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voluntary sector grants on the education,
training and employment of refugees in
the United Kingdom**

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Peter David Ilmolelian

October 2004

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About the Author

The author is currently working for the Immigration Research and Statistics Service (IRSS) of the Home Office in the United Kingdom.

Executive summary

Introduction

The study was conducted in 1998/99 with the main aim of establishing whether or not there was likely to be differences in the education, training and employment attainments between refugees who received educational grants and those who did not receive grants. It investigated the effects that grants from organisations such as the Africa Educational Trust (AET) might have on the ability of refugees to undertake and complete educational and training courses in the UK and established whether or not grants had any effect on the “employability” of refugees in the UK.

The research sought to look at the educational, training and employment experiences of a sample of refugees who, in 1993/94, applied for and/or received study grants from AET. The 1993/94 financial year was chosen because literature suggests that, on average, 5 years were required for immigrants to acquire local labour market knowledge and country-specific skills such as language fluency (Wheatley-Price, 1998). It was hoped that the five years period would have allowed target respondents complete their courses and seek employment while still allowing a reasonable prospect of tracing them to ask for their consent to participate in the study interviews.

In 1993/94 AET received 2,307 applications for grants, 72% of which were made by males. Of the grant applicants, 353 (15%) received grants with 60% of the grant recipients being male.

Sampling

A sample of 592 individuals was drawn from the list of 2,307 individuals who applied to AET for grants in 1993/94 stratified by nationality, subject area, study level and gender. The sample size was considered sufficient to achieve 200 interviews because the study assumed a tracer success rate of 0.35. The tracer rate took into consideration the fact that it was not compulsory for the former AET grant applicants to inform the Trust of subsequent changes to their current contact details, some would have left the UK, no longer had contact with the refugee communities in the UK and so on.

Of the 592 individuals in the sample only 170 (29%) were traced and 122 (72%) of which agreed to participate in the research (57 had applied and received AET grants and 65 had applied for but did not receive AET grants).

Tracer methods used

Approaches used to identify and trace the sample individuals included direct mailing, via

refugee community organisations (RCOs) staff and volunteers, networking, and using posters/leaflets/announcements. Staff and volunteers from over two hundred RCOs were contacted via the post to inform them about the research and asking for their assistance in tracing the respondents. Networking - including asking respondents to enquire from their colleagues, friends and relatives, asking visitors to AET offices; sifting through post-1993/94 AET application forms in case some had applied again for grants; and checking local telephone directories. Posters were placed in colleges, RCOs and social venues. In addition, students applying for grants in 1998, and former award holders who were known to AET staff were invited to come to AET office to go through the list of 592 names to see if they recognised anyone in the sample.

In order to increase awareness of and community participation in the research some community group meetings were attended where announcements made about the research and posters and leaflets distributed to participants in order to spread the word about the research and hopefully reach the target respondents. The Horn of Africa meeting organised by the Institute for African Alternatives (IFAA) and a Ugandan meeting organised by the Wider Consultation on Uganda (WICU) were attended. Also, the researcher had the opportunity of giving a presentation about the objectives of the research to a community meeting hosted by the Somali North-Eastern Educational Trust (SNET).

The conduct of the research

The research used two types of questionnaires: a short structured questionnaire for quantitative data and a semi structured questionnaire for in-depth qualitative interviews. Because the research used two types of questionnaire, participation rates in the study was increased as both those who had little time to spare for an interview and those who were prepared to discuss the research questions in-depth could participate in the study.

The structured questionnaire was used to interview 122 refugees. Each interview lasted for about 15 minutes.

Forty of the 122 interviewees agreed to participate in further in-depth interviews that explored their education, training and any employment experiences that they had had with each interview lasting approximately 45 minutes.

Majority of the interviews were conducted face to face (at their home, RCO premises or AET offices), while a few interviews were done over the phone (for those living outside London or had no time to attend interview at a venue) and by post (for those living outside London, if got questionnaire via a proxy contact e.g. RCO worker, or wanted to self-complete the

questionnaire).

As a thank you gesture to the respondents for their time and effort as well as a way of encouraging participation in the research, a small payment of £5 was offered for completing the short structured questionnaire and £10 for participating in the qualitative interviews.

All interviews were conducted in English because none of the respondents had asked for an interpreter (many respondents had reasonable understanding of the English language). However, there were a few others who had difficulties in understanding spoken and written English and the researcher had to facilitate their understanding by using alternative wording.

Seven discussion groups were conducted with young Ethiopian, Eritrean, Somali, Turkish and Kurdish refugees living in the London borough of Haringey and who had never applied for a grant from AET. Two of the discussion groups were exclusively for women refugees to cater for those who, for cultural or whatever reasons did not feel comfortable sharing their experiences in a discussion group setting in which men also attended. 15 participants attended each of these seven discussion groups.

In addition to interviews with the grant applicants and the discussion groups, employers and service providers were interviewed about their perceptions and experiences of training and employing refugees of different nationalities. Also, a presentation of the preliminary findings was done at a meeting organised by the Eritrean Islamic Society in the UK attended by over 70 people. The presentation was intended to gauge the reaction of the community to the research and its findings. It was also seen as a useful platform for receiving feedback from the community about how they saw the research might or might not benefit them.

Because Brophy et al (1997) found that a number of colleges deleted records of students after five or six years this research did not attempt to investigate the possibility of accessing college records in order to assess the education and training attainment of the AET grant recipients.

Extensive review of the relevant literature was done in order to inform the research enquiry and ground the research findings.

Key findings

- Refugees who received study grants were more likely to attend and successfully complete their education and training courses than those who did not;
- Refugees who studied health care, education, social science and business studies courses were more likely to be in employment than those who studied computing and information

technology courses;

- Refugees who received grants were more likely to be in employment than those who did not;
- Women were more likely than men to undertake further education training;
- The main employers of refugees were small businesses, supermarkets, community centres and local authorities;
- Employment of refugees was affected by their understanding of the UK labour market and the English language.

Recommendations

The study has 6 recommendations about those who have been granted a temporary or permanent immigration status:

1. Voluntary organisations like AET should continue to seek, promote and provide funding for the education and training of refugees in the UK;
2. Refugees should be provided with the earliest opportunity to study for and obtain UK education and training qualifications;
3. Refugees should be provided with the earliest opportunity to study for the English language foundation courses in order to facilitate their entry into the UK labour market;
4. Refugees should actively be encouraged to use the relevant UK job seeking techniques;
5. Refugees should be encouraged to attend training courses that offer opportunities for job placements in the UK;
6. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commission studies to establish whether or not there are certain sectors of the UK economy that are not fully accessible to workers of all backgrounds.

Introduction

This chapter provides background information about AET grants programme and the reasons for the Trust to carry out this research. It also outlines the focus, objectives and limitations of the study.

AET grants programme

The aim of the AET grants programme was to enable African refugees and exiles to gain qualifications and skills they can use for the benefit of their home country when they eventually return home. It also was aimed to help refugees who remained in Britain find work. AET has provided scholarships and study grants to African refugees and asylum seekers in Britain for over forty years. Each year over 1,500 African refugees apply to the AET for funding to study in the UK. However, the Trust has been able to provide financial support to a very small percentage of those who applied to it. AET grants typically cover travel, textbooks, stationary, tuition and examination fees costs and a few that are full grants.

The Trust was therefore anxious to establish if its grants helped refugees who remain in Britain find work. It was also interested in finding out if any particular subject areas or course levels were more likely than others to help refugees find work. If this were the case then the Trust could use its resources more efficiently by targeting those areas.

