the country of departure. They identify problems surrounding security, safety and integration as key in affecting their health and wellbeing. More specifically, our respondents mentioned factors affecting their general health as: the inability to successfully link up with a community or to build up a new community, the difficulties experienced with entering the labour market, economic destitution, inappropriate housing conditions, detention, isolation, concerns about family members and the future, discrimination, a difficulty in locating and/or accessing provisions for immigrants and a weak understanding of UK governmental policy. 'Isolation' as a recurring factor is both a cause of increased psychosocial difficulties in a new country, and also as a symptom of previous traumas and compromised health and wellbeing. At a more contextual level in the UK, isolation is attributed to the asylum process itself.

### **Citizenship and belonging**

Connected to the theme discussed above, our respondents indicate a strong relationship between their sense of belonging to a place and their health and wellbeing, making both fundamental for successful integration into the host country. Even though the aim of integration policies is to foster belonging among newcomers, the policies at stake do not achieve this goal and neither do they have the vision to create a 'hospitable' environment, especially during the period of asylum application. This is one of the main reasons for exclusion, alienation and segregation of new immigrants to the UK. Factors hampering a sense of belonging and integration in society are the cumbersome legal processes in the acquisition of citizenship, long waiting times for asylum decisions, feelings of hopelessness and uncertainty, asymmetric relations with authorities and high level of dependency associated with financial difficulty, inability to work and discrimination, and at contextual level the 'hostile' environment (as expressed by our respondents). Only few of our respondents have managed to establish a new life in the UK about which they are happy and hopeful. They have worked hard in establishing themselves, both educationally and workwise and have been able to do so with

the help of already established family members in the UK. They have shown a positive example of how newcomers can connect to broader society within the very few first years.

For many of our respondents, a sense of belonging and of community acceptance are inextricably linked to their legal status, to their citizenship rights and to the waiting times associated with the official asylum process in the UK. Feelings of disappointment and hopelessness following arrival in the UK have frequently been expressed after being confronted with the difficult procedures they have had to go through. To be confronted with detention upon arrival can have a very negative effect on the start of a new life in the host country.

#### **Policy recommendations**

- *A proactive government approach.* The Government should take more responsibility in countering the current anti-migration discourse which is a key obstacle in the positive integration of immigrants. Integration is not only the responsibility of local authorities and communities. The national government has a central role in changing the hostile environment and in adopting a more responsible and balanced discourse around immigration. In line with this, the government should develop a well-coordinated governance structure for integration that supports local communities, charities and civil society organizations who are struggling to survive in this era of austerity. Altogether, this should be seen as an investment in society for the long term.
- *Migrant friendly policies and culture.* Develop more migrant friendly policies and culture towards new arrivals. The first welcome, interactions and experiences with society play a central role in the future integration of people in host societies. Newcomers should feel respected and appreciated in order to be able to give back to society and excel. For example, early integration efforts during the reception period will have positive impacts on fostering a stronger sense of belonging and inclusion among newly arrived immigrants in the UK.
- *Fostering inclusion of all communities.* Both national and local authorities should develop and support strategies and platforms that promote active participation of all communities, including migrants in public decision-making processes.
- *Mainstreaming integration policies & plans.* Both at the local and national level, integration plans and strategies should be mainstreamed in public policy making like environment and gender plans. The effects of migration on urban infrastructure and services should be taken as an integral part of urban development. For many local authorities this is still a less developed area which is sporadically dealt with on an ad-hoc basis when faced with migration-related challenges.
- *Learning from others.* UK policy should be more open and receptive to learning from other countries' experiences and should apply best practices to the UK context. One way for developing this is by building local level partnerships with other cities abroad. This is all the more urgently needed in the post-Brexit context where there is a risk of 'isolationist' policies filtering in to the areas of migration and integration.
- *Developing a UK-wide integration strategy.* The UK national Government can develop this in close collaboration with the devolved governments, local authorities and civil society actors, community groups and educational institutions. This platform can function as a nation-wide thinktank.
- *A comprehensive local approach.* Integration strategies should be tailored to local community needs and therefore developed within a specific context in order to become

effective. Targeting only immigrants in local/national initiatives will further cement the idea that 'they' are the problem and fail to generate any positive outcomes when responding to the complexity of the integration of immigrants.

