

# Centre for Employment Relations, Innovation & Change

LEEDS UNIVERSITY BUSINESS SCHOOL



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## The Social and Economic Experiences of Asylum Seekers, Migrant Workers, Refugees and Overstayers

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**CERIC**

Report Commissioned by  
*The Investing in a Multi-Cultural Barnsley Project*

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## About CERIC

Leeds University Business School's *Centre for Employment Relations Innovation and Change* (CERIC) engages with contemporary issues in the area of work and employment that have direct policy relevance and significance. Members of CERIC have sustained a recognised external reputation since the late 1990s and have an outstanding track record of publication at the level of international excellence. Research conducted by members of CERIC has contributed to, and led, not only academic debate but provided an important evidence base for policy makers. Engagement with end-users and knowledge transfer forms a central component of the research activity of much of the Centre's work.

## About the IMCB project

"The Investing in a Multi-Cultural Barnsley" Project (IMCB) has brought together professionals working in the field of integration and community development in the Barnsley area. In recognition of the huge potential advantages that migration can bring economically, socially and culturally, the aims of the project are to encourage better integration through community cohesion. The project is funded by the Home Office through the Invest to Save Budget (ISB) initiative.

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## Executive Summary

This report examines the social and economic experiences of asylum seekers, migrant workers, refugees and overstayers living in the Barnsley area.

The report is based on research commissioned as part of the Investing in a Multi-Cultural Barnsley (IMCB) project. The research on which this report is based was undertaken with the aim of providing data on the social and labour market experiences of new arrivals\* in Barnsley, as a means of informing both the creation of resources to assist new arrivals and the development of a new integration strategy. The research was based on in-depth interviews with asylum seekers, refugees, overstayers and migrant workers, plus representatives of local support agencies, trade unions and employers. This was supplemented with a survey questionnaire of new arrivals.

### Key Findings

- It found that there was relatively widespread use of formal support services by asylum seekers and those with refugee status. However, the use of support services by migrant workers was much more limited.
- In addition to formally established support services, the use of other grass roots and informal networks as sources of support was also widespread amongst new arrivals.
- Changes in status, from asylum seeker to migrant worker or from asylum seeker to refugee or overstayer had a profound effect on the ability of new arrivals to access support services
- Experiences in relation to housing, healthcare, schooling and relations with the local community differed by status. Migrant workers had little experience of state support in terms of housing and were much less likely to have registered with doctors or dentists than asylum seekers or refugees.
- There is also a particular challenge to the inclusion of migrant workers in the local community: the long hours spent by migrant workers in the workplace appears to be a significant barrier to the development of contact with members of the local community.
- The sudden loss of NASS (National Asylum Support Service) provided accommodation that accompanied changes from asylum seeker status was a concern.
- Many people reported positive experiences with regards to their relations with the local community. Those living in houses with their family appeared to have more positive experiences in the local community, compared to those in multiple occupancy housing, as did those with more advanced English language skills.
- Integration is a family issue. Children of new arrivals share the problems and challenges faced by their parents. The upheavals associated with changes in status also affected children, and during the process of seeking asylum, the aspirations and goals of children, like those of their parents, were 'on hold'.

- There is a wealth of educational and employment experience that new arrivals brought with them to the Barnsley area. This included a high level of academic qualifications, plus a wide range of work based qualifications and experience.
- Many had experienced learning in the UK. English language classes were cited as being of particular benefit. Learning was also seen as source of social interaction. Only 12 per cent of migrant workers had undertaken learning in the UK compared to 60 per cent of other new arrivals.
- The range of qualifications and experience covered professional, trades and semi-skilled employment. Jobs undertaken in the UK showed a predominance of low skilled, labour intensive and low value added employment. This suggests a widespread mismatch between experience and current employment, and the significant underutilisation of skills.
- The majority of those covered in the survey had the legal entitlement to work in the UK. Many had found work via friends and family. There was also widespread use of employment agencies, which had increasingly focused on recruiting migrant workers from EU accession states.
- Wages for these workers tended to be clustered around the level of the minimum wage, significantly below the average wage levels for the Barnsley area. Many new arrivals reported routinely working long hours. The signing of the opt out to the Working Time Directive seemed common practice.
- 44 per cent of employees reported having experienced problems in the workplace such as issues with wages, bad treatment by colleagues or superiors, or unexpected termination of employment. As new arrivals such workers may be regarded as particularly vulnerable to poor treatment, and are less likely to have access to advice and protection from local support agencies or trade unions.
- For asylum seekers exclusion for the labour market created frustration based on feelings of dependency, powerlessness, of wasting skills and a desire to make a 'contribution'.
- Voluntary and community work were seen as ways of improving English, developing skills and enhancing longer term job prospects. It also provided participants with a desired sense of making a 'contribution'. This included participation in grass roots community groups for those legally barred from other forms of voluntary work.



### Conclusions

The social and economic experiences of new arrivals vary markedly by status. This emphasises the need for effective support services to be developed to meet the needs of all new arrivals, including asylum seekers, refugees, and migrant workers.

Both formal support mechanisms and informal grass-root networks developed by new arrival groups play a vital role and require ongoing financial support.

Migrant workers are less likely to access support services, have positive experiences of the local community or undertake learning. Long working hours can be seen as an obstacle to participating in non-work activities. Attention needs to be given to strategies for supporting migrant workers. These should include contributions from formal and informal support groups and crucially trade unions.

The actual and potential economic, cultural, social and community contribution of new arrivals in Barnsley is considerable. It is important to remember that despite the wealth of education, skills and experience of many new arrivals, people should not be reduced to a sum of their potential contribution to the local economy and community.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

This report examines the social and economic experiences of migrant workers, asylum seekers, refugees and overstayers living in the Barnsley area.

The report is based on research commissioned as part of the Investing in a Multi-Cultural Barnsley (IMCB) project, which is externally funded by HM Treasury and the Cabinet Office through the Invest to Save Budget. The aim of the ICMB is to encourage better integration through community cohesion, an improved knowledge base, the development of resources to assist new arrivals in Barnsley, and the implementation of a new integration strategy.

The research on which this report is based was undertaken with the aim of providing data on the social and labour market experiences of new arrivals in Barnsley, as a means of informing both the creation of resources to assist new arrivals and the development of a new integration strategy. Given the importance attached to integration by policy makers, the research focused on a series of themes pertinent to the challenges recently identified by the Home Office, of *achieving full potential, contributing to communities and accessing services* (Home Office, 2005) The specific themes covered by the project were as follows:

### Use of support services

- To what extent have new arrivals used support services in Barnsley and what are their perceptions towards these sources?
- What other sources do new arrivals use for support?

### Housing

- How have new arrivals experienced access to housing, via NASS, the local authority and the private sector?
- How do new arrivals view the conditions of housing they have been offered?
- Have new arrivals experienced housing 'churn' and if so what are the implications of this for inclusion in local communities?

### Access to healthcare

- What have been new arrivals' experiences of the UK healthcare system?
- Are healthcare needs being met?

### Access to education and training

- What are the educational qualifications of new arrivals in Barnsley?
- What are the experiences and attitudes of new arrivals in terms of skill acquisition in the UK?
- What are the experiences of new arrivals' families in terms of access to the mainstream education system?

### Access to the labour market and experiences of work in the UK

- What are the work experiences and skill levels of new arrivals prior to arriving in the UK?
- What proportion of new arrivals have worked in the UK?
- What type of work have new arrivals undertaken in the UK, in terms of skill levels, occupations and industries?
- What are the conditions of work for new arrivals, in terms of hours and pay?
- What sources have new arrivals used to find work in the UK?

- What problems, if any, have new arrivals experienced at work?
- Have people experienced opportunities for stability and progression, or have they experienced labour market churn?
- What are the attitudes of local employers to these groups of workers?

A key aim of the research was to explore any differences in the experiences of new arrivals according to status. For example, is it the case that asylum seekers and migrant workers differ in their access to support services and why? To what extent do changes in status affect the experiences of new arrivals? Fundamentally, some changes in status (from asylum seeker to refugee) affect the entitlement of new arrivals to indefinitely remain in the UK and to undertake paid work in the UK. Changes in status may also affect the entitlement of new arrivals to support services and housing. What are the experiences of new arrivals in this respect and what are their perceptions towards any status changes they have experienced?

## The research

The research was conducted between July 2005 and November 2006. To obtain a full picture of the social and economic experience of new arrivals in Barnsley, the research adopted a multi-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research data. There were four overlapping stages of the research. First, key themes were identified through initial meetings with the IMCB team, and through attendance at new arrival support groups. Secondly, semi structured interviews and focus groups were undertaken with 46 asylum seekers, migrant workers, refugees and overstayers. Thirdly, interviews were conducted with representatives of 24 key community support groups, local labour market agencies, government bodies and local employers between September 2005 and November 2006. Finally, a survey questionnaire was distributed to asylum seekers, migrant workers, refugees and overstayers between May and July 2006 to provide broad data on the experiences of new arrivals, in particular their access to housing, medicine and support, their qualifications and access to learning and, where applicable, their labour market experience in their home country and in Barnsley. Further details on the interviews and survey are provided below.

## Interviews with new arrivals in Barnsley

A total of 46 new arrivals were interviewed between July 2005 and July 2006. Many respondents were interviewed on multiple occasions throughout the research. As a result, these interviews generated, in many cases, detailed biographical accounts of the experiences of new arrivals both in their home country and since their arrival in Barnsley.

The techniques used in this phase of the research were one-to-one interviews and focus groups. Both the interviews and focus groups were semi-structured in nature. Key themes covered in the interviews included access to support services, housing and medical care, educational background and learning, and voluntary and paid work experience both in their home country and (where appropriate) in the UK. The interviews and focus groups also focused on the aspirations and expectations of new arrivals. Whilst these core themes were covered in most interviews and focus groups, the semi-structured nature of the research instruments also allowed for the discussion of other emergent themes and issues. The average length of interview was around forty-five minutes, with some lasting for up to two hours. In a number of cases, the interviews were undertaken with new arrivals and another member of their family, such as a partner or child.

Interviewees were identified through attendance at support group meetings such as the Barnsley Refugee and Asylum Seekers' Support Service (BRASS), via support organisations, through attendance at local community events and conferences, and via local employers and other labour market agencies. Snowball sampling, where respondents identified other potential interviewees also formed an important part of the research process.

Of the 46 new arrivals interviewed, 22 were men and 24 were women. 21 were asylum seekers, 18 were migrant workers, 5 were refugees and 2 were overstayers. The new arrivals originated from 22 different countries (see concluding section of this chapter, below). The term 'new arrivals' is perhaps a misleading one, since the length of time that interviewees had been in Barnsley varied considerably, from 1 day to over 15 years.

## Interviews with support groups, local labour market agencies, government bodies and employers

24 interviews were conducted with representatives from key support groups, government bodies, local labour market agencies and employers. These included representatives from some of the main formally established groups that provide support to asylum seekers and refugees, such as BRASS, representatives from key housing providers, including Safe Haven, interviews with a large firm in Barnsley employing migrant workers and interviews with local trade unions representatives. The interviews were conducted between July 2005 and November 2006. The themes covered varied from interview to interview, dependent upon the role of the representative and the function of their organisation/service. The aim of these interviews was to develop an in-depth understanding of the roles of different support groups and agencies in the Barnsley area and their experiences with new arrivals. The interviews lasted between 15 minutes and 2 hours.

## Survey of new arrivals

As part of the research, a survey of asylum seekers, migrant workers, refugees and overstayers was designed. This was distributed between May and July 2006. The survey aimed to provide data on the social and economic experiences of new arrivals, in particular their access to housing, medicine and support, their qualifications and access to learning and, where applicable, their labour market experience in their home country and in the UK. The survey was available in English, Farsi, Russian and Polish language versions. A sample of new arrivals was generated from a range of sources, including the Barnsley Asylum Team's mailing list of asylum seekers and refugees. Key representatives of support groups, government bodies, local labour market agencies and local employers also helped with the distribution of the questionnaire. The questionnaires were also distributed by the research team at community events, migrant worker information days, community cohesion conferences and via attendance at support groups. In total 400 questionnaires were distributed. 113 responses were obtained, constituting a response rate of 28 per cent. This represents a good response rate, given the well-established difficulties of accessing samples of migrant workers, asylum seekers and refugees. Estimates compiled by the IMCB team suggest a total population of around 2000 new arrivals in Barnsley. Our survey sample of 113 respondents thus represents over five per cent of the total population of new arrivals.

