

GENERAL SYNOD

Background Paper: Southwark Diocesan Synod Motion on Refugee Professionals**Summary**

This paper covers the current legal and practical position of asylum seekers and refugees within the UK regarding their right and ability to work, with reference to the educational requirements for those arriving with non-UK professional and/or graduate qualifications. There are a number of charitable and non-government organisations providing targeted assistance to refugees with specific professional qualifications, mostly medical, together with some work being done by individual parishes and dioceses. The paucity of provision for English language and inculturation teaching is the most significant barrier to enabling any refugee to retrain and return to employment. To keep the text as clear as possible, a glossary of terms is appended at the end of the paper.

Background

1. It is estimated that there are 117,234 refugees living in the UK – 0.18 per cent of the total population¹. Only 56% of working age people who came to the UK to claim asylum are in employment, compared with 76% of UK nationals². The introduction of the “hostile environment” policy in 2012 has resulted in an increasingly divergent approach towards the refugee population in the UK. For those arriving via an irregular or covert route and making a claim for asylum under the UN Convention on Refugees 1951, there can be a significant wait for that claim to be processed. Despite the Home Office undertaking to process all but the most complex claims within six months³, as of December 2018 just under 50% of asylum claims had received a decision within that time frame. Those with complex claims or engaged in the appellate process can wait for years in the asylum process⁴.
 - a. Waiting asylum seekers are subject to a number of restrictions, all of which can impact adversely upon their future ability to integrate and find employment. Restrictions include:
 - Except in exceptional circumstances, remunerated employment is forbidden⁵. Voluntary work is permitted. Some NGO including the British Red Cross offer training to equip and place asylum seekers into voluntary roles.
 - Access to tertiary education is not available to those over eighteen. Although basic English and Maths/IT courses are a requirement, funding cuts can result in claimants waiting up to two years to start them. Courses are aimed at those with little or no English language ability and so may not be appropriate for asylum seekers educated to degree level or above. Children attaining the age of eighteen as dependants of a claimant are not permitted to undertake further study or vocational training.
 - Upon the conclusion of the Home Office interview process an asylum seeker will be “dispersed”. The lack of a national system has resulted in inconsistent provision of

¹ British Red Cross Facts and Figures 2017

² Differences in Labour Market Outcomes between Natives, Refugees and Other Migrants in the UK, University of Oxford, 2017

³ <https://www.gov.uk/claim-asylum/decision>

⁴ Example: For Iranians applying on religious grounds the average time from application to grant is in excess of three years

⁵ If a claim is not processed within twelve months, a claimant may request permission to work, but will be restricted to employment in jobs on the Home Office list of permissible roles.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-while-an-asylum-claim-is-considered/working-in-the-uk-while-an-asylum-case-is-considered>

ESOL and refugee/asylum seeker services across the UK⁶. That many of these services are devolved in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland has created an even greater divergence of service provision. The lottery of dispersal allocation areas can significantly impact future employability for those granted leave to remain. Provision is especially limited in rural/semi rural areas⁷.

- b. Those who arrive via UNHCR selection under VPRS, CSS or VCRS with leave to remain already granted, are expected to undertake ten hours ESOL per adult per week, starting within one month of arrival, and are provided with employment support via Jobcentre Plus⁸. Currently this provision is restricted to refugees arriving under these schemes:
- Those registered with UNHCR as externally displaced by the Syrian Conflict and able to satisfy one of the seven categories of vulnerability.⁹ This includes families arriving under CSS
 - Those registered with UNHCR within the MENA region and able to satisfy Vulnerable Child/Children criteria. This will include families as well as unaccompanied minors.
- c. Those who achieve refugee status via a self-referral asylum claim do not have any set requirement for ESOL and/or employment support other than that determined as part of a standard “Back to work” agreement under DWP JSA/UC requirement.
- d. In a number of EU States, notably Germany and Sweden, language education commences at point of arrival. In Germany successful completion of the course enables a claimant to access higher funding/employment. In Sweden claimants are able to seek employment twenty four hours after arrival. Recent research has highlighted the importance of early employment integration to the long-term integration achievements of refugees¹⁰

Employment of Refugees with Professional Qualifications

1. *“Refugees are much more likely to be overqualified than other migrants. In total, almost 60% of employed tertiary-educated refugees in the EU are overqualified for the jobs they occupy, more than twice the level of the native-born and also well above the levels for other migrant groups.”*¹¹ Despite a large number of professional organisations offering significant support to assist refugee colleagues back into their profession, the numbers so assisted remain small. For refugees, the starting point – having their original qualifications assessed and verified through UKNARIC – is not a generally known route for Jobcentre Plus staff or many voluntary organisations. Any fees incurred can also be beyond most refugees.
2. In a paper *“Refugee Employment Support In The UK”*¹², two principal causes for refugee un/under-employment were identified as;
 - ESOL (26.59%)
 - Refugee skills and experience (25.43%)

a. Both anecdotal and empirical research into ESOL provision within the UK indicates that the lack of a national structure and standard is the most significant contributor to integration failure amongst refugees. Whilst all the professional bodies offering refugee support

⁶ Refugee Employment Support In The UK - Insights into services, barriers, and best practice to support refugees into employment across the UK, commissioned by the Refugee Employment Network Pub 31st January 2019 funded by the Home Office