AET grant awarding process

The AET grant awarding process is managed by an Awards Committee that made up of 3-5 AET members of staff. The aim of the committee is to ensure that grants are awarded fairly and increase the returns of the grants awarded (successful course completion and employment potential). The Trust does provide grants to applicants based on the subject area of their choice even where the Trust would have preferred they choose another course. In awarding grants AET considers the nationality, age, gender, personal circumstances and likelihood of the grant applicant succeeding in the chosen training course. It provides advice on what it sees as the best training course for grant applicants although the final course choice is left to the applicant. However, donors of AET grants would usually have own criteria for grant disbursement which AET has to honour. The criteria are usually based on humanitarian and developmental aspects of the proposed subject areas and levels. Sometimes donors would ask for their grants to be given to certain nationalities and not others. Grant applicants are selected for grants awards following an interview.

Focus of the study

The research targeted refugees who applied for AET grants in financial year 1993/94. A period of five years (1998/99) was chosen to allow students complete courses and seek employment while still providing reasonable prospects of tracing them. RCO staff, employers, service providers and certain nationalities (in discussion group settings) were also to be interviewed.

Unless explicitly stated, the term 'refugee' in this study includes convention refugees, those granted asylum status (e.g. Indefinite Leave to Remain - ILR) and asylum seekers.

Objectives of the study

The main aim of the study was to establish whether or not there was a difference in the education, training and employment attainments between refugees who receive educational grants and those who do not.

The specific aims of the study were

1. To establish whether or not:

- Refugees who receive grants were more likely to attend and complete courses than those who do not receive grants;
- A particular study level is more likely to lead to employment than others;
- Certain subject areas are more likely to lead to the employment than others;
- Refugees who receive grants from AET are more likely to find employment than those who do not receive grants;
- The jobs that refugees do are commensurate with their education and qualifications.

2. To identify:

- The sectors of the economy employing refugees;
- The types of jobs that refugees do;
- When refugees find employment the work is.

Limitations of the study

- The AET grants programme aimed to assist African refugees and students in the UK. Therefore it was not clear whether or not the findings of the research could generally apply to refugees in the UK¹.
- The research findings were based on interviews with people who were traced and agreed to be interviewed. Many others could not be found perhaps because they did not access the channels used to disseminate the information about this research. There were others who decided not to participate in the research. In some cases this may have been because they had not had an asylum decision yet or were illegally resident here and did not wish to be found or were outside the formal labour market;

It is worth mentioning that while many refugees do seek some support for study, there are others who either go directly into employment or who remain unemployed without seeking voluntary sector funding for their education or training.

¹ Group discussions, interviews with RCO staff (leaders and workers) from the Turkish and Kurdish communities and interviews with employers and service providers, suggested that the findings of this study were not peculiar to African refugees.

Methodology

Introduction

The research was conducted between April 1998 and June 1999. This chapter discusses the sampling procedure used, describes the characteristics of the sample population and the sample, the conduct of the field work, data analysis, and the challenges that the study faced and how these were overcome.

Sampling

In the grant year 1993/94 AET received 2,307 applications for grants. From AET's records it was possible to identify refugees who had applied for and received grants and those who applied for but did not receive grants.

From a sample of the 1993/94 grant applicants the study planned to trace 200 grant applicants. A sample of 592 individuals was drawn from the 2,307 grant applications and stratified by nationality, subject area, study level, gender and whether or not they had received AET grants. The drawn sample size was considered sufficient to successfully trace 200 of the drawn sample individuals because it was assumed that the tracing exercise would yield 0.35 of the sample because it was not compulsory for AET grant applicants to inform the Trust of changes to their contact details (many would have changed address since applying to the Trust in 1993/94). Other factors considered included some could have left the UK or were no longer in touch with their RCOs. At the end of the tracing exercise 170 individuals were found (success tracer rate of 0.29 which is 83% of the original assumption).

Although the participation rate in the study of the grant applicants was not known, the researcher adopted the assumption that it was likely to be higher (at least 0.5) for those traced (both applicants who received and did not receive AET grants) for a number of reasons. Therefore, it was hoped that the study would achieve at least 100 interviews with 50 respondents in each of the two study groups (those who received grants and those who did not). The following were the reasons for the adoption of the 'at least 0.5 participation rate' assumption:

- a. Sample individuals had previously contacted AET, a charitable organisation, for grants and therefore were less likely to refuse to participate in the research.
- b. The researcher had separately investigated the likelihood of non-grant recipients not participating in the research by investigating the way in which the grants were being awarded by the Trust and came to the conclusion that criteria and conditions that led to not awarding grants would not have led to low participation rates from this group. In the opinion of the researcher, the AET grant awarding process was fair and transparent and no

observable difference in participation rates were expected between grant recipients and non-recipients.

The researcher's assumption were later found to be correct as of the 170 individuals traced, 28% (48) refused to participate (22 were AET grant holders and 26 were non-AET grant holders) in the interviews of this research study.

The research had a contingency plan should the random stratified approach fail to yield sufficient number of respondents. The contingent plan was to interview anyone who applied to AET for grants in 1993/94, and if this did not yield sufficient number of interviews then the study would seek to interview anyone who applied to the Trust before 1993/94. These alternative approaches were not desirable for statistical, logistical and tracer reasons, but would have been used as a last resort.

Tracer methods used

Various approaches were used to trace individuals in the drawn sample. Initially direct mailing was used, but because of the low tracing success of the direct mailing it was decided to use other alternative approaches. These approaches also had varied success in tracing the drawn sample.

i) Direct mailing

Initial approach tried was to send 592 letters to the last known address of the drawn sample. However, 32% of the letters were returned because addressee was not known there. There was no information received on the whereabouts of 66% of the mailed letters. However, although only 2% of the individuals were traced using this method, those traced comprised 8% of the achieved sample.

ii) RCO staff assistance

RCO staff (leaders and workers including volunteers) were approached and asked for their assistance in identifying, contacting and distributing the questionnaires to the potential respondents. For example, with this kind of help, an Eritrean youth worker had 13 completed questionnaires returned to him by the Eritreans in his work area. A Congolese community co-ordinator in North London tried this approach but with limited success. Where possible community group meetings were attended and announcements made about the research and posters and leaflets distributed to participants to spread the word about the research and hopefully reach the target respondents. (The researcher attended these meetings as an observer as well as a presenter.) The meetings attended were the Horn of Africa meeting organised by the Institute for African Alternatives (IFAA), a Ugandan meeting organised by the

Wider Consultation on Uganda (WICU) and a Somali community meeting hosted by the Somali North-Eastern Educational Trust (SNET). This approach traced 17% of the 592 sample individuals.

iii) Posters

Posters were placed in colleges, RCOs, community and social venues and study mentioned in the London based Spectrum Radio station. In addition the study details were posted on AET website. Various Eritrean, Ethiopian and Somali websites were visited and details of the study sent to the contact address asking if they could post the details of the study on their websites. 1% of the drawn sample was traced using this approach.

iv) Networking

Networking approach was also used. Visitors to AET offices and friends of AET (former award holders who were known to AET staff) were asked by the researcher to go through the drawn sample list of AET 1993/94 grant applicants and asked if they recognised someone from the list or if they could provide contact details of people they think would be able to contact the listed persons e.g. colleagues, friends and relatives. Where there was a reluctance to provide the required contact details (this happened from time to time), they were then asked if they could let those people know about the study and contact AET. The networking approach traced 53% of the sample individuals.

v) Other approaches

Those who visited AET office (this included students applying for grants in 1998) were asked whether they applied for a grant in 1993/94 and this approach traced 10% of the sample individuals. Also, post-1993/94 AET applications were sifted to find out if any of those who applied for grants in 1993/94 had also applied in the later years. This approach traced 7% of the individuals in the sample. Checks to the local telephone directories yielded 4% of the traced individuals.