In terms of the composition of respondents to the survey, *Figure 1* reveals that the majority of the sample (52 per cent) were migrant workers, 28 per cent were asylum seekers, and 15 per cent had indefinite or special leave to remain. Five per cent of the sample had been refused asylum. The sample comprised workers from over 20 countries of origin, the most common being Poland (39 per cent of the total) Latvia (8 per cent), Zimbabwe (6 per cent), Lithuania (5 per cent), Albania (4 per cent), Iran (4 per cent) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (3 per cent). *Figure 2* shows the region of origin of new arrivals in the sample. The most common region of origin was EU accession countries (52 per cent of the sample), followed by Africa (14 per cent), Asia (14 per cent), former Soviet States (12 per cent), other non-EU-accession countries (4 per cent) and other European countries (5 per cent).

Figure 1: Status of respondents to the survey (%)

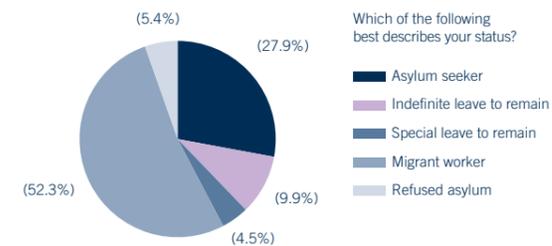
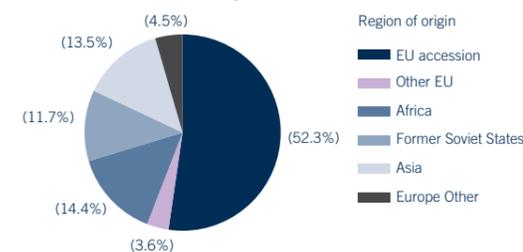


Figure 2: Region of origin of respondents to the survey (%)



In terms of personal characteristics, 46 per cent of the survey sample were male and 54 per cent were female. Respondents were relatively young when compared to the age distribution of the population of Barnsley. Thirty-two per cent of the sample were aged between 16 and 24, and a further 39 per cent being aged between 25 and 34. Seven out of ten of the sample were thus aged between 16 and 34, compared to around one-third of the 16+ population of Barnsley (Barnsley NHS Primary Care Trust, 2004). This profile is in line with official estimates of the ages of new arrivals in the UK (see for example, Home Office 2006), and indicates that our sample is representative of the new arrival population. An even higher proportion of migrant workers in the survey (77 per cent) were aged between 16 and 34. Again, this

distribution is in line with other studies of the migrant working population in the UK (see Robinson, 2002).

Over half of the sample of new arrivals (57 per cent) had lived in Barnsley for less than a year. However, a substantial proportion (27 per cent) had lived in Barnsley for more than 2 years (see *Figure 3* below). Some had lived in other areas of the UK prior to coming to Barnsley. Over half of the sample (58 per cent) had been in the UK for a year or more (*Figure 4*). Migrant workers from EU accession countries had, on average, lived in Barnsley for shorter periods of time than other groups. 90 per cent of those with indefinite leave to remain and 53 per cent of asylum seekers had lived in Barnsley for a year or more. In contrast, only 22 per cent of migrant workers had lived in Barnsley for more than a year. Of those new arrivals that had been in Barnsley for 2 years or more, one third were asylum seekers, 23 per cent had indefinite or special leave to remain, 20 per cent were migrant workers and 17 per cent had been refused asylum.

Figure 3: Length of time lived in Barnsley for survey respondents (%)

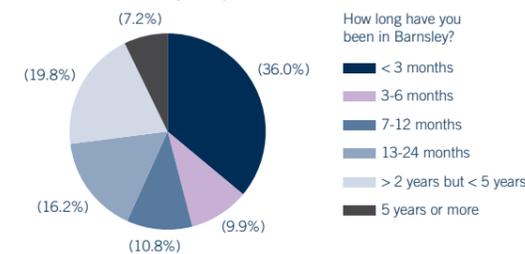
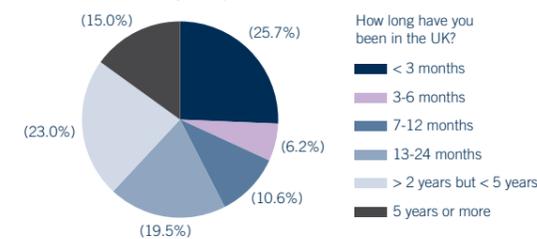


Figure 4: Length of time lived in the UK for survey respondents (%)



## Conclusion

The interviews, focus groups and survey together allowed the research team to build up a detailed picture of the social and economic experiences of asylum seekers, migrant workers and refugees. In addition to the formal interviews and survey, the researchers spent a great deal of time attending support groups and community events over the period of study, to build up their awareness and understanding of the experiences of new arrivals in Barnsley. As noted earlier, the 113 responses from the survey constitute over 5 per cent of the new arrival

population in Barnsley, and provides a sound base for the analysis of the social and economic experience of asylum seekers, refugees and migrant workers. Along with the interviews, new arrivals from 33 countries of origin participated in the research. These countries are depicted in *Figure 5*, below. It should be borne in mind, however, that the experiences recorded in this report largely reflect the views and experiences of those who are going through or have completed the formal asylum process, or those who were working or living legally in Barnsley as migrant workers and refugees. Some information, from the survey and the interviews, was obtained from overstayers, although overstayers represented a small proportion of the total number of responses. Caution should be exercised therefore, in generalising the findings to all new arrivals in Barnsley.

Figure 5: Countries of origin of new arrivals in Barnsley (survey and interviews)

Columbia	New Guinea	Guatemala
Chile	Ukraine	Estonia
Latvia	Iraq	Iran
Congo	Poland	Portugal
Lithuania	Albania	Sudan
Zimbabwe	South Africa	Pakistan
Azerbaijan	Morocco	Chechnya
Hungary	Turkestan	Chad
Eritrea	Mongolia	Nigeria
Georgia	Belarus	Nepal
Yugoslavia	Cameroon	Russia

The remainder of the report is structured as follows. Chapter 2 looks at new arrivals' access to support services. Chapter 3 looks at their experiences of housing, healthcare, schooling and their experiences of inclusion in the local community. Chapter 4 looks at the qualifications, learning and work experience of new arrivals. Chapter 5 looks at the realities of work in the UK for those new arrivals who had experienced it, and the work aspirations of all new arrivals. Chapter 6 draws some conclusions and recommendations.

## Chapter 2

### Access to support services

This chapter looks at new arrivals' experiences of support services, which has been identified by the Home Office as critical to their integration in local communities.

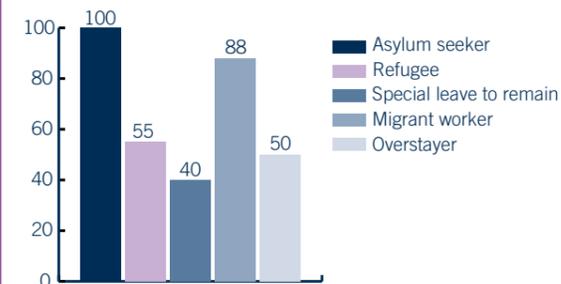
(see for example, Home Office 2005)

The chapter draws on evidence from the survey and in-depth interviews to describe new arrivals' experiences and their perceptions towards formal support services and their use of more informal networks of support. A key concern of the chapter is to examine whether the experiences of new arrivals vary according to status (see for example Anderson *et al.*, 2006). For example, is it the case that migrant workers are less likely to access support services than those who are going through the formal asylum seeking process? Do changes in status affect new arrivals in terms of their access to support services? The chapter does find some key differences in the experiences of arrivals with different status. Amongst asylum seekers there was relatively widespread use of formally established support groups and services, however migrant workers made little use of these groups. Alongside the use of formal groups and support services, new arrivals also made extensive use of more informal networks of support as a means of seeking guidance and advice, sharing experiences and keeping active and busy. These informal groups, along with the more formalised support services, appeared to be critical to the social inclusion of new arrivals in Barnsley.

### Accessing support services

The survey of new arrivals asked respondents about their use of a range of support services, including support workers from Barnsley Asylum Team, then based at Belmont Induction Centre, Barnsley Refugee Action Group (BRAG), Barnsley Black and Ethnic Minority Initiative (BBEMI), Barnsley Refugee and Asylum Support Service (BRASS), Citizens Advice Bureau, Safe Haven, Refugee Action, Refugee Council and various country of origin support groups. 44 per cent of the sample had used at least one of these formally established support services. The likelihood of accessing support services varied markedly among asylum seekers, refugees and migrant workers. Asylum seekers were much more likely to have accessed at least one of the support groups and services than other groups (see Figure 6 below). All asylum seekers had accessed at least one of the support services available, compared to only 12 per cent of migrant workers. Amongst asylum seekers, the most commonly used support services were Support Workers from Barnsley Asylum Team, BRASS, the Refugee Council, BBEMI, and the Citizen's Advice Bureau. Amongst migrant workers, the most commonly used support service was the Citizen's Advice Bureau (albeit only by 5 per cent of migrant workers).

Figure 6: Access by new arrivals to any support service (%)



Asylum seekers spoke positively about the support and assistance provided by support workers from Barnsley Asylum Team in terms of completing application forms, finding schools, doctors and housing and providing a basic orientation towards the local area and amenities. Key workers were also seen by new arrival asylum seekers as vital in providing initial orientation and acting as an ongoing point of contact.

Support groups including BBEMI, BRASS and Quaker House were used for a range of reasons. The social function of these groups was important. Phrases such as 'it is a good place to come and meet people' or 'it is useful for socialising and talking' were repeatedly used by interviewees when describing the function of groups including BRASS and Quaker House. A second important function of these support groups was as a means of keeping active and busy. The view of some interviewees was that the asylum seeking process, and in particular the restrictions that the process placed on undertaking paid work, could result in extensive periods of inactivity. Support groups such as BRASS offered an opportunity to keep busy and provided an alternative to staying at home. A third reason for using support groups was as a means of improving English language skills. English language classes were regularly run through BRASS. Quaker House, also offered 'confidence classes' to help improve language skills. These confidence classes were mentioned by a number of new arrivals as useful in gaining English language skills in a supportive environment. Support groups also offered a means of developing language skills through informal conversation with other asylum seekers, refugees, and with the first language English speakers who also attended these groups. Fourthly, support groups offered a means through which asylum seekers could access information and advice. One asylum seeker described support groups as an important 'gateway to official sources'. When this respondent had received a letter from the Home Office and needed help to understand and respond to the letter, he took it to BRASS to seek advice from other asylum seekers and BRASS volunteers and to find out about official sources of assistance. This role for support groups such as BRAG, BRASS, BBEMI and Quaker House, as a means of finding out information and sharing experiences was identified by numerous interview respondents.

Many of the interviewees also made extensive use of other informal networks, as a means of drawing on the expertise and experiences of other new arrivals. In some instances, these informal networks coincided with formal support groups, comprising for example, of a sub-group of those attending BRASS. In other instances, however, respondents felt disenfranchised by some existing support groups. Some expressed the view that existing support groups had narrow agendas and were not

meeting their particular needs. One respondent argued that existing support groups were useful for 'socialising and playing games', but that other grass-roots, or informal groups were also needed to fully address the needs and problems encountered by asylum seekers, for example, in the event of a negative asylum decision. Disenfranchisement from existing support groups had, in part, been the stimulus for the development of other grass roots or more informal networks of new arrivals. These grass-roots organisations served a vital function as a means of sharing information, discussing common problems and suggesting solutions. According to one interviewee:

*'These (informal groups) are important....they are like a network of organizations through which you can spread information'.*

The importance of these networks for accessing support and as a means of facilitating social inclusion cannot be overstated. Formal groups were seen as useful by many asylum seekers and refugees for the reasons noted above. Yet, on numerous occasions interviewees spontaneously described the invaluable assistance and guidance that they had also received through more informal networks and grass-roots, bottom-up organisations:

*'It is good to speak about what you're going through. You feel lost and alone with what you're doing. The system really lets you down.'*

*'We have been helping a guy from Cameroon. He has been given Indefinite Leave to Remain. If you can help one person then it is all worthwhile'*

One such group had mobilised large-scale support against the negative asylum decision received by the founder of Barnsley International Football Club. This included lobbying and petitioning against a negative asylum decision. Other examples of support and community mobilisation were also widely reported in our interviews, including the organising of demonstrations, financial advice, guidance on legal issues, and assistance in preparing for court hearings. Some interviewees who had lived in other areas of the UK expressed the view that there were more community based support groups in Barnsley than in other parts of the country.

