



What works in social-economic integration?

Migration and employment

Net immigration to the UK has shifted from non-EU to intra-EU migration and risen sharply since the 1990s. With the exception of the period 2009-12, the most common reason for migrating to the UK was work-related, with 154,860 such visas issued in 2013. While the majority of economic migrants arrive to a definite job, others, particularly asylum seekers and some spousal migrants, are not permitted to work. Refugee status is accompanied by the right to work; gaining employment then becomes critical to integration. Employability rates of migrants vary according to country of origin and immigration status. EEA immigrants are most likely to be employed, with activity rates just below 80%; non-EEA employment rates are around 60% and refugee activity rates vary between 20 and 40%. EEA migrants are more likely to be working full-time compared to those born outside the EU.

The relationship between employment and integration is well established. Work offers opportunities for language advancement and the development of varied social networks. Financial self-sufficiency improves self-confidence and contributes to enhanced housing and health outcomes. However, poor quality work can be counter-integrative, with a recent Joseph Rowntree Foundation study¹ showing low-paid migrants working long and unsociable hours, which reduced their ability to access ESOL or develop social networks and were associated with poor health and housing outcomes. In socio-economic terms, the challenges for migrant integration are complex. Refugees, many of whom have been unemployed for years before gaining the right to work, require intensive support as they often lack proof of qualifications, an understanding of application processes, an evidential work history and employer references.² There is a gap in knowledge about spousal migrants' access to employment.

For economic migrants, low quality and precarious employment presents major challenges, with migrants engaged in agency employment often working on contracts of less than 12 weeks duration, leaving them outside of mainstream employment protection. Such migrants generally earn less than the UK-born: over 30% less for men and 15% for women, with men taking, on average, 20 years to close the gap. EU migrants are less likely than British-born to claim out-of-work benefits but are more dependent on in-work benefits. Non-EEA migrants are more likely to claim out-of-work benefits – this categorisation includes refugees. The vast majority of migrants face down-skilling when entering the UK labour market. Thus, when considering what works in socio-economic integration, it is important to examine initiatives which aid access to work, promote social mobility and reduce reliance on in-work benefits.

English language proficiency, an understanding of employment rights and entitlements, access to good quality employment and opportunities for advancement are key to migrant integration. While many migrant employment initiatives have been developed, both in the UK and EU, no systematic study of what works has been undertaken. Thus, in identifying 'success' we must focus largely upon individual project evaluations, making identification of generalizable success criteria problematic.

What works?

ESOL classes are not designed to deliver the standard of English, nor the vocational vocabulary, required for access to work. European Integration and Refugee Fund initiatives have supported the development of *ESOL for work* classes for third country nationals, with some degree of success. Integration initiatives in Northern Europe, largely aimed at refugees, prioritise language proficiency. Around 450 hours of free language training is

connected with initiatives such as the provision of a language mentor and placements in businesses wherein refugees shadow workers to learn technical vocabulary. Evaluations show such programmes increase refugee employment by 30%.³ In Germany, some states have overcome language provision cost and supply issues by encouraging universities to train students to teach migrants German.⁴

Mentoring programmes have been successful when mentors are carefully matched to their mentees.⁵ While this approach has been utilised in the UK to help new migrants to negotiate UK systems, elsewhere in the EU programmes offer mentors for employment. In the Netherlands, Austria and Germany, migrants are matched with business people who share skills or sector interests. Mentors support CV and interview skills development, with a view to enabling migrants to access skilled employment. Migrants have also been supported by entrepreneurs to establish their own businesses.

In the UK, holistic pathway approaches have been shown to offer considerable potential for enhancing refugee employment, although such approaches can be hampered by the delays that refugees experience accessing a National Insurance Number once they have gained refugee status. Group work aiding the development of networks is followed by introductory language classes, then assisted access to mainstream ESOL, volunteering opportunities to provide a UK work history, and access to vocational learning and job-search support. A Holistic Integration Service has been developed in Scotland, recognising that life for refugees is chaotic immediately after grant of status.⁶ By providing support to deal with crises and creating strategies to support self-sufficiency, they hope to accelerate access to employment. This project is subject to a detailed evaluation, the findings of which will bring knowledge about what works in 2016.

Few initiatives are aimed at enhancing social mobility, with access to *any* job generally viewed as a successful outcome. A number of studies

have documented the so-called skills waste that occurs when highly qualified migrants such as teachers and doctors cannot transfer their qualifications or afford conversion courses. Pilot projects in the UK have used an accreditation of prior and experiential learning (APEL) approach, combined with top up training and accreditation, to provide migrants with qualifications that can increase access to skilled employment. Scandinavian countries use APEL centres to examine migrants' skills and provide appropriate accreditation. Most focus on enhancing job quality for migrants in the UK and involve provision of information about employment rights by civil society organisations. Such organisations often also offer CV and interview preparation services.

Evaluations provide evidence of enhanced employment outcomes for refugees participating in small-scale UK based projects such as *Reach In* and the *Community Integration Partnership*. Organisations such as *Migrant Gateway* have also been successful in reducing exploitation of migrant workers. However, these and other UK initiatives rely upon short-term funding such as Big Lottery, EIF and ERF, and are rarely long-lived. Good practice developed in migrant employment programmes is often lost when projects fold, making identification of what works challenging.

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5. Strang, A. (2014) 'The Holistic Integration Service.' Scottish Refugee Council, Glasgow.
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