Data protection issues

The researcher took a number of steps to ensure that the privacy of potential respondents was maintained. All individuals who assisted in the tracing exercise were trusted gatekeepers or known AET contacts who spoke the languages of sample individuals. Only the full names of the sample individuals, their nationality and partial address details (first part of the post-code) as recorded by AET were released to third parties. In both direct mailing and networking, consent was sought to participate, when wished to be contacted and if had any interpreter requirements. None of the 122 respondents asked for an interpreter.

Sample population and sample

2,307 individuals (sample population) applied for AET for grants in 1993/94 (72% of these were male).

353 of these individuals received AET grants (60% of these were male). 297 (84%) of these AET grant recipients were awarded grants to study part-time courses and remainder awarded for full-time courses. 96% of the part-time courses were attended in London colleges compared to 62% of the full-time courses.

Table 1: nationality breakdown of 1993/94 AET grants applicants

Nationality	Applied (N=2,307)
Eritrean	35.6
Ethiopian	29.0
Somali ²	18.7
Sudanese	6.1
Ugandan	4.7
Zairean (Democratic Republic of Congo)	1.9
Other	4.0
Total	100

592 individuals were drawn from the sample population. Of these, 170 (29%) were traced (64% were male). Of the traced individuals, 28% did not wish to participate in the research and of these 22 were AET grant holders (68% were male) and 26 were non-AET grant holders (81% were male).

Table 2: Distribution of grants and non-grants by nationality

Nationality	Grant holders (n=353)	Grant holders interviewed (n=57)	Non-grant holders (n=1954)	Non-grant-holders interviewed* (n=65)
Eritrean	43.6	40.4	34.1	49.2
Ethiopian	36.3	35.1	27.7	23.1
Somali	13.3	12.3	19.7	4.6
Sudanese	3.1	8.8	6.6	7.7
Ugandan	2.0	0.0	5.2	6.1

² During the fieldwork many Somali RCOs said they could not help in the tracing exercise mainly because it was difficult for them to distinguish between the different individuals in the list due to similarities in their names.

Zairean (DRC)	1.1	1.7	2.1	6.1
Other	0.6	1.7	4.6	3.1
Total	100	100	100.0	100

* This column does not add up to 100% due to approximation

From the AET database it was not possible to establish the age of applicants who were not awarded AET grants as this information was not recorded. However, from the interviews, it was possible to establish the age of 108 respondents, of whom 48 had received grants from AET and 51 had not received AET grants. 91% of these AET grant recipients and 93% of these non-AET grant recipients were aged 25-45 years.

Table 3: Study levels of the 1993/94 grant holders interviewed (GHI)³

Study level	GHI* (n=57)	GH** (n=353)
Foundation (ESOL, EFL, Access to FE)	12%	8%
Pre-degree (GNVQ, BTEC, C&G, 'O' and 'A' levels)	42%	58%
Undergraduate (HNC, HND, First degree)	14%	16%
Postgraduate (PGC, PGD, MA, MSc, LLM, MBA)	25%	14%
Research (MPhil, PhD)	7%	4%
Total	100%	100%

* = Grant holders interviewed ** = Grant holders

Table 3 shows that most of the grant holders had applied to AET to study at pre-degree level. 42% of the grant holders interviewed studied at pre-degree level while a quarter studied at postgraduate level.

Table 4: Subject area of GHI

Subject area	GHI* (n=57)	GH** (n=353)
Business studies	11%	19%
Computing & IT	7%	9%
Education & Social sciences	30%	20%
Health studies	17%	5%
Science & Applied science e.g. Engineering	35%	47%
Total	100%	100%

³ It was not possible to establish the study levels and subject areas applied for by those who were not awarded AET grants as this information was not recorded on AET database.

* = Grant holders interviewed ** = Grant holders

Table 4 shows that most of the grant holders and the grant holders interviewed studied Science & Applied science and Education & Social sciences.

Interviews

Interviews were done using a short structured questionnaire for collecting quantitative data and a longer semi-structured questionnaire for in-depth qualitative interviews. The use of the two types of questionnaire allowed the researcher to interview both those who had little time to spare for in depth interviews and those who had the time or wished to provide in-depth responses to the research questions. Also, it was thought that those who had not yet had a decision on their asylum claims were likely to respond to the short structured questionnaire as it did not have questions on their immigration status in the UK unlike the semi-structured questionnaire.

122 people agreed to participate in the structured interviews, of which 57 were AET grant holders (53% of these were male) and 65 were non-AET grant holders⁴ (65% of these were male). Each of the structured interviews took about 15 minutes to complete. Forty of the 122 interviewees agreed to participate in the semi-structured interviews of which 24 were AET grant holders (58% of these were male) and 16 were non-AET grant holders (87% of these were male). Each of these interviews lasted for approximately 45 minutes.

Small payments of £5 and £10 were provided to those who participated in the structured and semi-structured interviews respectively as a thank you gesture for their time and effort as well as a way to encourage participation in the research. Some of the respondents refused to accept these payments and reiterated that their time and effort was a small price that they were happy to sacrifice because *“through participation in the research their experiences would reach and benefit others in the UK or elsewhere”*. One Ethiopian community centre co-ordinator said that sometimes the refusal to accept payments could be due to cultural reasons.

All of the semi-structured and the majority of structured interviews were conducted face to face. (30% of the interviews were conducted at AET offices, 7% at RCO premises and 63% in the homes of the respondents' and via telephone). Interviews over the phone were convenient for those living outside London or those who had no time to attend interviews at a venue. Self-completion questionnaires suited those living outside London or those who wanted to complete the questionnaire at their own time as well as those who obtained the questionnaires via a

⁴ This figure includes 18 individuals who received grants from sources other than AET.

proxy contact e.g. RCO worker. Interviews were also carried out in the evenings, weekends and during holidays, and these achieved the most interviews.

All interviews were conducted in English because none of the respondents had asked for an interpreter and many had a reasonable level of the English language although a few had difficulties in understanding the spoken English.

Seven discussion groups were conducted with young Ethiopian, Eritrean, Somali, Turkish and Kurdish refugees living in the London borough of Haringey and who were not former AET grant applicants. Two of these discussion groups were for women refugees intended for those who did not feel comfortable sharing their experiences in discussion groups in which men also attended. In all these discussion groups, participants were given opportunity to air their views regarding the education, training and employment needs and experiences of the refugees in the UK. At least 15 participants attended each of these discussion groups.

Employers and service providers and RCO staff (leaders and workers) were also interviewed about their perceptions and experiences of training and employing refugees from different countries. Extensive review of the relevant literature was also carried out.

A presentation of the findings to the community was part of the research dissemination strategy - the preliminary findings from the research was done in a meeting hosted by the Eritrean Islamic Society in the UK in which over 70 people attended. In addition, the research was earmarked for publication in order to reach the wider refugee population and those interested in and working with refugees.

Analysis of structured interviews

Firstly, the research interview data was manually entered into an Excel spreadsheet and simple descriptive statistics produced.

Secondly, the research interview data was analysed using the McNemar's Chi-squared test of significance⁵. The aim was to determine whether the 1993/94 AET grant holders (in this case those who received any grant from AET, World University Service or Local Education Authorities) tended to complete their courses relative to those 1993/94 AET grant applicants who did not receive any grant from AET, WUS or LEAs. The research did not attempt to use the alternative method for assessing the education and training attainment of the AET grant recipients using college records as colleges were likely to refuse to reveal personal information about their students for data protection reasons. Also, Brophy et al (1997) had found that a

⁵A. Agresti (1990), "Categorical data analysis", New York: Wiley.

number of colleges deleted records of students after five or six years. For example, the Registrar at one large college wrote:

"I am sorry I am not able to produce the results of the course...the college keeps records on students for a five year period but is unable to keep them longer."

Another college wrote that the college in question had been amalgamated with another college and that:

"...unfortunately all previous records were destroyed at the time, so we are unable to help with your inquiry."

