

# A New Beginning – Refugee Integration in Europe



## Key research findings

SHARE conference 22 October 2013, Brussels



## Rational for the research

- Increased interest nationally and at EU level in measuring integration in select integration policy areas;
- UNHCR found that most studies or integration evaluations do not consider refugee specific integration;
- Outcome of studies or evaluation can impact integration policies, also for refugees, although little may be known about refugee specific integration;
- Some evaluations look at quantitative data only without gathering more qualitative data to support findings;
- Lack of understanding of barriers for refugees to integrate.



## The research aims

- Consider methods of integration evaluation;
- Consider the inclusion of refugee specific data;
- Explore specific refugee barriers or facilitators to integration for refugees based on:
  - existing literature,
  - views of those engaged directly with refugee integration in areas like education, housing, health and employment;
  - views from refugees about their integration experience.

Did **not evaluate** integration or look at integration of children or asylum-seekers

Did not include resettled refugees due to the specific support often available to this group



# What we did:

## Overall report and research

(EU, Germany, UK, Austria, Ireland, France, Sweden and Canada)

- **National research** in Austria, Ireland, France and Sweden;
- Set up a **Reference Group** to give advice to the research (staff from ECRE, MPG and ULB);
- **Review of existing literature** on integration *indicators*, methods of integration evaluation and the inclusion of refugee data;
- **Summarize findings from the national literature review**, adding experience from additional three countries;
- **Summarize findings from consultations**;
- **Make recommendations** for research, evaluation and integration support.



# Overall findings

## Integration indicators and evaluation (refugees)

- Generally not a harmonized approach across countries and within countries - although some alignment also through EU initiatives;
- Difficult to measure the “right things” in order to influence policy;
- Quantitative data is generally not available;
- When it is, it generally does not allow for analysis of refugees integration (some exception in UK and France);
- Qualitative research is available, also for refugees = **so we do know something about relevant barriers and facilitators;**
- Some areas are under-researched or not well understood.



# Overall findings

## Relevant integration policy areas

- Some areas may mark integration progress – *good housing*;
  - Some areas are means to achieve better integration – *good housing*;
  - different integration areas form complex influencing relationships.
- ➡ Integration literature on refugees look at and include findings on Housing, Employment, Health, Social Integration, Active Citizenship, Family Reunification, Education, Language and The Asylum Process;
- These areas are also in different ways those which came out as relevant through our stakeholder and refugee discussions;
  - Important to be clear about the integration goal, the objectives and what can be measured to inform policy in this regard.



# Overall findings

## Gaps in refugee integration research

- When research and data is available in quantitative studies – there is little research on establishing causal links and explaining trends;
- Lack of inclusion of the refugees' voice in research;
- The impact of family separation and lack of family reunification on refugee integration is under-researched;
- The impact on integration of refugees' experience of flight and the time in the asylum process is under-researched;
- Lack of research concerning integration of those with subsidiary protection needs;
- Other areas also require more consideration, in particular health (trauma), lack of documents and social networks.



## Employment – findings from literature and data

- Important policy area in all countries and at EU level - indicator are developed;
- Some statistics available and more researched than other integration areas;
- Nevertheless, mainly not refugees specific;
- Generally a picture of lower employment, precarious employment and higher downward professional mobility compared with other migrants;
- Some nuances of note:
  - Study in Canada attribute relative higher employment among refugees compared with family migrants to the support available (Hiebert 2002);
  - Swedish study showed that performance gap decreases over time;
  - Over-qualification high among refugees 40% in Austrian study (Riesenfelder 2011)
  - Indication that women experience additional difficulties in the labour market.
- Role of freedom and mobility is under researched.





## Employment – influencing factors

- While employment is seen as important - barriers were noted by stakeholders and refugees and indicated in literature;
- Some were specific to refugees others relevant for all migrants;
- General migrant difficulties: language learning, recognition of qualifications, discrimination and familiarity with the labour market culture;
- Other more specific barriers:
  - Time in the asylum process – deskilling, idle time, impact on family life, self-esteem;
  - Transition – all happening at once (housing, language, family, employment)
  - Documentation (identification, civil, driving license, status not understood, schooling, work, delays);
  - Lack of networks – more significant for refugees;
  - Health – stress, isolation, depression, flight related.



