

A New Beginning – Welcoming Refugees in Europe



Food for Thought

PSI Seminar "Public Services Welcoming Migrants" Brussels 14th March

The global situation

- 60 million people in forced displacement
 - More than 20 million refugees
- 1.165 million new arrivals in Europe through the Mediterranean since Jan 2015
- 2 million individual asylum applications registered in Europe in 2015
- Most people still protected in region of origin

Refugee Protection

- What is international protection?
 - The right to enter and the right to stay – prevention of *refoulement*
 - The ability to enjoy rights – to share in community life
- Whose responsibility?
 - Refugee protection is primarily the responsibility of states
 - UNHCR has a protection mandate, as well as the responsibility to support national efforts in the search for solutions
- Key ingredient?
 - Inclusion in national systems

What do we know about integration?

Employment

- 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;
 - Swedish study showed that performance gap decreases over time;
 - Over-qualification high among refugees 40% in Austrian study;
 - Humanitarian entrants in Australia more 'entrepreneurial' than skilled migrants – more likely to employ others;
 - Indication that women experience additional difficulties in the labour market.

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.

Education and language

- Language and education not necessarily the same;
- Some points of note:
 - Language plays an important role for social contact, gaining independence, finding jobs and education;
 - Refugees in France have more difficulties than other migrants to learn the language;
 - 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* showed that language improved over time.

Education and language– influencing factors

- 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 – or unfamiliarity with script.
- 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.

Civil and Political Rights - Active Citizenship

- Generally little research available - especially on refugees.
 - Foreign-born Swedish citizens are “far 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 contribute to engagement;
 - past persecution can hinder trust in political processes.

Social Integration

- Some overlap with active citizenship and participation;
- Some points of note:
 - Refugees in France are much more socially isolated, and less likely to have family and social connections than other migrants;
 - Refugee communities important to settling other refugees from that community;
 - Wider studies looking at xenophobia and discrimination are relevant;
 - UK studies point to different patterns in bonding and bridging among migrant groups;
 - 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

- 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

- Global: refugee housing seemed a particular concern and with poorer outcome for refugees, including homelessness, than for migrants in general;
- Some points of note:
 - Refugees in France suffer a more chaotic residential history than other migrants;
 - 25% of refugee respondents lived in transitory housing, 25% with family or friends;
 - 9.3% of those in need of housing support in Ireland in 2012 were refugees;
 - In the UK 50% of refugees relied on the National Asylum Support Service of which likelihood of homelessness was considered high;
 - In Canada, research showed that refugees in 2011 had poorer housing conditions than other migrants, but this is under researched;
 - Study in Sweden shows that those a/s who arranged their own accommodation had slightly better housing and employment integration over time

Some cross-cutting issues

- Family Unity
 - Family and humanitarian migration that reunites families and offers protection to the displaced and persecuted;
 - Separation from family can lead to stress and anxiety;
 - Prolonged time apart has consequences, including difficulties readjusting;
- Asylum Procedures
 - Research highlights the negative impact the long process can have
 - stress, anxiety, distrust of authorities, dependency, general health and psychological stability;
- Health
 - 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.

Cross-cutting issues

Recommendations

- Simplify family reunification process;
- Encourage more flexible criteria for family reunion;
- Raise efficiency of asylum procedures;
- Conditions, practices and support during the asylum process should promote dignity and aim to empower the individual;
- Improve information about accessing documents;
- Address lack of documentation in individual integration plans;
- Initial targeted integration support;
- Good management of the transition period is essential;
- Refugee health should be understood as a cross-cutting issue;
- Secure and stable housing should be integral part of planning.

Thank You

- We share the challenges and the privileges of daily contact with refugees;
- We bear the brunt of frustration; trauma and fundamentally different cultures;
- We share in joys and we are witness to tragedy;
- We can influence how they see their new home and how they perceive their chances of fitting in;
- We can be the first best thing they encounter.