

Integration and skills support for Syrian refugees

Targeted intervention is needed to integrate Syrian refugees and benefit from their skills contribution in society.

About the research

More than 12 million Syrians have been forced to flee their homes since the onset of the civil war in 2011, making Syria the largest displacement crisis globally. Although the immediate priorities of the international community have been to address the refugees' basic needs, the protracted Syrian conflict has also directed attention to other areas – in particular policies to help refugees integrate socially and economically in host countries.

The Building Futures research project provides a comprehensive assessment of the skills, training needs, work aspirations, life experiences, and ethical perspectives of young Syrian forced migrants in three host countries: a neighbouring host state (Lebanon), the main entry point to Europe (Greece), and a north European destination state (the UK). The *Building a New Life in Britain* report, published by Policy Scotland, presents research evidence based on 1,516 face-to-face interviews with young Syrian refugees, aged between 18 and 32.

Key findings

- Young Syrian refugees in the UK have the highest levels of skills and training, and are most eager to remain and contribute to the host country, compared with those in Greece and Lebanon. 25.7% of respondents in the UK reported an undergraduate or higher degree as their highest qualification, compared to 15.4% in Greece and 8.8% in Lebanon.

- Refugees in the UK receive better support and have an overall more positive experience compared to those in Greece and Lebanon – but access to support to increase employment remains patchy.
- Young Syrian refugees are faced with higher levels of unemployment in the UK than citizens, while many in employment are over-qualified for their jobs. 19.1% of young refugees in the survey sample are unemployed and looking for work.
- Syrian refugees resettled in the UK report overall more positive experiences than those coming through the asylum route; 84% benefitting from English language courses and 24% from cultural awareness training courses (compared to 62% and 10% respectively of asylum seekers).
- Young Syrians in Scotland are better supported and more positive about their engagement with people and institutions compared to those settled in England. 72% of respondents in Scotland reported state-subsidised housing rent, compared to 46% in England; state cash subsidies constituted the main source of income for 70% of young Syrians in Scotland, compared to 47% of those in England.
- Young Syrian refugees in Scotland are currently more distanced from entering into the labour market compared to those settled in England; 77% of Scottish refugees have no documentation about their qualifications, compared to 49% in England.

Policy recommendations

- In order to support Syrian refugees in applying their skills in the UK, policymakers, media and civil society should communicate much clearer to the general public why refugees flee their country and the contributions they can provide in the UK.
- Targeted investment in the education and training of young refugees, which was forcibly interrupted by the conflict, is crucial. Eliminating long waiting lists for entry-level ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) courses will remove a key barrier to work.
- Providing alternative accreditation of past qualifications and skills with minimal bureaucracy will help remove a key factor explaining the significant under-utilisation of highly skilled refugees.
- Only a small minority of Syrians in the UK have received support in key areas of labour market access. Authorities at all levels should encourage and facilitate the provision of services to improve refugees' understanding of how the labour market and job application process work in the UK. The private sector should engage with this group as a potential workforce, recognising and utilising their skills.
- The existing two-tier refugee support system, based on the mode of entry to the UK, produces inequalities in the support available to young Syrians. All refugees should have the same social provisions to support their integration, based on the refugee resettlement model.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The Policy Scotland report *Building a New Life in Britain* presents original research evidence based on 1,516 face-to-face interviews with young Syrian international protection beneficiaries and applicants, 18-32 years old, which were conducted in the UK, Lebanon and Greece between April and October 2017.

Web: policyscotland.gla.ac.uk/publication-building-a-new-life-in-britain

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The Global Challenges Research Fund research project Building Futures, funded jointly through the ESRC and the Arts and Humanities Research Council, provides the most comprehensive analysis to date of the realities, opportunities, and challenges Syrian refugees face as they attempt to rebuild their lives. The project is run by an interdisciplinary team from the University of Glasgow, in cooperation with the Scottish Refugee Council, SolidarityNow (Greece) and Educart (Lebanon).

The views expressed in this evidence briefing are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the ESRC.

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