Thirdly, further data analysis was done using the Probit model to identify and investigate the impact of a number of variables on the probability of refugees being in employment, and continuing studying for a further higher level course. STATA was used to run the probit analysis.

Probit model

The Probit model used was based on utility theory, or rational choice perspective on behaviour as developed by McFadden⁶ (the binary choice model). It estimated the likelihood of a particular decision being taken, and answers questions, for example, if a person received a grant, was he/she likely to be in employment relative to those who did not get a grant?

The Probit model is an estimating model from a normal Cumulative Distribution Function (CDF). The CDF of a random variable X is the probability that it takes a value less than or equal to x_0 , where x_0 is some specified numerical value of X.

CDF of X is given below:

$$F(X=x_p) = P(X \leq x_0)$$

The probit model as developed by McFadden is given below:

$$I_i = \beta_1 + \beta_2 X_1 + \mu_i$$

Where

I_i = Dependent variable (unobservable Utility Index for the i th individual)

β_1 = Constant

⁶ D. McFadden, "Conditional Logit Analysis of Qualitative Choice Behaviour", in P Zarembka (ed.), *Frontiers in Econometrics*, Academic Press, New York, 1973.

- β_2 = Estimated coefficient
- X_i = Independent variable for the i th individual
- μ_i = Stochastic disturbance term.

Dependent Variable is a latent variable (LV) because the only information about LV regards its role in the model and nothing is known about its unit of measure, mean or variance.

$$I_i = 1 \text{ if } I_i > \emptyset$$

$$I_i = 0 \text{ if } I_i = \emptyset$$

Analysis of semi-structured interviews

Information from the 40 semi-structured interviews was grouped according to the key questions of this research mainly what had contributed to the course attendance and successful completion and subsequent employment; qualifications and employment; employment opportunities including where worked, the kinds of jobs; and views on how the education and employment of refugees in the UK could be improved.

Not all of the information collected during these interviews was used in this study. This was because some of the collected information was only important in building a logical flow of 'story' that respondents were likely to have preferred as opposed to more structured interviews. The qualitative interviews covered issues such as immigration and family status; whether advice sought, from whom and for what purpose; training and employment history; motives to seeking UK qualifications; employer training received; and health. It also covered questions on perceptions about being a refugee and their life here and if and when they planned to go back home.

Challenges to the study

- Securing cooperation for assisting in identifying and tracing the potential respondents was one of the key elements of this research. The researcher therefore ensured that the purpose and possible contribution of the research to the lives of refugees in the UK was clearly explained. A study leaflet was produced that stated the aim of the study, how it was to be done, what the study hoped to achieve, who were the beneficiaries, a picture and contact details of the researcher and short background information about the work of the Trust;
- The fieldwork was carried out at the time when the UK Government was in the process of preparing a new legislation on asylum. This was thought could negatively influence the decision of potential respondents still in the asylum determination process to participate in the research. Therefore, assurances of anonymity of respondents and confidentiality of responses were given to every potential respondent or their gatekeepers (RCOs). For example, it was made clear that

participation in the research would in no way influence the outcome of their asylum claims.

- In order to ensure that the personal information that AET released to those who had agreed to assist in tracing potential respondents could not be used for purposes other than identifying and tracing the respondents, no information other than their names, nationality and first part of their contact postal code was released to the third parties;
- There was a possibility that many of those who were not awarded AET grants could refuse to participate in the research. The researcher therefore assessed the Trust's grant awarding process and concluded that it was fair and that grant refusal should not automatically lead to refusal to participate;
- All respondents were offered cash incentives as a thank you gesture and in order to encourage participation. {However, there was not evidence to suggest that had these cash incentives not been offered participation would have been lower};
- Five years had elapsed since potential respondents applied to AET for grants. Many would have had changed their UK addresses since then without the knowledge of the Trust. Finding potential respondents would therefore be a mammoth and difficult task. It was because of this reason that various tracer methods were employed by this research;
- It would have been difficult to identify some potential respondents especially those who tended to have similar names and/or lived at a certain town or city in the UK. However, because partial post codes were used this minimised the likelihood of not finding the 'right' potential respondent as chances of individuals having similar names, residing in the same postal code area and had applied to the Trust for a grant in 1993/94 were reduced;
- The research faced logistic problems in arranging convenient times and venues for all the planned interviews. Some respondents preferred interviews be held at their homes, in public places (e.g. at a restaurant), in the evenings and over weekends. However not all of these requests could be accommodated. For example, a request received for interview to be conducted was declined as it was deemed not cost effective by the researcher and instead a questionnaire sent by post to the respondent and follow-up telephone calls were made to ensure that the respondent received the study documents;
- The research was carried out at a time when Ethiopia and Eritrea had a conflict. This was thought could (negatively) influence the co-operation and identification of potential respondents here in the UK. Also, in the past, Ethiopia and Eritrea used to exist as one country. However, at the time of this research Eritrea had become an independent country and therefore some people from Eritrea and who had previously applied to the Trust as Ethiopians had subsequently changed their nationality to Eritrean whilst in the UK. Therefore the researcher had to approach both Eritrean and Ethiopian community groups and asked for their assistance in identifying the potential Ethiopian and Eritrean respondents.

Course attendance, completion and further training

Introduction

Inline with the specific aims of the study, this chapter identifies and analyses the main factors influencing the training course attendance and completion. It looks at the characteristics of those who attended (or not) and completed (or not) their training courses and investigates whether grants from AET (and from WUS and LEAs where appropriate) play a role in this. For this the McNemar's Chi-Squared Test is used. Also, Probit analysis is used to investigate the likelihood of studying for a further/higher course. Other factors affecting the likelihood of refugees attending and completing their training courses in the UK are also discussed.

Six of the respondents had received financial assistance through Department for Social Security (DSS) and were excluded from the analyses because, for purposes of this study, funds from the DSS were not considered as grants⁷.

Course attendance

75 respondents had received grants from AET (57), 5 from the World University Service (WUS) and 13 from their Local Education Authority (LEA). In some cases they had been informed of their eligibility for these awards by AET staff. All but one of these 75 respondents attended their courses. The person who did not attend her course received her grant from a LEA. Although she did not give a reason for not attending her course, when asked what could be done to improve future grant provisions, she suggested that grant applicants should be given the opportunity to choose their study area. In total, 99 respondents attended their courses and 23 never attended their courses. Of those who never attended their courses, 19 gave 'lack of money' (travel or course fees) as the reason for not attending their training courses and one cited difficulties with the English language while 3 gave no reasons for not attending their training courses.

Course completion

92 respondents had attended and completed their courses. All but 3 of the grant recipients (all AET grant recipients) who attended their course completed their courses. Difficult course discipline, English language (English for Speakers of Other Languages - ESOL - not enough foundation to pursue further courses in English) and family problems were cited as the main reasons for not completing their courses. Training service providers interviewed also echoed similar reasons for refugees not completing their training courses namely poor command of the English language.

⁷ Interestingly, it was found that half of those who received funds from the DSS did not complete their courses.

96% of the non-grant holders did not complete their courses and reported the main reason as the lack of funds to either pay for the fees or for daily travel to and from the course. A Somali housewife spoke of being “home-bound”:

“There are no child-care facilities in my area and so I can not attend English courses such as ESOL.”

Discussion groups with young refugees and interviews with a range of community workers, training service providers and employers suggested that refugees have difficulties in securing some form of financial support to help them obtain UK educational and training qualifications, in particular support for daily transport costs to and from colleges and training centres. Also, qualitative interviews with refugees called for “alternative sources of finance” to mainstream funding (e.g. LEA) and suggested that organisations like AET and WUS could help in this regard.