Some of these existed on a relatively informal footing, but others had, over time, secured a more formal status as a recognised community organisation, the formation of the Migrants and Refugee Community Organisation (MARCO) in October 2006, for example. In other cases, however, attempts to formalise grass-roots organisations had met with difficulties. One respondent had sought to arrange country of origin support group to provide English language classes for parents and children from that country. The organiser had applied for cultural support from the local authority and the Development Agency, but was frustrated at the length of time taken to process applications and the difficulties encountered in understanding and meeting the criteria for accessing funds to establish this group.

What is important to recognise is that the existence of both formal and more informal networks are vital to the social inclusion of new arrivals in Barnsley. As noted above, formal support groups and services were widely used by new arrivals, for a range of reasons. Many of the interviewees described their use of both informal and formal networks, and for many, they served the same functions, in terms of keeping active, sharing experiences and improving language skills. It may be the case that these formal groups do not meet the needs of all new arrivals, however, some formal groups, funded through central or local government money have specific aims and objectives to meet the needs of particular new arrival groups. As the profile of new arrivals changes, too, the support needs of new arrivals may also change. This can be seen in the attempts by some grass-roots groups to adapt to the recent growth in new arrivals from the new EU accession countries. As one interviewee, involved in a grass-roots refugee support group described:

*'The grass-roots organisations are better....we are debating whether we should be a refugee group or a migrant group – whether we should include migrant workers. Some say no, I say yes. They need help, they face isolation and exploitation.'*

Furthermore, it may be the case that these informal, grass-roots organisations may also be able to more effectively mobilise the needs of new arrivals collectively, as they are unconstrained by the necessarily narrower agendas and objectives of formal, government funded support groups. Over time, these informal grass-roots organisations may establish themselves on a more formal footing, although it is vital that there is support (both financial and bureaucratic) to allow this to occur. Indeed, it is important to remember that many of the new formalised services in Barnsley, such as BRASS, began as grass-roots initiatives.

## Access to support services by different groups of new arrivals

In comparison to asylum seekers and refugees, migrant workers had accessed very few of the services and support groups available in Barnsley. This low usage can be attributed to three reasons. First, migrant workers had, on average, lived in Barnsley for shorter periods of time than asylum seekers and those with indefinite leave to remain, making it less likely that they would have encountered support groups and services available. Many migrant workers reported that they were unaware of many of the support groups available to new arrivals in Barnsley. Secondly, migrant workers typically spent a large proportion of their time, often up to 80 hours per week, at work (see Chapter 4). Furthermore, in many of the workplaces where interviewees were employed, the majority of those employed were migrant workers from EU accession countries. The long hours spent in the workplace meant that it was difficult for many migrant workers to access many of the services available in Barnsley or to attend those support groups that ran during the working day. Given that a large proportion of their time was spent at work, many migrant workers sought support, guidance and advice from fellow migrant workers, often from the same country of origin. As one migrant worker from Lithuania described:

*'We mostly deal with foreigners. We have little contact with the English. There's a problem of language. Secondly there is not much time to meet people. Everything is with foreigners. There's no time to meet others. I spend most of my time here at work.'*

Thirdly, many of the services available (such as Belmont and BRASS) were perceived by migrant workers as being targeted specifically towards the needs of asylum seekers and/or refugees. A number of migrant workers expressed the view that there were few formal support groups available to meet their particular needs. Some initiatives in Barnsley had sought to address the gaps in support for migrant workers. For example, the Investing in a Multicultural Barnsley Team organised an information day in March 2006, which was held at the Barnsley Polish Club, and directed towards the needs and concerns of migrant workers. The aim of the event was to provide a 'one stop shop' where new arrivals could obtain advice and raise any concerns or problems that they were encountering. There were representatives at the event from Belmont, the IMCB project, Barnsley Housing Association, JobCentreplus, the Benefits Agency, local trade unions, private employment agencies and a training services company. Leaflets advertising the event were produced in Polish and the event was attended by over 30 migrant workers, including new arrivals from Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The event revealed some

of the issues and concerns faced by migrant workers in Barnsley, relating to working conditions, pay, housing, and entitlement to benefits. The attendance at the event and range of issues raised indicate the need for more systematic support services for migrant workers in Barnsley.

One factor which critically affected eligibility to support services was a change in status. Some of the most common changes in status encountered were as follows. For some, expiring work permits had led to a change in their status to asylum seeker. Many other new arrivals in Barnsley saw their status change overnight from asylum seeker to migrant, when eight accession countries joined the European Union on May 1st 2004. Decisions on asylum applications also resulted in a change of status to 'refugee', 'special leave to remain' or 'overstay'. Each of these changes of status was accompanied by changes in eligibility for support. New arrivals from EU accession countries, for example, were no longer entitled to NASS provided accommodation from May 1st, 2004 (see Chapter 3 on housing below). Negative asylum decisions also resulted in a removal of NASS housing and other support mechanisms. Whilst counselling and advice was provided by key workers and others in the lead up to asylum decisions, eligibility to support services was often removed very quickly after a negative asylum decision. Following negative asylum decisions, those remaining in the UK were left with few formal avenues for seeking support. When asylum seekers were granted indefinite leave to remain, many forms of support, including NASS provided housing, were removed. Interviewees perceived that there were gaps in support for those who had received positive decisions:

*'When people get a decision they don't know what to do next, they don't get any support.'*

*'They think that when you get your status, that's it, their responsibility to you is over.'*

The process of seeking asylum, and the changes in status that this entailed, had a negative effect on the morale of many new arrivals, and in some cases profoundly shaped perceptions of their own identity. One woman described the process of moving from being a worker in the UK to an asylum seeker, following the expiration of a work permit:

*'It has a demoralising effect. It takes everything you believe in, it takes everything you are. I was brought up to do things for myself, but then suddenly your life is not your own. The Home Office tells you where to live. You can't work – they decide your fate and you don't have a say. You become non existent.'*

Others described how the process of seeking asylum led to them feeling a sense of helplessness and an inability to plan for the future:

*'Nothing depends on our wishes... its not for me to decide...it depends on someone else'*

*'You can't do anything. You can't plan anything. You come to this country and you think it will be ok... you want to make a contribution but you can't do anything'*

## Conclusion

This chapter has outlined new arrivals experiences of support services in Barnsley. There was relatively widespread use of formal support services by asylum seekers and those with refugee status. However, the use of support services by migrant workers was much more limited. Changes in status were often accompanied by changes in eligibility for support services, and this was a source of anxiety and uncertainty for many. New arrivals used support services for a range of reasons, and many described their use of support services in positive terms. Amongst some, there was a feeling of disenfranchisement from the support services currently available and this had been the stimulus in part for the evolution of alternative, grass-roots networks. The use of these grass roots and other informal networks was also widespread amongst new arrivals. The chapter has argued that the development and sustenance of both formal and informal networks of support services are vital to the social inclusion of new arrivals in Barnsley.

## Chapter 3

### *Housing, schooling, healthcare and relations with the local community*

This chapter looks at the experiences of new arrivals with regards to housing, healthcare and relations with the local community. As with the support services considered in the previous chapter, these issues have been identified as being critical to the integration of new arrivals.

(see Home Office, 2005; Phillips, 2006)

The chapter begins by examining experiences of housing, looking at the type of accommodation that new arrivals live in, and who they live with. This is followed by consideration of attitudes towards housing, and the experiences of new arrivals when they change status, for example from asylum seeker to refugee status. The chapter then considers access to healthcare needs by new arrivals, highlighting in particular key differences in access amongst migrant workers on the one hand and asylum seekers and refugees on the other. The chapter then moves on to look at the experience of new arrival families in terms of accessing schooling, before moving on to look at relations between new arrivals and others in the local community. The chapter points to a number of factors which seem to be critical in shaping the experiences of new arrivals in terms of relations with the local community. Experiences varied according to status. A particular barrier to integration for migrant workers was the long periods of time that they spent in the workplace. Other factors which seemed to be important to positive experiences for new arrivals within the local community were whether new arrivals were living as part of a family in houses in the local community or whether they live in shared flats with non family members or alone; and whether new arrivals had confidence in speaking English.

### Housing

Respondents to the survey were asked about their experiences of housing. *Table 1* shows the main sources of housing for new arrivals. The vast majority of asylum seekers had lived in accommodation provided by NASS, via Belmont or Safe Haven (94 per cent). Migrant workers, in contrast, had typically lived in private rented accommodation (75 per cent). Amongst those with refugee status or special leave to remain, the most common experiences were living in private accommodation and accommodation provided by the local authority through Berneslai Homes. 6 respondents (3 migrant workers, 1 asylum seeker, 1 refugee and 1 overstayer) had lived in accommodation provided by their employer. In interviews, migrant workers also reported that their employer had put them in contact with a private landlord once they had started work. This may explain the survey finding that as many as 28 per cent of migrant workers had experienced employers who deducted money from their wages for accommodation (see Chapter 5 for more details).

*Table 1: Experience of housing provision in Barnsley by status*

	Had lived in accommodation provided by... (% of those of each status)						n
	NASS via Belmont	Housing association	NASS via Safe Haven	Private Landlord	Local authority (Berneslai Homes)	Employer	
Asylum seeker	87	0	7	3	3	3	31
Refugee	10	0	10	40	30	10	10
Special leave to remain	20	20	0	40	0	0	5
Migrant worker	4	0	0	75	7	5	57
Overstayer	50	0	0	33	0	16	6
Whole sample	31	1	3	48	7	6	109

*Note: figures may sum to more or less than 100 across each row due to rounding, because respondents were able to select more than one category of housing, and because some respondents did not provide an answer to the question.*

On average, respondents lived in accommodation with 3 people, although this figure was higher for migrant workers who lived, on average, in accommodation with 4 people. For asylum seekers, refugees and overstayers, the most common arrangement was to live in accommodation only with other members of their family. Seventy-one per cent of asylum seekers lived in a house with only their family members. Interviews with housing providers confirmed that the majority of housing stock available in Barnsley for asylum seekers was in family houses. For migrant workers, the most common arrangement was to live in a single room in a shared house or flat (40 per cent) or in a shared house with both family and non-family members (26 per cent). Interviews with migrant workers revealed that many lived in bedsit accommodation in houses with friends or work colleagues, as this was perceived to be the cheapest form of accommodation available.

Amongst asylum seekers, there was general satisfaction with the initial process of being allocated to NASS housing, through Belmont or Safe Haven. A number of interviewees had encountered problems with their housing, relating to the poor condition and maintenance of properties. In many instances, maintenance issues had been effectively resolved by contacting the landlord or housing provider. Some of those living in private accommodation described their difficulties in getting landlords to deal with maintenance problems. In these circumstances, new arrivals were often unclear about potential forms of redress and sources of advice to get problems resolved. One asylum seeker also stated that they had not raised concerns about their NASS accommodation for fear that it would prejudice their asylum application.

One of the most common housing concerns raised in interviews was the issue of churn. Many asylum seekers reported that they had lived in a number of different flats or houses. In some cases, requests to move had been made by asylum seekers, because of the poor condition of properties or the distance of the accommodation from a school for children, for example. In other cases, asylum seekers were unclear about why they had been asked to move from one house to another and in these such circumstances they perceived that the process of allocating accommodation was inequitable and lacked transparency.