⁷ In Somerset the only ESOL course provided (Bridgewater and Taunton College) closed in September 2018

⁸https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/722154/Combined_local_authority_funding_instruction_2018-2019_v2.pdf

⁹ <https://www.unhcr.org/40ee6fc04.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/protection/basic/5a0ae9e84/towards-integration-the-syrian-vulnerable-persons-resettlement-scheme-in.html?query=To%20Integration>

¹¹ OECD (2016): Making Integration Work. Refugees and Others in Need of Protection

¹² Ibid

- provide significant and targeted assistance with skills and experience together with funding towards professional qualifications and other financial assistance, none were in a position to offer skills based ESOL, IELTS, or OET teaching.
- b. The lack of targeted provision has put existing providers under increasing pressure, which has led to courses closing due to lack of capacity¹³.
 - c. The dispersal and “move on” provisions together with housing costs in London and South East, has resulted in well-established schemes there, such as The Refugee Council’s “Building Bridges” programme for refugee doctors, only registering ten with the GMC in 2018, due to lack of retention. In contrast, Reache North West has, as at October 2018, assisted 222 medical professionals to register with professional bodies. The NW is an area to which asylum seekers and refugees are dispersed, often from London.

Resources for Dioceses to Assist Refugees with Professional Qualifications

1. In September 2015 following Pope Francis’ call for every Parish and religious community to assist a refugee family, Cardinal Nicholls announced that every Roman Catholic Diocese in England and Wales must appoint (NB not necessarily fund) a Refugee Officer. The purpose of the post is to advise parishes and priests on refugee support. Within the Church of England, where a Diocese has a similar post (e.g. Canterbury) the take up from Parishes has been significant. The post of National Refugee Welcome Coordinator was created by MPA in 2017 specifically to provide assistance and support at Diocesan and at Parish level.
2. In 2016 CTBI published “Welcome the Stranger”¹⁴, a guide for faith communities looking to support asylum seekers and refugees. Feedback indicated an overwhelming need for ESOL resources, resulting in a follow up publication “Supporting English Language Learning”¹⁵. Together they provide a basic toolkit to support parishes involved in refugee care. More recently the Council of Europe launched the “Language Support for Adult Refugees”¹⁶ toolkit as part of its Language Integration of Adult Migrants (LIAM) project. With these and their suggested online resources, it is possible for any parish to fill most gaps in current language provision, no matter how remote their location.
3. The existence of a growing library of online training and resources for refugee/asylum seeker support and ESOL has, within the Church of England:
 - a) Enabled rural areas of the UK, most without previous engagement with refugees, to become sponsoring communities under CSS. Parishes from the Dioceses of Truro, Exeter, and Bath & Wells have provided more CSS than the combined figure for all other dioceses. The Church in Wales has provided almost as many.
 - b) Enabled Parishes in areas of asylum and refugee dispersal with poor or vestigial funded support to provide essential care both general and targeted, often within an otherwise hostile or indifferent community. There are some outstanding examples of this work in poorly resourced locations in the dioceses of Lichfield, Durham, Liverpool.

William Nye, Secretary General
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¹³ Reache Northwest withdrew the IELTS course in May 2018 <https://reache.wordpress.com/>

¹⁴ <https://ctbi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Welcoming-the-stranger.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://ctbi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/ESOL-booklet-FINAL-WEB.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-support-for-adult-refugees>

Glossary of Terms

Asylum Seeker	Uniquely within the EU, the UK has separated the refuge seeking process. An asylum seeker is someone who has arrived in the UK and sought refuge under the UN Convention on Refugees 1951
CSS	Community Sponsorship Scheme. Based on the scheme introduced in Canada almost forty years ago. Home Office scheme which encourages communities to welcome a refugee family from the VPRS and VCRS schemes and provide support to assist in their integration.
CTBI	Churches Together in Britain and Ireland
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
GMC	General Medical Council
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
MENA	Region of the Middle East and North Africa
Migrant	A migrant is defined as someone who chooses to leave their place of usual domicile in order to seek employment or join family members elsewhere.
OET	Occupational English Test
Refugee	In EU a refugee is someone who has claimed refuge under the UN Convention on Refugees. In UK it refers to someone who has been granted leave to Remain (“LTR”). A refugee has the same rights and responsibilities as any UK citizen, including the right to work and access to higher education.
UKNARIC	National Recognition Information Centre. The designated national agency for the recognition of international qualifications and professional skills in the United Kingdom.
VCRS	Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme. The VCRS is open to vulnerable children and their families in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. The scheme is accessible to all ‘children and adolescents at risk’ as defined by UNHCR, which encompasses unaccompanied children as well as those in families or with care-givers (an adult who UNHCR is satisfied has assumed legitimate responsibility for the child). The scheme is open to refugees of all nationalities.
VPRS	Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (see also VCRS) In 2015 the government committed to resettle 20,000 vulnerable people externally displaced by reason of the Syrian conflict ¹⁷ . Those registered with UNHCR as refugees can seek resettlement. . To date (January 2019) 13,500 people have been resettled c/f CSS

¹⁷ Initially the scheme was limited to Syrian nationals. Given that prior to 2012, Syria had been the largest receiver of refugees from Iraq, Palestine, and other countries in the MENA region, the Home Office agreed to proposals led by the Church of England, to extend the scheme to anyone externally displaced from Syria