Likelihood of course completion

McNemar’s Chi-squared test was used to investigate whether or not refugees who received grants from any source (including AET) were generally more likely to complete their courses than those who did not. Table 5 below shows that of the 122 people interviewed 45 had not been able to secure some form of grant funding from AET, WUS or LEAs. 44 matched pairs with each pair matched for course level and gender were tested. Of the 44 matched pairs complete information on course completion was available for 43 cases.

Table 5: Results from the McNemar’s Chi-Squared Test

1	Total grant holders (AET, WUS and LEAs) = 75
2	Total non-grant holders (none from AET,WUS and LEAs) = 45
3	Unknown course completion status = 2
4	Total sample size = 122
22 matched pairs of grant holders completing and non-grant holders not completing courses	
19 matched pairs of both grant holders and non-grant holders completing courses	
2 matched pairs of both grant holders and non-grant holders not completing courses	
No matched pairs of grant holders not completing and non-grant holders completing courses	

The test found that refugees who received grants from AET, WUS and LEAs were more likely to finish their courses than non-grant holders ($p < 0.001$).

Further training

34 respondents were studying at the time of the interviews, 17 of whom had received grants from WUS, AET or WUS and had all completed their previous courses.

Almost a quarter of those who applied for an AET grant to study at foundation level were at pre-degree level while a third of those who applied to study at pre-degree level were at undergraduate level. 4% of those who had previously applied to study at postgraduate level were studying at undergraduate level. One explanation for this could be that perhaps foundation and pre-degree course offered an important stepping stone to higher education before employment, whilst graduate courses were seen as a stepping stone towards employment in the UK. It could also be indicative of refugees' inability to gain employment with home qualifications and experience thus necessitating retraining at lower study level.

Likelihood of further training

Probit analysis was undertaken to investigate the probability of refugees studying for a higher qualification than that which they originally applied for in 1993/94. As the Table 6 shows, the receipt of AET grant made no significant difference to this probability. However those who applied for AET grants to do foundation courses had a higher probability of studying further while those who had applied to do under-graduate courses had a lower probability.

Table 6: Probit Estimate for the probability of Studying for a Further/Higher Course

Category	Variable	Coefficient
AET grants	Recipients	0.351
Subject Area	Computing and IT	-0.031
	Business Studies	-0.799
	Education & Social science studies	-1.358*
	Health studies	-0.35
Study Level	Foundation Courses	1.201*
	Undergraduate Courses	-1.677*
Individual Characteristics	Age	-0.027
Gender	Male	-0.882*
Constant	Intercept	2.339

Prob>chi²-0.001

Log Likelihood = -35.506

n =74 (All AET grant applicants who studied further)

* Statistically significant at 5% level

When subject areas were considered, education & social science courses were associated with a lower probability of study at higher level unlike science and applied science (including engineering). (Next Chapter shows that education & social science and health studies offered better employment prospects relative to other subject areas). Perhaps those who were more likely to gain employment were less likely to want to study further. Men were found less likely to study for higher qualifications than women.

Employment in the UK

Introduction

This Chapter describes the refugees who were in employment in the UK. It investigates whether grants improve the likelihood of refugees finding work compared to those who do not receive any financial assistance using the probit model. It also discusses factors likely to affect the chances of refugees finding work in the UK such as level of qualification, study area and the employing sector.

Just like in the previous chapter, six of the respondents who had received financial assistance from the Department for Social Security (DSS) were excluded from the analyses because, for purposes of this study, funds from the DSS were not considered as grants.

Who is in employment?

58 respondents said they were employed at the time of the structured interviews. Of these, 38 had received grants either from AET, WUS and LEAs and 9 were working but had not attended courses or received grants from any source. 49 of those working and received a grant had attended their courses however, 5 of them did not complete their courses.

27 men and 16 women worked full-time and 15 men worked part-time (none of the women respondents were working part-time). There were 25 respondents who were not employed. Of which 12 respondents had not been employed since completing their studies. 3 women had worked full-time in the past, while 7 men and 3 women had worked on part-time basis in the past. 5 respondents had never worked in the UK before and 34 were studying at the time of the research.

Of those in employment 5% were people who had applied to study for computing & IT, 33% had applied to study science & applied science and 28% had applied to study education & social science. All those who had applied to undertake health studies courses were either in employment or were continuing with their studies while those who applied to study science and applied science were either working or had not worked in the UK before but were continuing with their studies.

25 of the respondents were not working, 17 of whom had received grants to attend courses either from AET, WUS or LEAs and had all completed their courses.

Likelihood of being in employment

Probit analysis was carried out to determine the likelihood of 1993/94 AET grant applicants being in employment in 1998/99. Those who were studying at the time of the study were excluded in the analysis although it is worth noting that it is possible that some might have secured jobs after completing their courses but decided to study further later on.

Receipt of a study grant

The Table 7 below shows that AET grant recipients were more likely to be in employment in 1998/99 than non-AET grant recipients.

Table 7: AET grants and likelihood of being in employment in 1998/99

Category	Variable	Coefficient
AET Grant	Recipients	1.534*
Individual Characteristics	Age	-0.003
Gender	Male	-0.987
Nationality	Ethiopian	-1.145*
	Somali	-0.948
Constant	Intercept	1.764

Prob > Chi² = 0.038

Log likelihood = -17.87

n = 51 (all AET grant applicants excluding those studying)

* = statistically significant at the 5% level

The study then investigated whether employment amongst AET grant recipients was likely to be different. Table 8 below shows that there is no significant difference in employability amongst these individuals and suggests that successful course completion may in itself be the main factor leading to employment. Thus rather than having a direct effect on employment, grants help refugees undertake and complete their courses and it is their UK qualifications which then increase their chances of finding employment. One possible alternative explanation is that the students who were best at completing the AET application forms and AET interviews were also best at completing employment application forms and at employment interviews. WUS (1986) commented that while education does improve the employment prospects for refugees, it is often insufficient, in and of itself, to secure a job. A positive link has to be made between education and employment for refugees, who lack the networks, contacts and nationality necessary for securing a job.

Table 8: Employability amongst AET grant recipients only

Category	Variable	Coefficient
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Subject Area	Computing and IT	0.083
	Business Studies	0.445
	Education & Social science or Health studies	1.175
Study Level	Foundation Courses	-1.558
	Postgraduate Courses	1.407
Individual Characteristics	Age	0.009
Gender	Male	-0.715
Constant	Intercept	-0.671

Prob>chi² = 0.051

Log Likelihood = -13.694

n = 31 (AET grant recipients excluding those studying)

Nationality

Table 7 shows that Ethiopians and Somalis were less likely to be in employment than other nationalities (although only the coefficient on the Ethiopian variable was significant at 5% level). One possible explanation could be that people from these two nationalities were choosing to study subjects with low employment potential for refugees. However, since only the Ethiopian coefficient was significant at 5% level, then it seems that the choice of subject alone can not explain the differences in the employment levels of different nationalities.

Interestingly, in a number of qualitative interviews respondents felt that irrespective of their immigration status both black British and black African refugees job seekers were likely to suffer the same degree of racial discrimination, as two respondents put it: *“a racist employer will not discriminate within a race”*. *“If colour of skin is the issue, both black British and black refugees may suffer the same degree of discrimination”*. The Commission for Racial Equality (1987) found that Asian graduates who undertook vocational type of courses such as Electrical and Electronic Engineering could not find appropriate jobs in comparison with their white UK counterparts. Asian graduates were highly concentrated in few course types such as pharmacy courses and their associated occupational fields and most of them remained unemployed a year after graduation.