Housing churn was also commonplace when new arrivals changed status. For many, the loss of state-provided accommodation was the most important factor contributing to the feelings of instability, uncertainty and demoralisation that often accompanied changes in status. The overnight change of status from asylum seeker to migrant worker on May 1st 2004 experienced by many new arrivals meant that they were no longer entitled to NASS provided accommodation. In these circumstances, the loss of housing often occurred very quickly, leaving migrants with a short time period to look for alternative accommodation in the private sector. Most of those experiencing this change in status did receive guidance on finding private rented accommodation in Barnsley in the lead up to accession (and in some cases following accession). However, the acute time pressures to find alternative living arrangements sometimes resulted in poor decisions being made about private accommodation, with migrants then being tied-in for 6 months or a year (see *case study 1*). Positive and negative asylum decisions also resulted in a loss of NASS accommodation, and the notice period given for moving out of such accommodation was typically short, sometimes as little as 7 days. As with other changes of status, key workers did provide guidance and advice on the transition. However, further support could be provided for some asylum seekers in this position, through the establishment of 'Move on' projects, which are in place in other areas of the UK (such as Gateshead, Sheffield and Leicester), but not in Barnsley. These provide support (including housing) for those asylum seekers who had recently received a positive decision, and who were about to lose their eligibility to support services, including NASS accommodation. One new arrival and her son had recently received a positive asylum decision and were looking to relocate to a different part of the country, where other members of her family had already settled. However, they wished to remain in Barnsley whilst the son completed his secondary school education. They had received a notice period after which they would have to move out of their NASS provided accommodation and were therefore left with the prospect of having no accommodation for a period of time whilst the son completed his schooling.

**CASE STUDY 1**

**This husband and wife came to the UK with their two children in 2001 and whilst seeking asylum between 2001 and May 2004, they had lived in NASS accommodation.**

When Latvia joined the EU in 2004 they lost their entitlement to NASS provided accommodation and they had to vacate the property within a month. The family found it difficult to adapt to this sudden change. Although they received some guidance on how to find private rented accommodation, the short period which they had to find alternative accommodation forced them into making a quick decision.

The accommodation turned out to be unsuitable, yet the family were tied into a six month contract. The landlord threw the family out of the flat before the six-month period was complete. This occurred after an employer had failed to credit wages to the husband's bank account before a holiday period, which meant he had no funds to pay the rent. The family sought advice from Wellington House, and was offered alternative temporary hostel accommodation. The family have lived in 3 private rented properties since their change in status in 2004. At one point, between accommodation, the husband and wife lived temporarily in their car, whilst their children lived in friends' houses.

The family have put their names down to be considered for a council house, but perceive that they have little chance of 'reaching the top of the queue'.

**Healthcare provision**

As Table 2 shows, the majority of survey respondents (65 per cent) had registered with a doctor. A much smaller proportion (27 per cent) had managed to register with a dentist. There were clear differences in registration rates amongst those that had been through the asylum seeking process compared to migrant workers. For example, 97 per cent of asylum seekers had been able to register with a doctor, compared to only 39 per cent of migrant workers. Information on registering with a doctor was included as part of the initial orientation process undertaken with all asylum seekers. In many instances, key workers escorted asylum seekers to the doctor's surgery to help them to register. Registration rates with dentists were six times higher amongst asylum seekers (56 per cent) than for migrant workers (9 per cent). Thirty per cent of the survey sample had required specialist healthcare or hospital treatment. Overall, 56 per cent of respondents to the survey felt that their healthcare needs were being met. Perhaps surprisingly, given the markedly different registration rates reported above, there was little difference between migrant workers and other groups in terms of their perceptions as to whether their healthcare needs were being met. Although it was not a principal aim of the interviews to examine healthcare issues, respondents did self-report a range of medical problems, including depression, stress and the experience of trauma. In some instances, these respondents had not sought assistance for their problems. It is clear that for asylum seekers the experiences which had led them to seek asylum in the UK continued to dominate their daily lives, and shaped their experiences in Barnsley to a much greater degree than the other issues considered in this report, such as housing, healthcare and work. However, this is not to downplay the importance of housing, healthcare, employment etc. to the successful integration of asylum seekers in Barnsley.

Table 2: Access to healthcare and differences in access by status

	All sample (%)	Asylum seekers (%)	Refugees (%)	Special leave to remain (%)	Migrant workers (%)	Overstayers (%)
Registered with a doctor	65	97	91	60	39	100
Registered with a dentist	27	56	36	0	9	50
Needed specialist medical attention/hospital treatment	30	41	36	20	30	67
Do you feel that your healthcare needs are being met?	56	50	70	50	56	50

N=113

**Schooling**

For new arrivals with children of school age, a primary concern was to find a suitable school. The interviews conducted pointed to widespread satisfaction with schooling arrangements for new arrivals. Key workers, formal support groups such as BRASS, churches, and more informal support groups were all used as a means of identifying local schools, and navigating the application process for school places. Another important source of support in this regard was neighbours and existing members of the local community. Numerous interviewees reported receiving invaluable assistance in finding a school from their neighbours.

Whilst some interviewees reported that their children had experienced difficulties at school, including isolated instances of bullying, in general there was satisfaction with schooling. Teachers were seen as a valuable source of support and were perceived by parents to play a positive role in helping their children to settle in. Indeed, many parents reported that their children had integrated into the local community much more rapidly than they had themselves. The ability of children to acquire language skills more rapidly than their parents was seen to be important in this regard. Parents also described how their children had been able to quickly forge friendships at school and with other children in the local community. In the words of one interviewee:

*'For the children it is fine. They fit in. Kids just look at them like they are other children. We came in the summer and straight away everyone knew her in the street. People were bringing their kids to play with her.'*

One interviewee, who had recently moved out of Barnsley after three years of living in the area noted that his children still travelled regularly from Leeds to meet the friends they had made whilst at school in Barnsley.

Whilst these examples point to some positive experiences of new arrival children, it is important also to recognise that children face many of the same challenges as their parents. For example, children were profoundly affected by the upheavals associated with changes in status. As noted above, changes in status were often accompanied by changes in accommodation, either to a different part of Barnsley, or to a different area of the UK. For children, this often entailed moving to a different school, in some instances when examination periods were relatively close. Parents seeking asylum were also acutely aware of the aspirations of their children for the future, and that these goals often conflicted with the realities of ongoing asylum applications. One interviewee described the career aspirations of his son, aged 14, who was settled in a school in Barnsley and had demonstrated a particular interest in drama. His goal was to become an actor, yet his father admitted that whilst his asylum application was still being considered, the future was still very uncertain, and his sons' career goals would have to be placed 'on hold'. Another respondent and her daughter had received a negative asylum decision but could not return to their home country because of the ongoing situation there. The daughter had studied at Barnsley College and 'come out with flying colours'. She had received an offer of a place at university to further her studies. However, she had had to defer entry as she could not afford to go because the University wanted to charge her as an international student because she had no Indefinite Leave to Remain. Both the mother and the daughter were frustrated by the process:

*Mother: 'She will be a benefit to this country... we will see if there are any scholarships this year... these are children that are doing well. Children of good character. She has deferred her place.'*

*Daughter: 'Hopefully I can go this year...scholarships are not for people without status...the costs are too much.'*

There was also evidence that the burdens and responsibilities associated with integration and the asylum seeking process were also being borne by children, due to their superior language skills. In a number of cases children's language skills were essential to helping parents to communicate with landlords, teachers, government officials, key workers and members of the local community. To give two specific examples, children had assisted parents in translating letters received from the Home Office about their asylum application, and had also communicated problems about accommodation to landlords.

Perceptions amongst new arrivals about their relations with the local community were mixed. Many interviewees described very positive relations with their neighbours and reported that they had settled well in the local community. However, others indicated that they had had little contact with neighbours and the local community. There were some instances reported in the interviews of specific problems with neighbours and local residents, yet these appeared to be relatively few and far between. There were a number of key factors which seemed to be important in determining the extent to which new arrivals had had positive experiences with their neighbours and others in the local community. First, perceptions of relations with the local community varied according to status. Migrant workers were often limited in the extent to which they could interact with neighbours and members of the local community by their long working hours. For many migrant workers, social relations were limited to work colleagues, family and housemates (who were often from the same country of origin). Secondly, there was some evidence to suggest that families living in communities were more likely to have had a positive experience with neighbours. In some cases, children had been the starting point for developing social relations with neighbours. Some interviewees reported that social relations with their neighbours had begun when their children had started playing together. Parenting issues provided an experience which was common to new arrivals and those already established in the community, from which social relations could develop. In other cases, as noted earlier, neighbours had played a key role in helping new arrivals to find a school for their children. Thirdly, interaction with the local community varied according to language skills. Those whose English language skills were well-developed had the confidence to engage in conversation with neighbours. In contrast, those who were less confident about their English indicated that interaction with members of the local community was limited to basic pleasantries. According to one recent new arrival seeking asylum: 'you say hello, how are you, and then its "bye-bye"'.

## Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the experiences of new arrivals in relation to housing, healthcare, schooling and relations with the local community. The chapter has highlighted key differences in experiences by status. Migrant workers in particular had had little state support in terms of housing provision and were much less likely to have registered with doctors or dentists. Changes in status, from asylum seeker to migrant worker and from asylum seeker to refugee or overstayer also had profound effects on the experiences of new arrivals. The loss of NASS provided accommodation, and the short time period over which notice periods were served, was a particular concern. There is a need for ongoing support for those experiencing changes in status. A 'Move on' programme, in place in other areas of the country, would help those moving from asylum seeker to refugee status.

The chapter has also highlighted that integration is a family issue. Children of new arrivals share the problems and challenges faced by their parents. Indeed, in some instances children are bearing many of the responsibilities associated with arriving and settling in Barnsley, particularly in cases where children have more advanced English language skills than their parents. The upheavals associated with changes in status also affected children, and during the process of seeking asylum, the aspirations and goals of children, like those of their parents, were 'on hold'. Many of those interviewed reported positive experiences with regards to their relations with the local community. Those living in houses with their family appeared to have more positive experiences in the local community, compared to those in multiple occupancy housing, as did those with more advanced English language skills. This suggests that special attention needs to be directed towards those living in multiple occupancy housing, and those whose language skills are underdeveloped. There is also a particular challenge to the integration of migrant workers into the local community: the long hours spent by migrant workers in the workplace appears to be a significant barrier to the development of contact with members of the local community.



# Chapter 4

## Qualifications, Skills and Employment

This chapter looks at the qualifications and work experience of people who are new arrivals to the Barnsley area.

The chapter draws on evidence from the survey and the in-depth interviews to describe new arrivals' learning and employment experiences in both their country of origin and since their arrival in the UK. The evidence demonstrates a wealth of educational achievement and occupational experience associated with the new arrival community. For example, the percentage of respondents to the survey with degree level education is higher than the recorded average for Barnsley (NOMIS, 2006), and two-thirds of respondents report having vocational or work based qualifications. Many of those who participated in the research have also undertaken learning since their arrival in the UK. The chapter reports the types of courses people have taken and looks at the contribution of learning to peoples' sense of participation and engagement. Two-thirds of the people surveyed also have work experience in their country of origin, ranging from semi-skilled work to trades crafts and professional occupations. These results are disaggregated by status to explore any differences between people associated with the asylum seeking process and migrant workers. For those people who have had experience of employment in the UK the types of jobs were on the whole clustered around unskilled or semi-skilled, labour intensive work. This suggests a significant under-utilisation of skills for those in employment.

It is important to recognise the various groups of people covered in this chapter. The status of the individual obviously has a significant bearing, as asylum seekers are excluded from the working legally in the UK. Amongst those people seeking asylum there were some who had previous experience of working legally in the UK. There were others who were willing to speak of their experiences of working within the unofficial economy. There were also people who had gone through the asylum process and received a positive decision granting leave to remain in the UK and the legal entitlement to seek employment. There were others who had received a negative decision, some of whom remained in the UK whilst appealing against this decision and others who had immersed themselves in the unofficial economy as 'over-stayers' beyond the asylum process. A significant proportion of those new arrivals who participated in the research were legally entitled to work in the UK, either having been granted leave to remain in the UK or as migrant workers from other EU countries. Within this latter group there were people who had experienced a change of status whilst living in the UK as a consequence of their country of origin joining the EU in 2004.

