Refugees living in Wales

A survey of skills, experiences and barriers to inclusion

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About the authors

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List of acronyms

NASS National Asylum Support Service
RIES Refugee Integration and Employment Service
WAG Welsh Assembly Government
WRC Welsh Refugee Council
WSMP Wales Strategic Migration Partnership (Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Migrants)
UKBA UK Border Agency
Executive summary

Background and policy context

1. There is currently very limited information on the background, circumstances and needs of refugees (defined as those granted leave to remain in the UK) living in Wales. Much of what is known has been deduced from information about asylum seekers living in Wales, a proportion of whom (varying by individual circumstances, date of arrival and country of origin) will be granted to leave to remain in the UK and may choose to continue living in Wales.

2. Until 2001, relatively low numbers of asylum seekers and refugees decided to settle in Wales compared to some parts of the UK. The numbers of asylum seekers and refugees increased when Wales became a dispersal area. At the end of May 2009, a total of 2,322 asylum seekers were living in Wales. Over half (56.9%) were living in Cardiff, whilst Swansea had 562 asylum seekers (24.2%), Newport 364 (15.7%) and Wrexham just 74 (3.2%). Nearly three quarters (71.1%) of those dispersed to Wales come from nine countries of origin: Afghanistan, China, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan and Zimbabwe.

3. There is evidence that the population of refugees and asylum seekers living in Wales is distinct from the wider UK refugee population in some important ways. Refugees and asylum seekers are more concentrated in a limited number of towns and cities and they are drawn from a more limited range nationalities and linguistic groups. Existing evidence suggests that very few refugees and asylum seekers specifically choose to come to Wales, but very little is known about secondary migration flows to and from the country.

4. The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) published its Refugee Inclusion Strategy in June 2008. The strategy sets out WAG’s vision of refugee inclusion in Wales and aims to support and enable refugees to rebuild their lives and make a full contribution to society. For policy makers and practitioners concerned with the process of integration, the lack of information and data on the background, needs and experiences of refugees living in Wales is highly problematic because it makes it difficult to deliver appropriate support and services and to harness the skills and experiences that refugees bring.

Survey aims and objectives

5. This survey of refugees living in Wales represents a pragmatic response to the lack of information currently available to inform policy and practice in relation to refugee integration and issues of community cohesion. The survey was devised in consultation with policy makers and practitioners and is located within the framework for thinking about integration issues which has been developed by Ager and Strang (2004). The framework identifies a number of key ‘markers and means’ by which this process of integration might be both attained and measured.

6. The survey included a total of 74 questions (both closed and open-ended) intended to capture information on the demographic characteristics of respondents and their circumstances and experiences of living in Wales including in relation to
housing, support, skills, qualifications, employment and health and well-being. There were also a number of questions around issues of safety and security including experiences of racism and discrimination.

7. A total of 123 refugees participated in interviews for the survey which took place between August and November 2008. The main countries of survey participants were Eritrea, Sudan, Iraq, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iran, Turkey, Algeria and Zimbabwe. Around 70% of respondents in the survey are aged 25-44. There is a balance of male and female respondents. Half describe themselves as Muslim, and just under half (43.1%) as Christian, with smaller proportions of Sikh, Buddhist and Hindu. A significant proportion (44%) of respondents was granted status in 2008, with a further fifth granted status in 2007. This is likely to be a reflection of the Home Office ‘backlog clearance’ or ‘legacy’ programme’. Nearly half of those who took part in the survey have been living in the UK for more than five years and a third have been living in Wales for that time. Most were dispersed to Wales but ten respondents (8.1%) moved to Wales after being granted refugee status.

8. Efforts were made to ensure the participation of refugees from a wide range of countries and backgrounds. Because of the lack of baseline information it is impossible to know whether the survey participants are representative of the wider refugee population in Wales. Although the survey has limitations it nonetheless provides significant new information about the experiences of refugees living in Wales, and about possible approaches to data collection for the future.

Housing

9. Housing is widely considered to be a cornerstone for successful refugee integration. A significant majority (89.4%) of refugees who participated in the survey live in rented accommodation, with the council or local authority being the landlord for two thirds. Very few of the refugees own their own property (4.1%). Some refugees do not have their own home but are staying with family or friends, or living in temporary or hostel accommodation. Others are effectively homeless. This may be as a result of the requirement that they have a ‘local connection’ with the area in which they are living in order to be entitled to homelessness services.

10. Although one in five refugees said that they do not have any problems with their accommodation, the vast majority described significant housing problems including a lack of permanency (36.6%), the condition of their accommodation (28.5%), insufficient rooms (20.3%), problems with neighbours or community (14.6%), and cost (13%). Respondents provided extensive comments on the quality of their accommodation, with many describing problems with the condition of the property (most notably damp, insect and mouse infestation, dirtiness of rooms and carpets) and with living arrangements (especially overcrowding and a lack of privacy). Concerns were also expressed about the attitude and behaviour of other residents towards themselves and their children.
Education and training

11. Education creates significant opportunities for employment and for wider social connection. The findings of the survey are broadly consistent with previous studies which have generally found refugees to be more highly qualified than their UK citizen counterparts. Three quarters of respondents held a secondary school certificate of education and a further 43.9% had a diploma. More than a quarter had obtained a University degree in their country of origin with a further 8.9% holding a postgraduate qualification.

12. A third of those surveyed have gained an English language qualification and 13.8% have obtained a University degree or postgraduate qualification (8.1% and 5.7% respectively). More than a third of respondents were undertaking educational courses at the time of survey.