RCO leaders and workers suggested that some employers were prejudiced immediately they hear a foreign name with a foreign accent. Pile (1997) pointed out that there was a Home Office document which warns employers against discrimination. However, she still found that some of the refugee respondents had had experiences of what they felt was direct discrimination by employers on the grounds of their ethnic origin and gave an example of a Pharmacist who applied for a job and was invited by telephone for an interview on the day his CV was received. The company was very keen and offered to pay for a taxi to get him to the

interview. When he arrived, the Director came out, and as soon as he saw the applicant, he turned on his heels and went back into his office. His secretary then came out and said she was sorry but the director was unable to see him now and that they would telephone to rearrange the interview. They never did. The applicant thought it was because they had seen the name on his CV as an English name: "As soon as they saw me it was a different matter". The Commission for Racial Equality, (1987) found that graduates in the UK from ethnic minorities were likely to continue their studies after graduation rather than moving directly to a job. Modood et al (1997) suggested that the point of departure in the education system usually determines the future employment of ethnic minorities in the UK.

However, racial or country of origin or nationality discrimination do not seem to explain the employment differences between the African nationalities. Another explanation for the differences in employment could be because the recognition of overseas qualifications in the UK varies according to the country of origin. The British Council (1987) commented that generally, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Sudanese and Somali educational qualifications were unlikely to be considered comparable to the UK qualifications. Wheatley-Price (1998) reported that UK employers were unfamiliar with foreign qualifications obtained under non-British educational systems and therefore unlikely to employ immigrants possessing foreign qualifications and work experience lest they make 'hiring mistakes'. Pile (1997) suggested that in 'unregulated' professions such as engineering, there were no formal procedures with recognition of qualifications left to individual employers' judgement and many refugees felt that this was used as a cover for discrimination while in 'regulated' professions such as medicine, law and architecture formal re-qualification procedures required were often cumbersome and costly.

One further difficulty reported during in-depth interviews with refugees was the need to be able to produce good references when seeking employment in the UK. Refugees may have had many years of work experience in their home countries but were rarely able to produce references. They may have fled war or civil conflict or had to leave because of oppressive governments. In some cases they had left in circumstances where it was not possible to get a reference. But even when references from Africa were available they were often not accepted by UK employers as being equivalent to UK references. Others spoke about the vicious circle of not being able to get a job without a reference from a former UK employer and not being able to get the reference because they had never worked in the UK before.

Age

The likelihood of employment may also be affected by the age of the job applicants. RCO leaders and workers suggested that refugees were generally older than UK students when

applying for courses at the same level possibly because they had spent additional time bringing their English language skills up to the required level for the course or because they had to gain UK equivalents to qualifications they already held from their home country. Perhaps it is not surprising that staff at one training centre for language and skills felt that an additional difficulty that refugees faced was that they tended to be older than most of the UK job entrants for the same level of job and that this age difference could have an impact on their chances for getting work. It is possible, therefore, that the cumulative effect could be that by the time refugees had completed Ph.D. level programmes they were too old (and perhaps over-qualified) for first time entry into the British labour market.

Gender

Table 9 below suggests that men were less likely to be in employment than women. It is not clear why this should be. Perhaps this finding could be explained by the fact that men formed the majority of those applied for grants to study science and applied science while women made up the majority of those who wished to study health studies. However, women respondents also studied computer, IT and business studies – subject areas this research suggests are not associated with high employment probability (Table 9). It could also be that men have work experience obtained whilst in their home countries and are looking for a higher entry level into the UK labour market and that these are difficult to secure. The difference between the employability of men and women could also be explained by the finding in Table 6 that women were more likely to continue for further and higher education courses than men perhaps improving their probability of finding employment.

Recognition of overseas qualifications in the UK and the inability of the respondents to use qualifications obtained in their home countries was discussed at length in the semi-structured interviews.

"We come from diverse African family backgrounds and school environments and consequently we may have different skills gaps."

For many this was because of their "sudden departure" from their home countries which meant that they had left without certificates or proof of their qualifications. A number of people reported that even when they had their certificates their qualifications were not recognised by the UK employers. The general view was that very few refugees find jobs in the UK with their home country qualifications even though some already had good academic qualifications and work experience. However most accepted that there was a need for refugees to retrain here to meet the UK labour market demand but noted that training should be tailored to their needs. Khan (1997) showed that in the US there was a greater post-migration schooling investment by

refugees as compared to other foreign-born men. They (refugees) exhibited their recognition and desire to bridge the skill gaps. Perhaps, more importantly is the fact that the education of refugees (pre-migration schooling) was interrupted when they fled their countries of origin.

Study level

Probit analysis was done to check whether the probability of being in employment depended upon the study level. Table 9 below shows that those who applied for grants to study foundation level courses were not likely to be in employment compared to those who had applied to study for pre-degree courses.

Table 9: Subject area/study level and likelihood of being in employment in 1998/99

Category	Variable	Coefficient
Subject Area	Computing and IT	-1.062
	Business Studies	0.027
	Education & Social science or Health studies	0.766
Study Level	Foundation Courses	-2.022*
	Undergraduate Courses	1.440*
	Postgraduate Courses	0.837
Individual Characteristics	Age	-0.012
	Gender	Male
Constant	Intercept	1.483

Prob>Chi²=0.000

Log Likelihood = -33.813

n = 75 (all AET grant applicants excluding those studying)

* = statistically significant at the 5% level

Staff at a training service provider commented inadequate funding for foundation level English language courses could be the main reason why refugees were not able to get jobs which reflected their qualifications and capabilities. Another explanation could be that for others they wished to undertake such courses in order to facilitate their settlement and integration in the UK. An Eritrean housewife who received a grant from AET to study English language foundation course spoke of its importance in helping her to communicate effectively with others in English and noted that,

"I did not intend to use my English language skills to get paid employment in the UK. I want to remain a house wife."

Staff at one training centre for language and skills noted that:

“A major stumbling block for the majority of refugees in getting a job is the lack of a good command of English coupled with the lack of UK work experience.”

Lack of UK work experience was also picked up in interviews with RCO leaders and workers. They said that training courses for refugees often lacked the work placement element that was included in similar courses for UK students.

Although the staff at one London Job Centre also cited inadequate English language skills as a major problem for refugees securing employment in the UK, they noted that,

“Solving the language barrier problem is not enough. More should be done to overcome cultural and work skills difficulties through integrating refugees into the wider community as well as making use of transferable skills brought by the refugees from their home countries”

Those who applied for degree courses and post-graduate studies (although not significant at 5% level) had a higher probability of being in employment than those who applied to study for pre-degree courses. There would appear, therefore, to be a positive (although non-linear) relationship between the probability of being in employment and the level of study. It could be that rather than the grants having a direct effect on employment it was their higher UK qualifications which had increased their chances of finding employment here.

Subject area

Although the probit results in Table 9 appear to suggest no significant difference in employment due to subject area, the results suggest that applicants who applied to study for computing and IT courses were less likely to be in employment than those who undertook other subject areas. AET observed that refugees were often concerned about the “academic” status of a course (e.g. Science and applied science including engineering) and as such health studies (e.g. nursing care work but not medicine), education & social science studies and computing & IT were seen as having lower status than the pure and applied sciences. Similarly AET observed that most African refugees preferred to study for an MA rather than, for example, a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) which, according to AET’s experience was likely to have led to employment as teachers in the UK. One male Eritrean respondent reported:

“I have managed to get my degree in software engineering but at the moment I can not get a job so instead of wasting time I want to do my masters in net working.”

Interviews with RCO leaders and workers suggested that the training courses offered to refugees had limited employment focus, for example, computing and information technology.

Choice of course

In-depth interview with refugees also offered an alternative explanation to the unemployment of refugees in the UK namely that grant organisations often tie their grants to courses relevant to the refugee's home countries. Refugees felt that grants should be based on the individuals' needs and not on the possible future needs of their nations since they were not sure when they would be able to return there. Training that would help them to find employment in the UK would therefore be more appropriate. One person spoke of the trickle-effect of such UK relevant study courses,

“Any positive support to refugees’ educational and employment goals in the UK will inevitably help their home countries”.