### Education and Qualifications

The survey of new arrivals asked people about their education and qualifications. The results show that 87 per cent of respondents had at least high school qualifications. A significant proportion of new arrivals had been through higher education, with 21 per cent of people holding a university degree. It is notable that this proportion of people with higher education experience is above the average for the local area, which is around 15 per cent (NOMIS, 2006). Furthermore, 8 per cent of new arrivals surveyed reported holding a Postgraduate qualification in addition to a first degree. It is also notable that 80 per cent of those new arrivals with higher education qualifications had come to the UK as asylum seekers, and had either passed through the system or were awaiting a response to their application.

The issues of higher education and continuous learning were recurrent themes during the interviews with asylum seekers. As demonstrated in the survey data, a significant proportion of people had been through higher education and they were keen to have the opportunity to apply their knowledge and skills in the UK. This was often related to desire for further study, in the UK. As one young male asylum seeker described:

*"(I am doing) a course, a computer course. I am trying to do something, to learn something... I think about doing more (study). I hope to do more. Computers are everywhere, everything is on computer. In the past I have done many things. I was studying in university. I finished my degree in engineering electrician... I was working, just for a short time, after finishing my degree... my work was regarding my profession... I would like to learn here again, maybe there are different standards to know".*

Many saw additional learning in the longer term as a way of improving their opportunities for employment and thus regaining some semblance of their previous lifestyle. From the survey data 35 per cent of respondents had undertaken learning since their arrival in the UK, of those who had 71 per cent cited improving their job prospects as a motivation for doing so. As in the case above this meant seeking the opportunity to convert existing skills and training to a UK context (25 per cent of the learning undertaken since arriving in the UK involved the conversion of existing skills for the UK context). For others it meant pursuing their education in the UK. In the words of a female asylum seeker:

*"I worked part-time as a Care Assistant working with schizophrenia and dementia. I would like to do more work with mental health, hence my interest in doing a Behavioural Studies degree."*

Putting such plans into action, however, was dependent on gaining leave to remain in the UK and so became associated with the frustration of awaiting a decision. This reflected a recurrent theme of people feeling stuck in an indeterminate state, in 'limbo'. Given the sense that their future was wholly contingent on the outcome of their asylum application such planning for self-development was both empowering and distressing. People often expressed the notion that despite a clear picture of what they wanted to do in the future, such thoughts were essentially pointless as they were powerless to put such plans into action. There was a strong sense that their entire future was to be decided by someone else. Some participants expressed a sense that this almost stripped them of the right to make decisions about their future, or even have plans for what they would like to do.

For many respondents, some who had perhaps been through higher education or pursued training and had developed clear career paths, this sense of a loss of control over their lives was heightened and was a considerable source of frustration and distress.

In addition to these longer term goals, undertaking learning was also associated with more immediate imperatives. Much of the learning being undertaken was in the form of English language classes, this is reflected in the survey data with 66 per cent of those who had undertaken learning in the UK stating they had studied English, and 64 per cent that 'improving English language skills' was motivation for undertaking learning. Classes were available via a variety of providers, catering to a range of levels, from the introductory sessions offered via BRASS and BBEMI to the more advanced certificated courses provided by Barnsley College. The 'Confidence Classes' offered via Quaker House were singled out for praise by several respondents as a means of developing both English language and self-assurance more broadly. For many with limited, or no prior experience of English such classes were essential for helping people cope with the challenges of settling into an unfamiliar environment. It was noted that the opportunity to converse with local people helped new arrivals feel more settled in the community. Many saw learning English as essential to their future ability to find work and develop an independent life in the UK, although as above this was qualified by an awareness of the contingent nature of their future status. For many undertaking training, either English language classes or for other skills, participation in the process of training also took on a key significance. Attendance at classes provided a structured activity and an opportunity for interaction with others that helped alleviate the sense of alienation created by an unfamiliar environment and the frustration created by their indeterminate status. There were other non-English speakers who did not participate in any language training, but rather relied on family members for their English language needs. It should also be noted that the undertaking of learning in the UK was more strongly associated with people who had been associated with the asylum process than it was with migrant workers. From the survey data only 12 per cent of migrant workers reported having undertaken learning since arriving in the UK compared to 60 per cent of those who have passed through or were still in the asylum process. This reflects issues noted in Chapters 2 and 3: firstly that people in employment and often working long hours are more constrained in their ability to attend such external training opportunities: secondly, in part a reflection of the first point, it has been shown that migrant worker are less likely to have had contact with the local support agencies who are able to direct them towards training opportunities.

Figure 7: New Arrivals' Work Experience in their Country of Origin

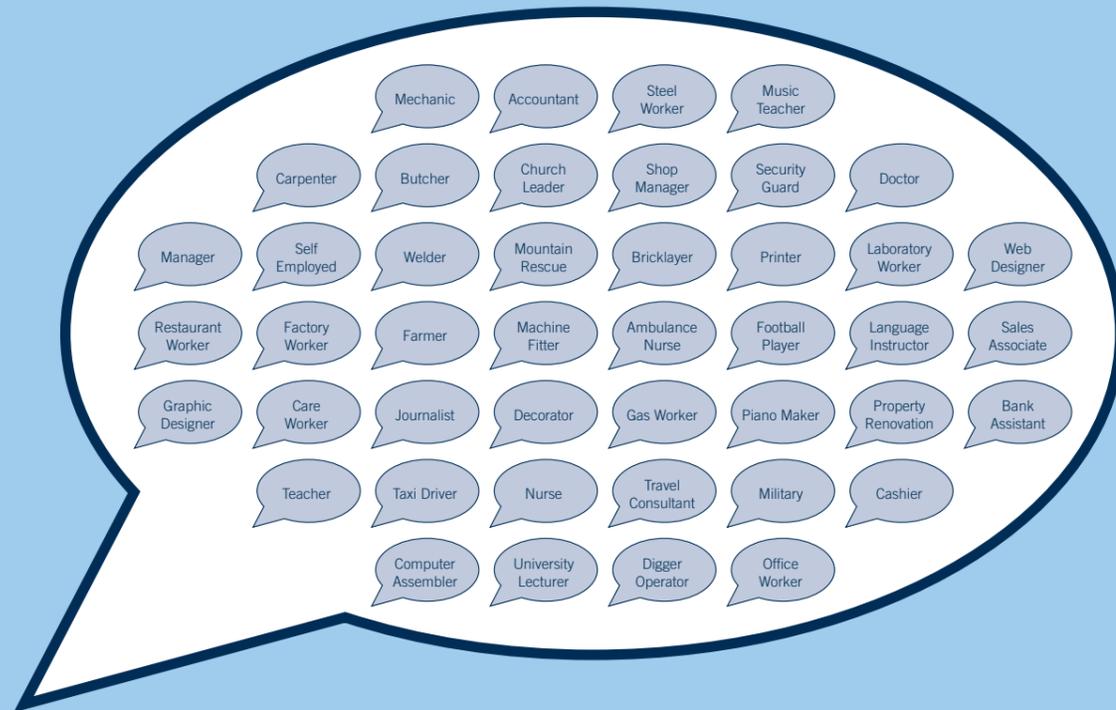
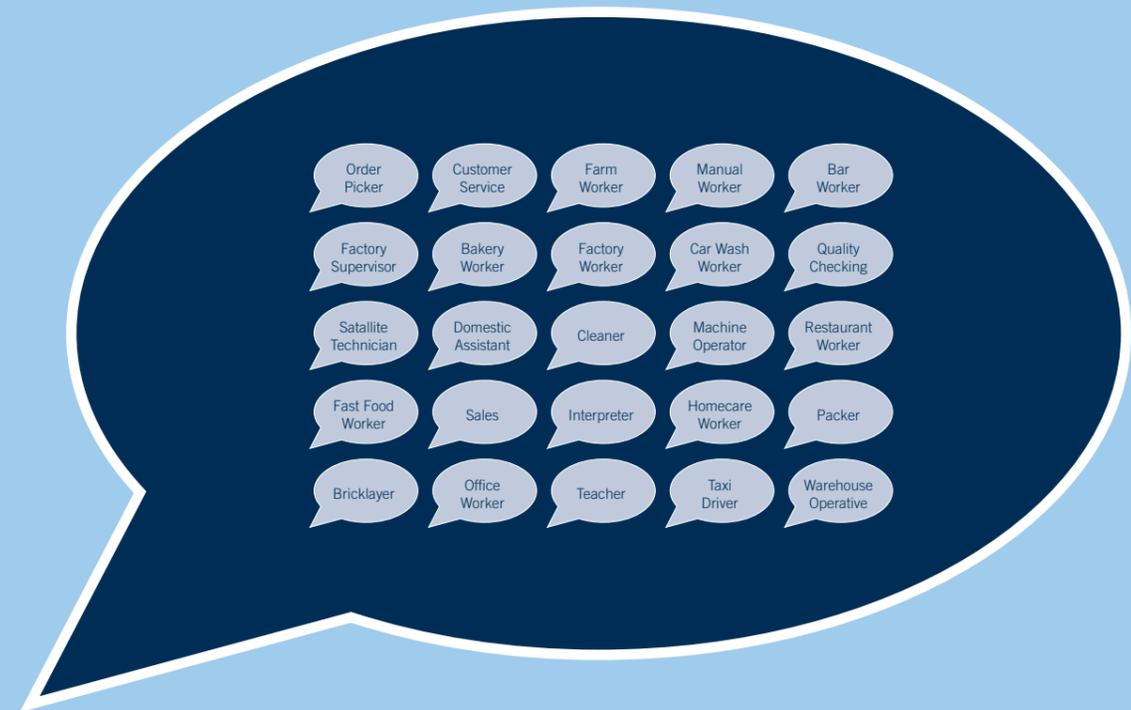


Figure 8: New Arrivals' Work Experience Since Arriving in the UK



## Work Based Skills and Experience

The survey of new arrivals asked people about their work-based and professional qualifications. In addition to the considerable educational achievements discussed above, 55 per cent of respondents reported having vocational qualifications. Unlike Higher Education qualifications, work based qualifications were distributed more evenly between migrant workers and those people associated with the asylum process. The range of work related and professional skills was wide in scope, including for example hairdressing, welding, carpentry, trained economists and geologists, software engineering and veterinary surgery. This was reflected in the wealth of employment experience recorded in the new arrivals survey. Two-thirds of respondents had employment experience in their country of origin. Furthermore, 75 per cent of those who had worked in the country of origin had been employed for at least a year, with 34 per cent having over 5 years experience. *Figure 7* shows the range of this experience. The jobs previously held by new arrivals to the Barnsley area ranged from semi-skilled work to trades crafts and professional occupations. There were health care professionals in the form of doctors and nurses. There was experience from the trades-crafts in the form of carpentry, welding, steel construction work and bricklaying. There was experience in teaching, farming, graphic design, sales and even a professional footballer.

*Figure 8* shows the range of jobs that newly arrived people in Barnsley were currently employed in or had done since coming to the UK. Whereas *Figure 7* is characterised by a range of experience and skills, including professional and skilled work, *Figure 8* is dominated by lower skilled labour intensive jobs.

The following case studies highlight some of the frustrations felt by new arrivals' experiences of the labour market in the UK.

### CASE STUDY 2

**This woman and her husband came to the UK as asylum seekers and were granted Indefinite Leave to Remain. They are both highly skilled professionals and feel a sense of frustration over the inability to utilise their skills in the UK:**

*"My husband is a medical doctor, a consultant, and I am a very qualified nurse. We could be helpful for this country and we could support ourselves. If from the beginning we had been given permission to work we could have integrated into society straight away... If we had chance to work and be integrated our English would have progressed. Our level of English is not good enough. We lose confidence in our abilities, so long not working in work we are qualified to do... In conclusion, my husband is sitting at home, no work and I'm working as a cleaner".*

*"I tried to be a registered nurse in this country... I had to send documents to prove experience. I got a registration number as nurse but couldn't get on because I had no English references... I did receive a registration number which meant my documents were ok, but they lost them and they are now asking me to get them again – it is impossible".*

*"I'm now a domestic cleaner. I have had jobs only in hospitals. I started career as a carer, then an auxiliary nurse, then staff nurse, then manager – senior Medical Sister. This is my second year as a cleaner. Just not connected with patients at all, just with a mop and bucket, so no way to progress and my English does not improve".*

*"It is hard to find a better job without references. I have applied for jobs as an Auxiliary nurse – no reply. I have sent 200 letters to nursing and residential homes, only once got reply – it was a negative one".*

*"(My husband) he has stopped, he sees no point. Instead of making the best of his skills and ability and making selves useful to this country. He can't work fulltime now for health and reasons of age. So we are living on low income – pension support – he live on that. I'm only working part-time".*

*"We could have been a lot more useful to the community. There is no logic in what happens. There are more foreign people with skills and intelligence. Instead (they are) sitting around... No one is gaining any good from it".*

The themes reflected in this case study were recurrent through the interviews with new arrivals in Barnsley. Feelings of frustration were repeatedly expressed in terms of peoples' sense of wasting their abilities working in low skilled jobs. Interestingly this frustration was not just a reflection of a sense of personal loss, but also a loss to the wider community. This desire to contribute to the wider community, in this case through the provision of scarce skills, was itself a recurrent theme, particularly amongst those who had come to the UK as asylum seekers - we will return to this later. Case study 3 again reflects a mismatch between professional qualifications and experience, however this case also raises issues of long hours working and the impact this can have on both familial relations and peoples' ability to contribute to the community.