## Employment – recommendations

- List of the practices brought out in this study to overcome the barriers;
- Some concrete suggestions were made during the consultations and are included for consideration;
- Recommendations are set out in the report:
  - Skills recognition
  - Support to employment agencies;
  - Early assessment of practical skills;
  - Exiting good practice to be shared;
  - Combination of work/language
  - Language learning as early as possible;
  - Volunteering, internships, apprenticeships;
  - Good coordination between asylum authorities and issuance of documentation;
  - Documentation which is clear and simple and well understood;
  - Time in the asylum system which preserves the dignity of the individual.



# Education and language - findings from literature and data

- Important policy area for all countries and at EU level;
- Language and education not necessarily together conceptually;
- Different approach for adults and children;
- Gaps in research on links between education/language and integration;
- Generally language seen as very important to all areas of integration, most notably employment;
- Some points of note:
  - Study in France showed that refugees have more difficulties than other migrants to learn the language (Beque 2007) –(absence of francophone links);
  - That language plays an important role for social contact, gaining independence, finding jobs and education was found in Austria (Kraler et al. 2013);
  - Germany evaluation of integration courses – 93% language improved, contact with Germans improved, 51% maintained level of German after course, 56% attachment to Germany intensified;
  - UK *Spotlight on Refugee Integration* (2010) showed that language improved over time.



# Education and language– influencing factors

- Education for adult refugees – linked to language, but also separate
- Common barriers include:
  - Age can play a role both for language learning and education in general;
  - Lack of advice and support – also linked to knowledge of service providers
  - Gender related barriers (child care, gender roles) – however important aspect in strengthening self-perception and aspiration
  - Illiteracy.
- More specific issues are either language or education:
  - Health – including stress – also linked to family separation;
  - Limited linguistic links between country of origin and country of asylum;
  - Lack of contact with receiving community – practice of language;
  - Lack of language courses during asylum process;
  - Availability of appropriate language courses;
  - Validation of foreign qualifications.



## Education and language – recommendations

- Higher level of language education based on individual assessment;
- Language courses available as early as possible;
- Sharing of practice and lessons learned from language courses to a/s and on ways to link language and employment or practice;
- Service providers who know how to empower refugees and can give correct advice;
- Loan, grant and scholarship schemes for higher education also for refugees;
- Include guidance on education in individual integration plans;
- Improve the information and research on the reasons for education outcome.
- Other recommendations from migrant education considered.



## Active Citizenship – findings from literature and data

- Elements reflected in all countries, but in different ways;
- Some typical features;  
(Voting rights and voting participation; Participation in political parties and associations; Acquisition of citizenship; Representation in media; and Volunteering)
- Generally little research available - especially on refugees;
  - Foreign-born Swedish citizens are “fare more likely to vote than non-citizen foreign born”
  - High political interest, but no membership of parties among refugees.
- Other: citizenship important for protection in country of origin; citizenship reduced discrimination in employment; language; lack of network; previous persecution can hinder trust in political processes.



## Social Integration– findings from literature and data

- Social inclusion, social exclusion, social integration, social connections – different approaches with different focus (risk of poverty and inclusion / relationships);
- Some overlap therefore with active citizenship and participation;
- UK – Ager/Strang framework speak of *social bridging* and *social bonding*
- Some points of note:
  - France ELIPA study shows that refugees are much more socially isolated, and less likely to have family and social connections than other migrants;
  - Studies in France point to the important role refugee communities can play in settling other refugees from that community;
  - Studies looking at xenophobia and discrimination are relevant;
  - UK studies point to different patterns in bonding and bridging among migrant groups (*Rethinking Integration* (2012), COMPAS (2007);
  - Canada evaluation conclude that there is a need for programming addressing barriers to newcomer integration, including racism and discrimination.





# Social integration and Active Citizenship – influencing factors

Commonly cited influencing factors:

- Political participation influenced by past negative experiences;
- Attitude in society and portrayal in media;
- Barriers to volunteering – including documentation;
- Limitations to political participation (voting) or citizenship;
- Isolation and lack of social bonding and bridging;
  - Lack of language ability;
  - Habits around socializing
  - Uncertainty about cultural norms;
  - Fear of rejections/ racism;
  - Psychological and health related barriers;





# Social integration and Active Citizenship – Recommendations

- Collective efforts to support social networking;
- Strong anti-discrimination framework;
- Promotion of intercultural dialogue;
- Strategies to promote active citizenship;
- Community engagement promoted (sport clubs, recreational);
- Further research on the links between citizenship and integration;
- Facilitation of citizenship.