Others felt that refugees should be advised about the courses and qualifications that were most likely to lead to employment in the UK, although they stressed that such advice should not be binding in order to enable individuals choose the courses they want. For example, one Somali woman noted that,

“I was told that fine arts was useless to study. But here I am now working in the UK bringing to light issues such as AIDs and discrimination to the attention of the society through my art works.”

Another example is that of an Ethiopian pharmacy student who felt that refugees are part and parcel of the globalised labour markets and should therefore given the opportunity to choose their study areas,

“Educational skills are much more globalised than a few years ago. Any educational skill and knowledge is certainly worth investing in.”

AET (1995) found a number of refugees attending educational courses not of their own choice. The main reason is because more grants are available in such subject areas due to donors' wishes (Brophy et al, 1997).

Access to UK labour market

Introduction

It is well documented that the more a 'new' individual participates in the local affairs, the better and the quicker their adjustment to the new environment will be. UK education is one of the ways by which refugees can adjust and integrate with the native population. It is through education that the talents and knowledge of refugees can be explored and 'best fitted' to UK's labour market. How quick or slow the adjustment process takes place will determine a refugee's future place in the UK labour market.

This chapter explores the factors likely to contribute to where refugees work. It describes where the sample respondents worked, discusses issues relating to accessing the UK labour market and reviews what the literature has to say about this area.

What sectors employ refugees?

A question on the kinds of jobs the respondents were doing was not asked formally in the structured interviews but instead asked of the respondents who were interviewed face-to-face and who were working full-time, part-time or studying part-time. This was because it was felt that such a question could have been too sensitive especially for those likely to be working in breach of immigration rules or where a respondent was self-completing the questionnaire (either posted to them or sent to them by an RCO worker). The question asked was "If working full-time, part-time or studying part-time but working as well, what is your job?" Those who participated in the qualitative interviews but whom were not asked this question during the structured interviews were asked this question because the nature of qualitative interviews made this line of enquiry possible. In the end, 79 respondents (including 4 students working on part-time basis) provided this information. Therefore it is possible that some respondents who could have answered this question regardless of whether they were asylum seekers or full-time students were not asked this question.

Although these refugees had found work, the jobs they held were clustered in certain sectors of the labour market. Not one of the seventy-nine individuals was working in either the manufacturing or construction industries. Nor were any of them employed in the financial, insurance or banking sectors. The largest group (38%) were employed in the service industry, as clerks, sales assistants, caterers and security guards. The single largest group of employers were the supermarket chains. A further 37% of those in employment were employed either in health care (12%) or in community work (25%). Altogether 75% of the refugees in employment

were employed in just three sectors (service industry, health care and community work). Another 10% were teachers or lecturers and 15% (all men) worked as minicab drivers. But even the minicab drivers could be regarded as part of the service industry. Many respondents during semi-structured interviews reported working in their current jobs out of “economic necessity” and had serious concerns about their future job security particularly amongst those working with community groups many of whom were on fixed-term contracts (usually one year) linked to specific projects. These refugees were likely to experience frequent spells of unemployment in between contracts. The findings of this research are echoed by Chiswick et al (1997) who found that immigrants' labour market status appeared to be somewhat more sensitive to cyclical changes in economic activity than that of the native-born. Pile (1997) found that most of the work done by refugees was undertaken by voluntary organisations and that these organisations represented a huge resource and were a one way in which refugees might play an active role and make a net contribution to the society in which they live.

Blanchflower and Burgess (1996) found that employment growth was apparently more variable in manufacturing plants than in private service sector workplaces while Business Strategies Ltd (1998) forecasted an increase in number of jobs between 1997-2007 for sales assistants & check-out operators and professionals, particularly in the education, health and business services sectors. Perhaps this suggests that there might now be better employment prospects for refugees in the UK than was the case in the past years?

Why employed in these sectors?

Views from service providers and employers interviewed suggested that some refugees do not seek “high profile” jobs because of their own concerns about their command of the English language. Some felt that for their part refugees also need to accept that even the so called ‘unskilled jobs’ need to be learned and only their flexibility and willingness to learn new skills will address this problem. A manager of a large bus company in London spoke of their difficulties in recruiting new staff and suggested that one of the main problems facing refugees was their lack of good command of English language essential particularly in a job dealing with the general public and suggested that due to this it was possible the job skills that many refugees had were under-utilised.

A project leader with a major health authority reported that it is not because of unequal employment opportunities that impede the employment of refugees but rather because that the majority of the jobs required a satisfactory level of written and spoken English.

A study on refugees by the Haringey Council (1997) found that 39% of Somalis could not read or write in any language, the vast majority of whom were women. AET (1995) found that

majority of Eritrean and Ethiopian women living in London faced some form of a language skill barrier. AET, 1998(a); Haringey Council (1997); Haringey Council and NLTEC (1995) concluded that the education and employment of refugees suffer due to inadequacy in English language skills. The Refugee Council (1994) stressed the need for language training if refugees are to achieve self-sufficiency and successfully settle in the UK.

Stark et al (1997) found that the optimal migration duration of migrants was not always related to the purchasing power differentials amongst countries. Perhaps this finding could explain the willingness of refugees to take up low paid jobs in early years of arrival and their later interest in obtaining a UK qualification in order to access the UK labour market commensurate with their UK qualifications. Another important observation is that refugees may therefore have no optimal migration duration as they are likely to live in a host country for a long time and therefore wages and their purchasing power differentials between countries may not be of real interest to them – at least at the beginning of their migration period.

Employment versus qualifications and expectations

Semi-structured interviews with refugees revealed that those in employment found their current work closely related to the qualifications gained in the UK although the majority also felt that their job roles were of a lower rank or status than those of both white and black British born colleagues with the same educational qualifications. They felt that their current UK jobs were below the level that they had hoped for. It may be that it was because of the type of training that they undertook which qualifies them for low skilled jobs - something that need to be addressed if refugees feel they the training courses offered to them do not meet their employment needs.

Refugee Council (1996a) found that the majority of the refugees who were studying, were attending courses or places of learning for less than 16 hours, reflecting the 16-hour rule which limits the amount of time allowed for attending courses while claiming unemployment benefits. On the other hand, the Refugee Council (1989) suggested that the concept of 'actively seeking work' introduced into the Social Security Act (1989) means that unemployed refugees could face the prospect of being forced into low-paid work without being first given the opportunity to gain train in a course of their choice.

The Refugee Council (1994) found that some refugees because of the sudden departure from their countries arrive in the UK with no professional or educational proof of qualifications. To such individuals, re-qualification courses are essential. Perhaps this again points to the need to assist such refugees to re-train in their desired courses here in the UK.

Adjustment to UK labour Market

Wheatley-Price (1998) showed that the country of birth and years since migration play a major part in the employment of male migrants in the UK and that, on average, 5 years are required for the immigrant to acquire local labour market knowledge and country-specific skills such as language fluency. Therefore if the labour market adjustment period for refugees could be reduced, it means that those granted refugee status here could quickly contribute to the UK economy and social well-being. Jones (1993) observed that in the 1970s Pakistani and Bangladeshi immigrants arrived in the UK with little or no capital or educational qualifications. East African Asians, on the other hand, managed to bring to the UK with them business skills, educational qualifications and even capital as they fled their countries to avoid political persecution. Since the majority of these East African Asians came from countries with largely British system of governance (Uganda and Kenya), this could have enabled them to quickly overcome some of the disadvantages of belonging to an ethnic minority group.

Chiswick et al (1997) found that in the US human capital was less strongly linked to employment status for immigrant men than for native-born white men, probably because human capital acquired outside the United States was only imperfectly transferable to the U.S. labour market. However, although the immigrants had some initial difficulty finding work, their employment and unemployment rates quickly attained levels comparable to those of the native-born.