### CASE STUDY 3

**This man and his family came to the UK as asylum seekers. Since being granted Special Leave to Remain he has sought employment to support his family.**

Despite being a qualified and experienced Solicitor in his country of origin he has been frustrated in his attempts to find work in his chosen profession. Following a string of low skilled jobs including working as a delivery driver for a fast food outlet, he was successful in getting a more challenging job working with adults with behavioural problems. However the long hours he is expected to work has taken its toll on his family role and the community activities to which he is dedicated.

*"I am not liking the work, I am looking for something else. Too much travelling – 50 miles a day. I am doing 18 hour days, 14 hours work and then travel. I get home for an hour then I am into bed. I get no time to spend with my family. No time for other activities, I was involved with a lot of other things, but I have had no time for them. The job is killing me. I'm killing myself. You have to do the extra shifts to make enough money. I am paid by the hour. I did 14 hour days, some times 4 days a week. Last week I did it 5 days. I am applying for another job, working in a Warehouse. Another job in sales. Closer to home".*

*"I got the (current) job via a friend whose daughter worked there. Heard about it and called up for an application. It was the only job I could get. I have tried for years but all people want to know about is you experience in this country".*

In the course of the research there were repeated instances of people with professional qualifications working in low skilled employment; a senior nurse who was working as a cleaner, or a Solicitor who had worked delivering fast food provide two illustrative examples. Focusing on such dramatic mismatches between skills and employment should not distract us from the fact that skills underutilisation exists at various levels. There was a wealth of experience in a range of semi-skilled and skilled work outside of the professions which was not reflected in the range of employment that newly arrived people in Barnsley had found themselves engaged in. This also raises a broader question regarding the extent to which this mismatch of skills reflected the reality of demand in the local labour market, regardless of the origins of the individual workers. Many employers in the area are focused on competitive strategies based on low skilled, labour intensive production techniques.

### Conclusion

The results of the survey of new arrivals show that 87 per cent of respondents had at least high school qualifications. In terms of higher education, 21 per cent of people held a university degree and a further 8 per cent had postgraduate qualifications in addition to a first degree. 80 per cent of those new arrivals with higher education qualifications had come to the UK as asylum seekers. Further to any previous education and training, 35 per cent of respondents had undertaken learning since their arrival in the UK, with many seeing this a way of improving their job prospects in the UK and a significant minority seeking to convert existing skills and training to a UK context. For many asylum seekers the commitment to ongoing personal development was tempered by the sense that such investment was pointless in a context where their future was entirely contingent on the Home Office decision on their case.

Two thirds of people who had undertaken learning in the UK had taken English language classes at various levels of proficiency. These classes were praised by participants, particularly those with less prior familiarity with English, as helpful in navigating the challenges of their new environment and feeling more settled in the local community. Many saw learning English as important to their longer term prospects although this was again tempered by an acute awareness of the contingent nature of their future residency. Attendance at English language classes also had immediate benefits in the form of social interaction and the structure that scheduled classes provided to those people who were economically inactive. The other side of this coin was that only 12 per cent of migrant workers reported having undertaken learning since arriving in the UK compared to 60 per cent of those who have passed through or were still in the asylum process. This reflects the potential problems of the long working hours constraining peoples' ability to engage in non-work activities, and the previously noted issue of less contact with the local support agencies who could help people with their learning needs.

In addition to this wealth of educational qualifications, 55 per cent of respondents to the new arrivals survey reported having vocational qualifications. This reflected a range of professional and trades based qualifications, plus training for semi-skilled work. In addition two-thirds of respondents reported having employment experience in their country of origin. The range of jobs people had been employed in mirrored the broad range of qualifications and training, including for example doctors and nurses, teachers, and a variety of construction occupations. When this is compared to the range of jobs in which respondents to the new arrivals survey had worked in during their time in the UK the contrast is marked. Regardless of prior experience or training, the majority of these jobs could be characterised as low skill and labour intensive.



## Chapter 5

### The Realities of Work and Experience of Labour Market Exclusion

Following on from the previous chapter, here we examine a number of other employment related themes.

The chapter starts by looking at the workplace experiences of new arrivals who have found employment in the UK, and provides data on finding work, their wages, working hours and other workplace issues. The chapter then moves on to explore the attitudes of asylum seekers, who are legally excluded from the labour market, towards work, employment and economic inactivity. This is followed by a discussion of the data on those new arrivals who have chosen to undertake voluntary work, and an exploration of their motivations for doing so.

#### The Realities of Work

The survey of new arrivals asked people about the realities of their experiences of work in the UK, including day to day workplace issues such as wages, hours of work and any problems encountered in the workplace. Around 63 per cent of new arrivals surveyed were either working or had at some time worked in the UK. The survey data relating to employment experience is dominated by responses from people with the legal entitlement to work in the UK, 78 per cent of responses came from migrant workers and 16 per cent from those awarded Indefinite Leave to Remain or Special Leave to Remain. Only 3 per cent of respondents who reported having work experience in the UK were over-stayers and 3 per cent current asylum seekers who are excluded from the labour market (although their work experience may have been gained prior to their legal exclusion due to their status as asylum seekers). In short the survey data relating to employment is dominated by new arrivals who have the legal entitlement to work in the UK. Such workers are still facing issues in terms of wages and hours of work, which impact on their non-work life in the Barnsley community. The evidence sheds light on the realities of work for a significant proportion of new arrivals to the area. Caution however should be exercised in extrapolating conclusions regarding people working

illegally within the hidden economy. It should also be recognised that many of the issues raised reflect the nature of the lower skilled, low value added jobs that dominate the employment experiences of new arrivals. Some of these issues are therefore common to all workers in these situations regardless of nationality. However, there are consequences of these conditions that have particular relevance for new arrivals.

In addition to examining the experiences of those who are working or have worked in the UK, this chapter also explores the attitudes towards work of those who are legally excluded from the labour market. Through the use of interview data the chapter examines the importance attached to work and the way in which this contributed to a sense of well being and self respect. The chapter concludes that in terms of education and skills new arrivals have much to offer to Barnsley, and in many cases people are frustrated by the constraints on their ability to contribute more to the community and local economy. There is however a cautionary note that must be struck in terms of relying on a business case for migration to the Barnsley area in terms of the potential danger of endorsing an employment agenda based on minimum wage, labour intensive employment. Furthermore regardless of national origin we must avoid the danger of reducing human beings to the sum of their potential economic contribution.

#### Finding work

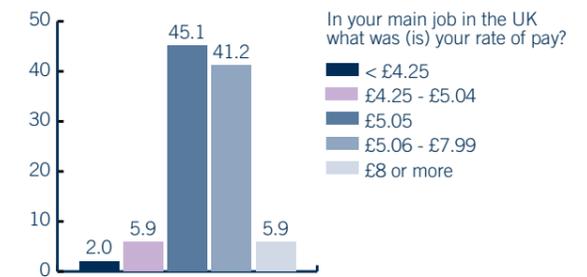
The survey asked respondents about the sources they had used to find work in the UK. The most commonly used sources for finding work were: being told about a job by friends and family (cited by 51 per cent of those who had worked in the UK), private employment agencies (41 per cent), newspapers (36 per cent), Jobcentreplus (35 per cent), the internet (35 per cent) and being given a job by friends and family (22 per cent). Interview respondents working with a major local employer pointed to the particular importance of friends and family in hearing about local job opportunities. A number of new arrival migrant workers had heard about potential job opportunities with this employer in their

country of origin, from friends and family who were already employed there. Private employment agencies were also used extensively by those finding work in the UK. In some cases interviewees indicated that they had registered with agencies in their countries of origin. Interviews with local employment agents revealed that migrant workers made up the vast majority of those seeking work, making up as much as 95 per cent of those on their books. Indeed these interviews revealed that they were actively adapting their strategies in order to seek a competitive advantage from the recent increases in new arrivals from EU accession countries, seeking to supply more workers into low-skilled, low value added production jobs. Interestingly, this strategy would seem to be at odds with the competitive strategy espoused by the European Employment Agency industry which is based on the supply of workers for high value added jobs, and the movement of agencies into auxiliary functions (CIETT, 2000; see also Forde, 2001; Forde *et al.*, 2006).

#### Wages

The survey asked those who had worked about the wages they earned or had earned in their main job since arriving in the UK. *Figure 9* shows the majority of responses were clustered around the level of the minimum wage, with 45 per cent reporting being paid at the statutory minimum level of £5.05 at the time of the survey, and 41 per cent in the next category up. This suggests that the majority of respondents, who were working legally in the UK, were being protected by the minimum wage regulation implemented in 1999. Interviews with migrant workers and a leading local employer of migrant labour confirmed this adherence to the statutory minimum wage. It should be recognised that this suggests a large degree of minimal compliance with the regulation and demonstrates the importance of such protection for vulnerable workers. A significant number of respondents reported wage levels in the next category up, although given the width of the wage band it is impossible to determine how many respondents continued to gravitate towards the bottom of the band around the level of the minimum wage. It should also be noted that the majority of respondents reported wage levels well below the published average for the Barnsley area, which at the time of research were £10.41 an hour for men working full-time and £8.65 for women working full-time (NOMIS, 2006), and compounds the suggestion that newly arrived workers tend to be located in employment towards the bottom of the labour market. A small minority of respondents reported wage levels in excess of £8 an hour, this perhaps reflects the fact that although the types of jobs people reported doing were dominated by low and semi-skilled employment there were a small number of respondents who reported working in more skilled employment, which may attract higher wages.

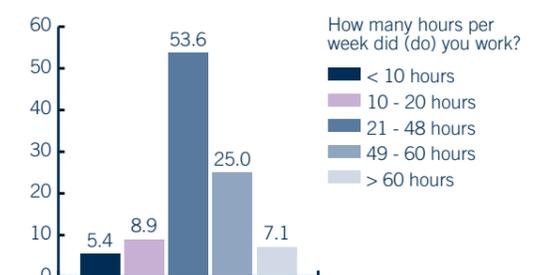
Figure 9: Rate of pay in main job in UK (%)



#### Working hours

People were asked about the number of hours they worked per week in their main job since arriving in the UK (see *Figure 10*). Significantly a third of respondents reported working more than 48 hours per week, with 7 per cent working over 60 hours per week, suggesting regulation in the form of the Working Time Directive (which limits working time to 48 hours per week) was having little effect in limiting working hours. When the Working Time Directive was introduced in 1998 the UK was the only EU country to adopt a clause allowing individual workers to opt out of the limits on the number hours they could work. This suggests either workers are unaware of the regulation or as is supported by the interview data, for these workers the use of the opt out clause of the Working Time Directive is common practice. Although this is a choice made by individual workers the question is the extent to which this is a constrained choice. The UK is traditionally known to be a long working hours economy (ETUC 2006). Furthermore, with low value added, labour intensive production techniques, it is not uncommon for employers to rely upon long working hours to maintain profitability and therefore to put pressure on the workforce to comply with these needs. Signing the Working Time opt out can become a de facto prerequisite of employment, thus casting doubt over the voluntary nature of this act (ETUC 2006). The other key constraint relates to the evidence above regarding the prevalence of employment at the statutory minimum wage level. Low hourly earnings encourage workers to maximise their earning abilities through working long hours.