- *Adopting a gender-sensitive approach.* Government and local authorities should develop a culture- and gender-sensitive integration programme and support initiatives which aim to support English learning facilities and initiatives amongst women and girls. This approach can also be deployed in the early stages of entering the labour market. It is for instance important to provide sufficient childcare in order to eliminate such obstacles as reasons for not participating in society, both educationally and in the job market. Additional and specific investment in this group will help them to catch up with the male population and with the same group already established in society. Early investment will support this group and all newcomers in becoming more independent and boost their integration into society.
- *Supporting immigrants in the labour market.* The government (both national and local) should address the wider structural and institutional barriers for immigrants to enter and integrate in to the labour market, such as promoting equal opportunities in education and employment and address discrimination. In addition, the government can provide support through more intensive careers advice and develop meet-ups between employers and new immigrants to create a platform to meet and exchange ideas and expectations. Both the government and potential employers could collaborate in developing opportunities to upskill and reskill immigrants in order to increase their chances on the labour market. In the long term this will support newcomers in establishing themselves and putting down roots in the UK as a new home. This aspect is very important for their health and wellbeing in the long term.
- *Increasing provision of English language learning.* It is important to provide sufficient space for English language learning classes and that the classes meet the individual needs of the students involved in order to be as efficient and effective as possible. In addition, the teachers offering the courses should be well trained and culturally sensitive to students with a diversity of backgrounds. This will also keep the students motivated. At the moment asylum seekers have to wait six months before they can enrol in English language classes, which can increase their marginalization and delay their integration in society in the long term. During the asylum application period, a time where people have a lot of time because they are not allowed to work; language learning would be a useful and meaningful way of using their time.
- *Investing in vocational training courses.* The government can develop a specific programme, connecting adult immigrants with employers in the provision of vocational training combined with language learning facilities on site. This is especially feasible for larger companies or specifically companies set up for this function. In the latter case, immigrants can develop some work experience, increase their English language proficiency and move on to other jobs. These collaborations can be partly funded by the government in order to make the initiative feasible.
- *Countering educational segregation.* The government and local authorities should develop measures countering educational segregation by investing in state schools, teachers and in the quality of education provided. This is a field which generates further social inequalities in people's lives, and a fundamental obstacle for the successful integration of immigrants.

- *Tackling isolation of newcomers.* Isolation of newcomers could be addressed in a number of ways. First, more research could be done to map the causes and effects of isolation among migrants. It is important to consider culturally sensitive differences between individuals and groups in order to identify specific problems and tailored solutions to isolation. Reunion of new migrants and their already established family members in different regions of the UK could for some overcome issues with isolation and help to develop a sense of intimacy and home in the UK. Other policies could include connecting individuals and families with UK residents of similar faith and culture, introducing them to volunteering opportunities, as well as the provision of counselling and trauma-related care for those experiencing psychological distress. These do not need to be mutually exclusive approaches, and, indeed, could work best in combination with one another.

## Appendix: Interview table

Original Interview Title	Interview Name/Number in Report
Meso Cambridge – 1	Interview 1
Meso Cambridge – 2	Interview 2
Meso Cambridge – 3	Interview 3
Meso Cambridge – 4	Interview 4
Meso Cambridge – 5	Interview 5
Meso Glasgow – ASH 121218	Interview 6
Meso Glasgow – Councillor Scottish Green Party 141118	Interview 7
Meso Glasgow – Former Employee of Red Cross 030918	Interview 8
Meso Glasgow – Govan Community Project 291118	Interview 9
Meso Glasgow – Just Right Scotland 261118	Interview 10
Meso Glasgow – Manager Voluntary Sector 181218	Interview 11
Meso Glasgow – Maryhill Integration Network 151118	Interview 12
Meso Glasgow – NHS 201118	Interview 13
Meso Glasgow – Police Scotland 121218	Interview 14
Meso Glasgow – Scottish Government 270918	Interview 15
Meso Glasgow – Social Worker 231118	Interview 16
Micro Cambridge – UK_F 28 Y3	Interview 17
Micro Cambridge – UK M 26 A3	Interview 18
Micro Cambridge – UK M 30 Y2	Interview 19
Micro Cambridge – UK M A 29 A2	Interview 20
Micro Cambridge – UK M 44 Y3	Interview 21
Micro Glasgow – 1	Interview 22
Micro Glasgow – 2	Interview 23
Micro Glasgow – 3	Interview 24
Micro Glasgow – 4	Interview 25
Micro Glasgow – 5	Interview 26
Micro Glasgow – 6	Interview 27
Micro Glasgow – 7	Interview 28
Micro Glasgow – 8	Interview 29
Micro Glasgow – 9	Interview 30
Micro Glasgow – 10	Interview 31

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