Work-related training

Winkelmann (1996) found German apprentices experience fewer unemployment spells in the transition to first full-time employment than the non-apprentices. Among apprentices, those trained in large firms had the smoothest transition to employment. Once in employment apprentices (whether they stay in their training firm or not) and non-apprentices did have similar job stability (tenure). An estimated 70% of apprenticeship trainees leave their training firm within a five-year period. These findings were consistent with the view that apprenticeship training develops general, portable skills rather than firm-specific skills. To this end, apprenticeship training might reduce the 'negative' effects of subject area and study level on employment if one is able to get such training.

Arulampalam and Booth (1997) suggested that reliance on work-related training to improve the skills of the work-force will result in an increase in the skills of the already educated but will not improve the skills of individuals entering the labour market with relatively low levels of education. Furthermore, Royalty (1996) found that the normally observed positive effect of education on training is mainly due to differences in turnover by education level rather than a pure complementarity between education and training.

Whilst educational qualifications obtained can safely be used to predict the ability of the person to receive and complete successfully a particular work-related training and at a reduced cost; there are other factors which influence the provision of such training. These factors include the sector of employment, type of work, size of a firm, age, gender and ethnic differences. If most refugees are employed by smaller firms, and if more training is being provided by larger firms it implies that refugees are not likely to get trained, and along with it all the opportunities that arise because of such training. Since work-related training increases the future employment probability of workers, future promotional opportunities, occupational attainment and wages; lack of such training to refugees will increase the incidence of unemployment amongst refugees in Britain. IFF (1997) found that the likelihood of a firm having a training budget increases with the size of a firm. Shields and Wheatley-Price (1998) found that large firms provide more work-related training than small firms as they have a better chance of retaining the services of their trainees and have sufficient facilities or qualified trainers to provide training at the workplace. They also found that the type of work (part-time or full-time) determines the likelihood of receiving employer-funded training. The likelihood of receiving work-related training for part-time workers was lower compared to full-time workers. The same can be said about the type of employment sector. If refugees are concentrated in sectors and industries with low levels of employer-funded training it implies that refugees will have less opportunities for firm-provided training relative to the general population and less likely for turnover leading to further in-the-job training.

Booth (1991) found that work-related training is higher in the public sector while Greenhalgh and Mavrotas (1996) and Shields (1998) found that training was highest in the 'non-tradeable' industries of health, education and public administration and lowest in manufacturing and the service sector (e.g. wholesale, retail, hotels and restaurants).

Some studies suggested that age of an employee does affect their likelihood of receiving employer funded training. For example, Shields and Wheatley-Price (1998) suggested that the younger the person is, the more likely that returns to their newly acquired skills and knowledge will be reaped by the employer. They also found ethnic differences to have great impact on the incidence and the determination of work-related employer-funded training in the UK and concluded that there would be substantial increases in the incidence of both on-the-job and off-the-job employer-funded training of non-white employees if work related personal observable 'characteristic' differences (inherent in both employers and employees) do not exist amongst them.

Job seeking techniques

Semi structured interviews with refugees revealed that most found their jobs by responding to adverts. Few looked for advice or help in applying for work. If they did, they sought it from relatives, friends and other refugees rather than through job centres or employment agencies. RCO leaders and workers felt that many refugees were reluctant to follow the “official” job recruitment procedures, for example, through Job Centres and only get to hear about job vacancies through word of mouth and friends. They explained this was partly due to a perception that many UK employers would be reluctant to employ refugees. A young Somali in a group discussion commented:

“I would only approach a company if I knew a refugee who already worked there, because then I would know that they would recruit refugees.”

Lack of familiarity with the UK employment and recruitment “culture” was also cited in semi-structured interviews with refugees as a major problem for refugees getting employment here. For example, some spoke about African cultures, emphasising the importance of “humility,” while in Britain it was important for people to “sell themselves” in an interview. Without training or preparation young people brought up in an African culture could find it difficult to adapt to this new situation.

Sicilian (1996) found that when firms searched for new workers through informal networks, the resulting worker-firm matches were superior to those resulting from search through formal networks. The impact of employer search effort depended upon the type of information network used in the search process. A strong firm-worker match increases the chance of a temporary job turning into a permanent job and along with it proper job training (Macleod, 1997). This suggests that refugees could face difficulties getting jobs here if they use own networks unknown to or untapped by the employers. Wheatley-Price (1998) suggested that immigrants tended not to have a fair knowledge of UK labour market demands (and constraints) and found it difficult to find a potential employer.

However, Ruiz-Quintanilla and Claes (1996) studied the factors that affect patterns of underemployment among young adults (part-time employment, temporary employment, and unemployment) in six European countries (Belgium, England, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and the Netherlands). They found that organisational and societal factors (the strategies that employers take to integrate the young workers into their first jobs) appear to have had greater influence than behavioural variables such as job strategies and demographic variables such as gender and age.

Refugee status and employment

The perception of many of those who took part in qualitative interviews was that educational qualifications had a more direct positive effect on employment and job status for both black and white British workers than they did for refugees. They felt that black British job seekers had better opportunities for finding employment because they “knew” the labour market.

A number of the women interviewed spoke of facing the extra problem in Britain of being a black woman and a refugee. While a Somali woman spoke about the cumulative problems associated with being a black, Muslim refugee woman in the UK.

LEA grants are the major source of finance for most refugees who are able to meet the eligibility criteria. The Refugee Council (1989) cited that due to poor housing, refugees have to move frequently in order to find suitable accommodation. This results in many refugees being unable to satisfy the Borough residency requirements (usually a minimal of three years continual residency in the Borough) when applying for discretionary awards from LEAs. One respondent commented that:

“I have been refused an LEA discretionary grant by different boroughs because I could not fulfil the borough residency requirements. My immigration status has seen me being re-housed many times in different boroughs.”

Furthermore the Refugee Council (1989) found that the rate of discretionary awards in many LEAs is frequently set at a level below the mandatory award level. This is because it is assumed that the individual has access to other funding. Due to their circumstances, refugees are not in position to rely on family networks for financial assistance. Seeking alternative sources of funding therefore becomes a problem for those who are new to Britain.

Sometimes refugees may not be able to find work because of the behaviour of employers. Pile (1997) found that even though some refugees may have letters from the Home Office allowing them to work in UK they still experienced difficulties when seeking employment. The Refugee Council (1996b) argued that employers need to know that most asylum seekers, and all refugees and those with ELR are likely to have permission to work in the UK. Borjas (1992) found that the labour market performance of particular immigrants from one country depended on the circumstances that produced the need to migrate in the first place. Even where the quality of schooling, formal education skills acquired and post-school human capital investments are more or less similar to those in UK; employers may still find it difficult to determine who to employ. This is particularly true where immigrants from one country are made up of both economic immigrants and refugees as a result of political upheavals.

Recommendations and conclusion

Recommendations

The study has 6 recommendations about those who have been granted a temporary or permanent immigration status:

7. Voluntary organisations like AET should continue to seek, promote and provide funding for the education and training of refugees in the UK;
8. Refugees should be provided with the earliest opportunity to study for and obtain UK education and training qualifications;
9. Refugees should be provided with the earliest opportunity to study for the English language foundation courses in order to facilitate their entry into the UK labour market;
10. Refugees should actively be encouraged to use the relevant UK job seeking techniques;
11. Refugees should be encouraged to attend training courses that offer opportunities for job placements in the UK;
12. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commission studies to establish whether or not there are certain sectors of the UK economy that are not fully accessible to workers of all backgrounds.

Conclusion

From the research results it is clear that refugees who received grants were both more likely to complete their courses successfully and more likely to find employment than those who did not receive grants. Grants from organisations such as AET can and do make a difference. Group discussions and interviews with RCO staff, employers and service providers suggest that the findings were not unique to the Black and therefore could generally apply to other refugees of different race in the UK from Africa and other parts of the world.

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