Figure 10: Hours worked per week in main job in UK (%)



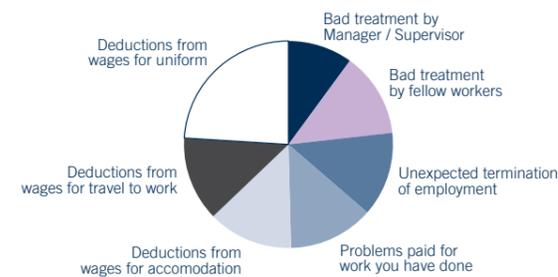
These themes came to the fore during interviews with migrant workers employed in labour intensive, low skilled work at a local packaging firm. Despite a wealth of experience in their home countries, varying from the military, scientific laboratory work, and the fire service, experience of work in the UK had been dominated by employment at the level of the minimum wage in such sectors as food processing or packaging, bar work and work in hotel kitchens. On the basis of the experience that the only work available paid the minimum wage, the ability to work long hours at their current employer provided the incentive to voluntarily waive Working Time protection through signing the opt-out. This was seen as an important issue by several workers. As one female migrant worker commented:

*“The money depends on the job. My money is ok... plus with the over time. So many places have strict hours, here you can work over. That’s the main thing. That’s what keeps us here, otherwise we would go (to another employer)”.*

The voluntary nature of this does however have to be viewed in the context of minimum wage employment. The ability to earn a living wage at this level compelled employees towards seeking all the hours of work available, plus the premium paid for overtime provided added incentive to work long hours. The difference the availability of overtime made to the weekly pay package suggests that although voluntary, the decision to opt out of Working Time protection is for many workers a constrained choice.

Working long hours was recognised as being not without negative consequences in other areas. Several people spoke in terms of not having time for anything else but work. This was manifest in such things as not having the opportunity to socialise with anyone from outside the work place, or even to meet people that did not work for the company. Although interaction between different national groups of migrant workers was celebrated, the dominant role the workplace played in peoples’ lives was felt to have a detrimental effect on the ability to meet local people, and thus to develop a sense of settling in to local communities. This echoes the themes reported in chapters 2 and 3 regarding the lower level of interaction with local support services and within the local community amongst migrant workers. The long hours worked by many people newly arrived in the Barnsley areas can contribute to their isolation from the wider community.

Figure 11: Workplace issues and problems encountered by new arrivals to Barnsley



### Workplace Issues

The survey also asked people about issues and problems they had encountered in the workplace. 44 per cent of new arrivals who were working or had worked in the UK stated that they had experienced one or more of the issues and problems depicted in Figure 11. Again many of these issues are not uncommon within the type of employment that dominates the work experience of new arrivals, and therefore are problems faced by all workers regardless of nationality. There are certain issues that are of particular relevance to new arrival workers. Such workers can be regarded as particularly vulnerable within the labour market, given unfamiliarity with employment regulations, customs and practice and as reflected in chapter 1 the lower likelihood they will access support services that may be able to advise on issues at work. Migrant workers are also less likely to be members of trade unions (Martinez Lucio and Perrett, 2007), and again may be denied this source of advice and protection. Interviews with local trade union representatives confirm the relative absence of migrant worker membership. This must be viewed in the context of the types of work that many new arrivals are engaged in. Migrant workers are often employed in areas of the economy and types of organisations that trade unions have found it difficult to make inroads into.

### Attitudes towards work of those excluded from the labour market

For many of the asylum seekers living in Barnsley the fact that they were legally barred from working was a source of frustration. There were a number of aspects to this. At one level, people expressed a basic frustration at being inactive. For people who had been employed in their country of origin being economically inactive was an unfamiliar experience. This inactivity added to a sense of dislocation. People in this situation were geographically dislocated from familiar surroundings but also dislocated from familiar daily life routines. This provided an added dimension to issues of inactivity that would be common to anyone displaced from work. For anyone used to full time employment, work takes up a significant proportion of their waking hours. Work provides structure and routine to peoples lives and in addition to material rewards, work also provides crucial social interaction. It is notable that many of the asylum seekers who participated in the interviews referred to the importance of facilities such as BRASS or the Quaker House group in terms of providing social interaction and a sense of keeping busy.

Research shows that work can also be an important contributor to personal identity and a sense of self worth (MacKenzie et al. 2006), issues that again may be seen to be of heightened concern given the geographic displacement and other life experiences of those seeking asylum in the UK. Several interviewees also talked of their unease over their reliance on state benefits. For people who had been used to providing for themselves and often their families through paid employment, this was an unfamiliar and disconcerting experience. The often expressed desire for more self-reliance must again be viewed in the context of the situation asylum seekers found themselves in. For many this contributed to a wider sense of a loss of control over their lives, associated with displacement from their country of origin and their experiences of the UK asylum process. Declared aspirations for employment, and frustrations at their exclusion from the labour market, were tied to issues of independence and self determination for people who felt they had been stripped of these things by their life experiences. Frustration was also expressed over a sense that people were wasting their talents through inactivity. This echoes the earlier discussion of themes expressed by those in work who felt they were underutilising their skills. Again this was linked to a stated desire to contribute to the local community and economy, and was often expressed in terms of a broader desire to ‘give something back’ to the society that had offered the chance of asylum. This was also often tied to a perception of the demonising of asylum seekers in the media, and a desire to counter this through providing the community with a more positive and more rounded picture of people in their situation.

#### CASE STUDY 4

This university educated woman worked in a well paid white-collar job in her country of origin. Forced to leave home due to threats to her family she came to the UK with an entitlement to work. She supported her family through a series of low skilled jobs. Unable to return home when her visa expired she sought asylum.

*I came here with a work permit. I worked with young adults with challenging behaviour, and disabled. My first job was as a carer in a care home. I worked my way up. When I came they did not know anything about me, and I did not tell them, but they realised what I was capable of, and realised I was a hard worker. The agency kept getting asked for me, people wanted me back... I could do different work. We are not acknowledged for skills, the likes of teachers and nurses. It is frustrating, there are a lot of skilled people doing mental tasks. It is frustrating – professional people working in care homes. You find there are a lot of skilled people and this is the only job they can get.*

*I am proud, I like to do things for myself. I took any job. It was tough, I had gone from a high position to a low job, but I focused on taking care of my children so I was prepared to do anything. First I worked in a care home, as an assistant, and I built up. I didn’t speak about myself to anyone. I did anything. Later I worked in challenging behaviour with young adults.*

*My agency realised what I was capable of. I worked in different places, and people would ask for me. They realised I had potential – they knew nothing of my background, my education. I worked my way up the hierarchy, I started as a carer and became a supervisor. I was supposed to become Assistant Manager but then my visa expired and I sought asylum...*

It is important to take these themes in context and recognise that the issue of exclusion from the labour market is only one of the challenges faced by people in the asylum process. Work in itself is not a panacea for the trauma many have suffered, and for some people it may not be a viable option regardless of their legal exclusion from the labour market. Furthermore, although the desire to work may be the instinct of anyone who has been used to being economically active, it should not be confused with the reasons why people find themselves in the asylum process. Nor should the desire of some people to 'give something back' to the society that offers the chance of asylum be translated into an obligation to do so. Similarly, despite the wealth of education, skills and experience many asylum seekers have to offer, individuals should not be reduced to a sum of their potential economic contribution. As the words of one female asylum seeker remind us.

*"All my family are in prison – it is a dictatorship over there... 6 members of my family die already by torture. Social Workers don't ask you why you are here. They think everyone is here because they want to work. People think we come here looking for money, they don't want to ask about problems in our country. The think we come here for a better life and to get money".*

### Voluntary work

It is important that the notion of work be understood in a broader sense, incorporating not just paid employment, but also voluntary and community work. These other forms of work can provide people with many of the non-monetary rewards associated paid employment in terms of providing social interaction, a sense of participation and in terms of charity or community work, a sense of contribution. Around 18 per cent of people surveyed reported having done voluntary work since arriving in the UK. Three quarters of those who had undertaken voluntary work were or had been asylum seekers, one quarter were migrant workers. The types of work undertaken included work in charity shops, hospitals and for religious groups. It is notable that much of the volunteering involved working with the new arrival community, in areas such as language teaching, assisting with housing issues or working for community associations and action groups. Several respondents expressed their desire to help other new arrivals adjust to life in Barnsley. There are other advantages associated with undertaking voluntary work. Many of the respondents saw it a way of improving their skills and in turn improving their longer term prospects for paid employment. Related to these incentives, the opportunity to improve English language skills was also seen as an important motivation. The interviews confirmed the importance attached to voluntary work by those who

chose to do it. This is reflected in the words of a woman who came to the UK as an asylum seeker and has now been granted Indefinite Leave to Remain.

*'One year I worked in Help the Aged, for help with learning, to learn English. I have a certificate...First it helped get experience to work, and helped to learn the language. Sometimes I was in the shop, sometimes ironing or sorting the clothes, I did anything.... I liked work at Help the Aged. Now I am trying to get a job with money. I liked work to help the aged – I have memories of my grandma – because of that I went to help the aged'*

The words of one female asylum seeker who has become involved in new arrival community action groups reflect both the desire to contribute to the well being of others and the benefits of combating the dangers of inactivity:

*'I have done a lot of voluntary work since I have been in Barnsley. More than I used to do in Leeds. In Leeds I had a job and I had to earn money. Now I can't work, but I feel I have to do something, it has reinvigorated me to do things'.*

This picks up on the themes covered in Chapter 2 regarding the role of community action groups and suggests that in addition to the importance of their broader social and political roles, there are supplementary personal benefits for people who participate in such activities.

### Conclusion

Around 63 per cent of those covered in the survey of new arrivals to Barnsley reported having experience of working in the UK. The majority of those surveyed have the legal entitlement to work in the UK. Many had found work through friends and family. There was also widespread use of private employment agencies, many of whom were explicitly adapting their strategies to attempt to secure a competitive advantage through the increased use of migrant workers from EU accession countries. Those new arrivals working in Barnsley faced issues in terms of wages and hours of work, which impacted on their non-work life in the Barnsley community. The data suggest a large degree of minimal compliance with the minimum wage regulation, with 45 per cent reporting being paid at the statutory minimum level and 41 per cent in the next category up. This is well below the published average for the Barnsley area, which at the time of research was £10.41 an hour for men and £8.65 for women. This evidence compounds the suggestion that newly arrived workers tend to be located towards the bottom of the labour market. In terms of working hours a third of respondents reported working

more than 48 hours per week, with 7 per cent working over 60 hours per week. This suggests that either workers are unaware of the working time regulation or that the use of the opt out clause of the Working Time Directive is common practice. Although employers may put pressure on worker to sign the opt it must also be recognised that for many people minimum wage employment acts as an imperative to work long hours as means of making a living. Interviews with such workers confirmed that working such long hours was perceived to have a negative impact on their ability to meet local people, and thus to develop a sense of settling in to local communities.

The survey also asked people about issues and problems they had encountered in the workplace. 44 per cent of new arrivals who were working or had worked in the UK stated that they had experienced one or more of the following: difficulties getting paid for the work done; employer deductions from wages for accommodation; employer taking deductions from wages for travel; employer taking deductions from wages for uniform; bad treatment from managers/supervisors; bad treatment from fellow workers; unexpected termination of employment. Migrant workers can be regarded as particularly vulnerable within the labour market, given unfamiliarity with employment regulations, customs and practice and the lower likelihood they will access support services that may be able to advise on issues at work. Migrant workers are also less likely to have trade union representation and are often employed in areas of the economy into which trade unions have found it difficult to make inroads. Local representatives from unions including the Transport and General Workers Union and the GMB have attempted to develop links with migrant workers through non-work based initiatives. Unions have reported some success in making contact with hard to reach migrant workers through specific political campaigns such as anti-fascist campaigns. This has been a consequence of moments of broader political action rather representing a focused and sustained attempt to develop links with migrant workers on the basis of workplace issues. Other initiatives have been more focused around making migrant workers aware of their employment rights and offering advice on workplace issues. One such example was the presence of the GMB at a day long drop-in session for migrant workers held at the Barnsley Polish Club. The session, which was organised by the Investing in a Multicultural Barnsley team, demonstrated the worth of multi-agency cooperation in reach out initiatives. The development of relationships between trade unions and BBEMI and other community groups offer other fruitful avenues for fostering links with migrant workers. Trade unions have had difficulties in terms of being visualised and engaged with by new migrant communities. Even longer

established communities which have developed networks and organisations are found to have an uneven dialogue with organised labour (Perrett and Martínez Lucio, 2006). Whilst there are many cases of trade unions developing innovative strategies in terms of learning, representation, legal support, and cultural engagement these moments of good practice are rarely shared and systematically discussed within the trade union movement (Martínez Lucio and Perrett, 2007). Trade unions are moving quickly on the equality agenda but there are organisational challenges facing them.