## Housing– findings from literature and data

- Housing – not an EU policy area, but prominent in many countries' framework – also linked to question of urban development;
- In all countries refugee housing seemed a particular concern and with poorer outcome for refugees, including homelessness, than for migrants in general;
- Some points of note:
  - Study in France shows refugees suffer a more chaotic residential history than other migrants (Beque 2007);
  - ELIPA showed 25% of refugee respondents lived in transitory housing, 25% with family or friends;
  - Study in Ireland in 2012 noted 9.3% of those in need of housing support were refugees;
  - In the UK Spotlight on Refugee Integration showed 50% of refugees relied on the National Asylum Support Service of which likelihood of homelessness was considered high;
  - In Canada, research showed that refugees have poorer housing conditions than other migrants, but this is under researched (Hyndman 2011);
  - Study in Sweden shows that those a/s who arranged their own accommodation had slightly better housing and employment integration over time (Boverket 2008);



## Housing– Influencing factors

- The transition phase from asylum to refugee status particularly relevant and time of vulnerability;
- Urgency upon recognition;
- Lack of employment, and therefore secure income;
- Landlords reluctant to rent to refugees
- High landlord requirements, which refugee cannot easily meet;
- Shortage of affordable and suitable housing;
- Insufficient support to find housing;
- Urban preference, do to networks or employment.



# Housing – Recommendations

- Support to finding suitable and affordable housing upon recognition;
- Measures to prevent homelessness among refugees;
- Create greater awareness among landlords and social housing authorities about some of the limitations faced by refugees when accessing housing;
- “Housing mediators”;
- Information as part of integration support;
- Access to guarantor scheme may be a good practice.



## Some cross-cutting issues – Family Reunification

- Not an indicator area – although in Canada one of the strategic outcomes are “Family and humanitarian migration that reunites families and offers protection to the displaced and persecuted”:
- Some research highlighting the role family re-unification plays for the integration;
- Barriers to achieving reunification well researched;
- Studies highlight that separation from family can lead to stress and anxiety, but also that the prolonged time apart has consequences on its own, including difficulties readjusting;
- It is next to impossible to “measure” the impact family separation has on other areas of integration in a quantitative manner.



## Some cross-cutting issues – Asylum Process and Condition

- Not a policy or an indicator area – however clearly an important factor in refugee integration;
- Research exists in general on impact of aspects of asylum reception - highlights the negative impact the long process can have – stress, anxiety, distrust of authorities, dependency, general health and psychological stability;
- Research gap in relation to the impact of asylum procedures on integration;
- *This study did not include looking at impact of detention;*
- There is not enough evidence to tell apart the impact of *reception standards* from the *time spent in the process*, but the time factor is clearly relevant.



## Some cross-cutting issues – Health

- Not an indicator area at EU level, but included in the framework in Germany, Austria, France and the UK;
- Generally little research on refugees and health, some studies do find significant need for psychological support;
- Refugee health may be included in studies on other integration areas as for instance a barrier to employment;
- In Sweden there is a larger body of research on refugee health – looking at impact also on employment, living conditions and social integration;
- Overall there are indications that refugees suffer poorer health than other migrants and natives;
- While some health issues pre-existed prior to flight, experiences during the asylum procedure clearly play a role as well.



## Some cross-cutting issues – Transition and documentation

- Not a policy or an indicator area;
- This study shows that the transition period is very important for the integration trajectory;
- The transition period is not well understood or researched;
- Importance of validation of study and work degrees is understood in integration support and thinking;
- Little or no focus on documentation more general.





## Some cross-cutting issues – Recommendations

- Further research and knowledge of the links between family unity and integration trajectories;
- Simplification of the family reunification process and flexible criteria applied in identifying family members;
- Ensure that asylum procedures are efficient;
- Conditions, practices and support during the asylum process should promote dignity and aim to empower the individual;
- Information about difficulties for refugees accessing documents should be improved with service providers;
- Lack of documentation should be addressed in individual integration plans;
- Initial targeted integration support should be considered as good practice;
- Good management of the transition period is essential;
- Refugee health should be understood as a cross-cutting issue.



# Thank you