For asylum seekers, who are legally excluded from the labour market attitudes towards work are often linked to broader feelings of dislocation and powerlessness. For many people economic inactivity was an unfamiliar circumstance. Feelings of dependency on state benefits challenged peoples' desire for self-reliance and frustrated their desire for self-determination in life choices – an issue with broader connotations for people engaged in the asylum process. At a more basic level people also felt frustrated by the sense of wasting their skills and talents in a context where they felt they had something positive to contribute to the local community and economy. Although these aspirations are worthy we must guard against the danger that they could be distorted to underpin an agenda in which people are reduced to a sum of their potential economic contribution.

The concept of work should be understood in its broader sense, incorporating voluntary and community work, which can also be associated with many of the non-monetary benefits of paid employment. Around 18 per cent of those covered in the survey of new arrivals reported having undertaken voluntary work in the UK. The motivation for doing so reflected a range of issues; improving English language including and improving skills to enhance longer term job prospects. Interestingly much of the volunteering was associated with helping new arrivals adjust to life in the UK, and Barnsley in particular. Such volunteering helped combat the negative connotations of inactivity and provided participants with a desired sense of making a 'contribution'.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

This report has examined the social and economic experiences of new arrivals in Barnsley.

Using data generated from in depth interviews and a survey of new arrivals, it has explored in detail the experiences of new arrivals in relation to support services, housing, healthcare, schooling and their relations in the local community. It has examined the qualifications, skills and employment experiences of new arrivals, and considered the realities of work for those who have been in employment in Barnsley. It has also looked at the attitudes of asylum seekers towards work, employment and inactivity and their experiences of undertaking voluntary work in Barnsley.



**Chapter 2** provided an analysis of new arrivals' use of support services. It found that there was relatively widespread use of formal support services by asylum seekers and those with refugee status. However, the use of support services by migrant workers was much more limited. New arrivals used support services for a range of reasons, and many described their use of support services in positive terms. Amongst some, there was a feeling of disenfranchisement from the support services currently available. The use of other grass roots and informal networks as sources of support was also widespread amongst new arrivals.

**Chapter 3** explored the experiences of new arrivals in relation to housing, healthcare, schooling and relations with the local community. The chapter highlighted key differences in experiences by status. Migrant workers in particular had had little state support in terms of housing provision and were much less likely to have registered with doctors or dentists than asylum seekers or refugees. Changes in status had profound effects on the experiences of new arrivals, particularly the loss of NASS provided accommodation that accompanied changes from asylum seeker status. The short period over which the loss of housing occurred was a particular concern. Many of those interviewed reported positive experiences with regards to their relations with the local community. Those living in houses with their family appeared to have more positive experiences in the local community, compared to those in multiple occupancy housing, as did those with more advanced English language skills.

**Chapter 4** highlighted the wealth of educational and employment experiences new arrivals brought with them to the Barnsley area. The survey showed that 87 per cent of respondents had at least high school qualifications, 21 per cent of people held a university degree and 8 per cent had postgraduate qualifications. Around 80 per cent of university graduates surveyed were or had been asylum seekers. In addition 35 per cent of respondents had learning experience in the UK. English language and computing courses were particularly prevalent. Many saw this as an investment in their future, although for asylum seekers this was tempered by recognition of the contingent nature of

their status. English language courses were seen as particularly important by those people with limited prior experience of the language in helping them to navigate the challenges of their new environment and with feeling more settled in the local community. Scheduled classes also provided opportunities for social interaction and temporal structure which were seen as particularly important by asylum seekers due to their economic inactivity. Only 12 per cent of migrant workers had undertaken learning in the UK compared to 60 per cent of other new arrivals. This fits the pattern of lower engagement with local support agencies reported earlier, and also may reflect the long working hours that the interview data suggests limits peoples' ability to engage in non-work activities. The majority of new arrivals, 55 per cent, also held work-based qualifications, and 66 per cent had work experience in their country of origin. The range of qualifications and experience covered professional, trades and semi-skilled employment. The data presented on the jobs that new arrivals had done during their time in the UK showed a predominance of low skilled, labour intensive and low value added employment. This suggests a widespread mismatch between experience and current employment, and the significant underutilisation of skills.

**Chapter 5** looked at the UK workplace experience of new arrivals to the Barnsley area. The majority of those covered in the survey had the legal entitlement to work in the UK. Many had found work via friends and family. There was also widespread use of employment agencies, which had increasingly focused their labour supply strategies around the use of migrant workers, particularly from EU accession states. Wages for these workers tended to be clustered around the level of the minimum wage. These wages were significantly below the average wage levels for the Barnsley area and confirm that employment for new arrivals is dominated by jobs located towards the bottom of the labour market. Many new arrivals covered in the survey and in the interviews reported routinely working long hours. In terms of workplace experience, 44 per cent of employees reported having experienced problems in the workplace such as issues with wages, bad treatment by colleagues or superiors, or unexpected termination of employment. As new arrivals such workers may be regarded as particularly vulnerable to poor treatment, and are less likely to have access to advice and protection from local support agencies or trade unions. The chapter moved on to explore the attitudes of asylum seekers towards work, employment and economic inactivity. Exclusion from the labour market created frustration based on feelings of dependency, powerlessness, of wasting skills and a desire to make a 'contribution'. Around 18 per cent of those covered in the survey of new arrivals reported having undertaken voluntary work in the UK as a way of

improving their English, developing skills and enhancing longer term job prospects. It also provided participants with a desired sense of making a 'contribution'. This included participation in grass roots community groups for those legally barred from other forms of voluntary work.

The report has raised a number of issues which merit consideration in the development of a new integration strategy in Barnsley. First, the social and economic experiences of new arrivals vary markedly by status. A number of the support services available to new arrivals are directed towards asylum seekers, as is NASS provided housing. Differential entitlement to support would appear to have an impact upon a number of tangible outcomes, for example migrant workers were much less likely than asylum seekers to have registered with a doctor. This may be attributable to the fact that registration with a doctor is included as part of the induction process with new arrival asylum seekers. Many migrant workers were simply unaware of the support services available to them in Barnsley. Other migrant workers were unable to attend support groups due to the long hours that they spent in the workplace. This point emphasises the need for effective support services to be developed to meet the needs of all new arrivals, including asylum seekers, refugees, and migrant workers.

Secondly, the report revealed the profound effects of changes in status on new arrivals. Changes from asylum seeker status to migrant worker, refugee or overstayer resulted in changes in eligibility to support services and a loss of NASS housing. In some cases (for example, with the accession of 8 countries to the EU in May 2004) these changes occurred overnight. For those receiving asylum decisions, the loss of NASS provided housing was often implemented over a very short time period. These changes in status were a source of anxiety, insecurity and uncertainty. There is a need for ongoing support for those experiencing changes in status. Whilst it is clear that widespread and effective support and advice has been provided by key workers, the Barnsley Asylum Team, Wellington House and by key housing providers to help those changing status, additional support mechanisms would facilitate transitions. With regards to housing in particular, 'Move on' programmes, in place in other areas of the country, would assist those making the transition from asylum seeker to refugee status.

Thirdly, the report found the widespread use of both formal and informal networks of support by new arrivals in Barnsley. The development and sustenance of both formal and informal networks of support services are vital to the social inclusion of new arrivals in Barnsley. New arrivals used formal networks for a range of reasons, as a means of accessing information, keeping busy and improving language skills. Respondents were generally positive about the range of support networks. Informal networks were used for similar reasons by new arrivals, and were often perceived to perform similar functions. For some there was a feeling of disenfranchisement from the support services currently available and this had been the stimulus in part for the evolution of alternative, grass roots networks. It may be the case that formal groups do not meet all the needs of new arrivals. Informal, grass-roots networks may also be able to effectively mobilise the needs of new arrivals collectively, as they are unconstrained by the necessarily focused agendas and objectives of formal, often government funded support groups. Over time, these informal grass roots organisations may establish themselves on a more formal footing, although it is vital that there is support (both financial and bureaucratic) to allow this to occur.

Fourthly, the report has highlighted the positive experiences of many new arrivals in terms of relations with the local community. These experiences did vary by status. There would appear to be a particular challenge to the inclusion of migrant workers in the local community: these new arrivals often have limited interaction with the local community due to the long hours spent in the workplace. Whilst many migrant workers talked positively about the development of relations and networks with other new arrivals, these networks were often formed in the workplace, rather than with others in the local community. Other factors which affected whether experiences with the local community were positive were the confidence of new arrivals in speaking English, and whether new arrivals were living as part of a family in the community, or were in multiple occupancy housing. The findings suggest that special attention needs to be directed towards those living in multiple occupancy housing, and those who want to improve their English language skills

Fifthly, the report has also highlighted that integration is a family issue. Children of new arrivals share the problems and challenges faced by their parents, and in some cases, where their English language skills are more developed than their parents, are bearing many of the primary responsibilities associated with arriving and settling in Barnsley. The upheavals associated with changes in status also affected children, and during the process of seeking asylum, the aspirations and goals of children, like those of their parents, were 'on hold'.

Sixth, the report has highlighted a disparity between the range of qualifications and experience new arrivals bring to the Barnsley area and the types of jobs that people have been employed in. There are dramatic examples of skills mismatches provided by qualified professionals working in unskilled jobs, however these should not distract from the fact that skill underutilisation is apparent across a range of levels including trades and semi-skilled workers.

Seventh, the report has stressed that the employment experiences of new arrivals must be viewed in the context of the realities of the local economy and labour market. Employers and employment agencies are continuing to adopt strategies to compete on a low road basis. The consequences for employment are the continuation of many low paid, low value added jobs. The implications of this are not exclusive to new arrivals. This is an issue for broader regional economic development strategy. This does not detract from the fact that there is a considerable wealth of skills and experience associated with new arrivals to Barnsley.

Eighth, the report has highlighted that particular problems are faced by new arrival workers with regards to working long hours for low pay. The waiving of statutory protection through the opt-out clause of the Working Time directive was common. The question is over the extent to which this is a constrained choice. Employers are known to encourage workers to sign this opt out. It must be recognised however that minimum wage employment acts as an imperative to work long hours as people strive to make a living. Working long hours has a broader impact on the lives of new arrivals in terms of limiting opportunities for engaging in non-work activities. This includes family commitments and, of particular relevance, opportunities to meet local people. This reinforced the suggestion that particular attention needs to be given to strategies for supporting migrant workers. These should include contributions from formal and informal support groups and crucially trade unions.

Ninth, the report has shown that for asylum seekers, who are legally excluded from the labour market attitudes towards work are often linked to broader feelings of dislocation and powerlessness. Many asylum seekers were used to being in full time employment. Feelings of dependency on state benefits exacerbated peoples' desire for self-reliance. The legal exclusion from work also fuelled the sense of the loss of self-determination in life choices associated with the asylum process. People also felt they were wasting their skills and talents when they thought they had something positive to contribute to the local community and economy. Some were able to partially realise these aspirations through community activities such as involvement with grass roots organisations. Such opportunities should be encouraged and supported for the range of benefits cited in this report.

The actual and potential contribution of new arrivals in Barnsley is considerable. However this contribution should not just be view in economic terms, it comes in other forms such as social, cultural and community based contributions. This is a mutual commitment and new arrivals to Barnsley must continue to be supported in the process of adjusting to their new environment. We must also not lose sight of the fact that many new arrivals to Barnsley are asylum seekers who have often experienced extreme trauma in their country of origin. Therefore it is important to remember that despite the wealth of education, skills and experience of many new arrivals, people should not be reduced to a sum of their potential contribution to the local economy and community.



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