13. Half of all respondents have undertaken training courses since their arrival in the UK, including forklift truck training, food hygiene, ICT, first aid, health and safety, counselling, homeopathy, catering and playwork. The levels of training being undertaken by refugees in Wales are considerably higher than reported elsewhere in the UK.

14. A number of refugees described starting - or wanting to start - educational courses or take up training opportunities but being unable to do so or to complete their studies due to ill health or difficulties with funding and/or childcare and domestic responsibilities.

English language skills

15. The importance of English language skills for the process of refugee integration is universally acknowledged. This is reflected in emphasis placed on the provision of English language (ESOL) training by both the Home Office and WAG. Previous research has found that on arrival, self-reported English language skills among refugees are generally poor but that these skills improve considerably over time. The findings of the survey are largely consistent with this finding.

16. Around a third of respondents described their English language skills as ‘very poor’ prior to their arrival with less than one in ten (9.8%) considering their skills to be ‘very good’. By contrast two thirds considered their English language skills at the time of the survey to be ‘very good’.

17. Although two thirds of refugees said they had received some formal English language training since arriving in the UK, many described difficulties in receiving appropriate support to improve their language skills. These difficulties included the appropriateness of the level of training provided (usually too easy), courses and lessons/classes being too short, a lack of childcare and/or the timing of classes which makes it difficult for parents (especially mothers) with school-age children to attend. Several respondents commented on the associated costs of attendance, particularly bus fares.
Employment and volunteering

18. Employment provides a mechanism for income generation and economic advancement and, as such, is widely considered as a key mechanism for integration. Jobs are also valuable in establishing valued social roles, developing language and broader cultural competence and establishing social connections.

19. Existing research indicates that refugees experience high levels of unemployment and under-employment, in spite of the fact that many arrive in the UK with good qualifications and previous work experience in their countries of origin. The findings of the survey confirm that this is also the case in Wales. Although nearly two thirds of respondents were employed in a variety of professions before coming to the UK, less than a third (31.7%) had a job at the time of the survey. Of those refugees who were employed, most were in administrative or clerical positions, cleaning or factory work. Nearly half of those who are employed did not feel that their job was appropriate for their qualifications, skills and experience.

20. Many refugees commented that they had experienced racism and discrimination both in terms of finding employment and in their experiences in the workplace. Issues of skin colour, religion and dress codes (particularly headscarves) were raised as causes of discrimination. Many respondents believe that they are not selected for job interviews because they do not have an English (or Welsh) name.

21. Volunteering is widely viewed as a potentially important route into employment for many refugees, not least because it can provide an opportunity for refugees to gain work experience in the UK, acquire or develop skills and obtain UK references. Although refugees living in Wales are generally under or unemployed, more than half (57.7%) have been involved in voluntary work since their arrival. This is considerably higher than the 29% involved in voluntary work in earlier UK-wide research, but slightly lower than for the population of England and Wales more generally.

22. Lower levels of volunteering could reflect a number of factors. Around a quarter of survey respondents said that they had found it difficult to access volunteering. The main reason given was a lack of information about available opportunities for volunteering. This problem is greatest for those who have recently arrived and have limited English language skills.

Health and well-being

23. Gathering information from population groups on health and well-being is very difficult and a survey methodology poses severe limitations on the kinds of questions and issues that can be explored. Nonetheless the survey provides some basic information about the mental and physical health of refugees living in Wales.

24. The refugees who participated in the survey generally consider their physical health to be better than before their arrival in the UK. Twice as many respondents consider their mental health to be good since arriving compared with previously. It is notable that the proportion of respondents who consider their mental health in the UK to be ‘poor’ is similar to the proportion prior to arrival. Moreover a significant
proportion of respondents indicated that they felt that both their physical and mental health had become worse since they arrived in the UK (22.8% and 38.2% respectively).

25. Nearly all the descriptions of decline in mental and physical health since arrival in the UK are related to anxiety, stress, depression and isolation associated with being a refugee, the asylum process and separation from home and family. There is some evidence that mental health problems are made worse by the housing and employment situations in which many refugees find themselves.

26. A third of respondents were receiving medical treatment at the time of the survey, most notably treatment for depression in the form of anti-depressants and/or counselling. Nearly a quarter described difficulties in accessing medical treatment including difficulties and delays in securing appointing with GPs, dentists and hospital consultants, and the length of waiting times for appointments, especially with consultants.

Racism and discrimination

27. The process of integration is about more than simply access to services or the labour market: it is also about how communities function on a day-to-day basis, whether individuals feel safe and are how they relate to one another.

28. Half of all refugees participating in the survey have experienced negative public attitudes and racism whilst living in Wales. These figures are significantly higher than the findings of a recent survey undertaken by the Welsh Assembly Government for the population of Wales as a whole.

29. A significant number of incidents were described by survey respondents, many involving verbal and physical abuse, often by teenagers and youths. Damage to property was also widely reported. Reference was made by some respondents to discrimination in the workplace and in dealings with agencies and service providers, including the police. It appears that many racist incidents are not reported due to concerns about the consequences. Many also feel that incidents which are reported are not well dealt with by police, housing providers and the UKBA.

30. A third of survey participants feel that they have been discriminated against because of skin colour, ethnic origin or religion. This figure is three times higher than the finding of the latest Living in Wales survey. Visible differences, particularly headscarves, are noted as causing particular problems.

31. Questions were asked about refugees' feelings of safety and security in the place where they live. These questions were drawn in large part from the British Crime Survey with a view to being able to compare the responses of refugees living in Wales with the responses of the population of England and Wales more generally. The findings of the survey are largely consistent for those of the population as a whole.
32. The survey explores feelings and relationships towards the neighbourhood or area within which refugees live and their involvement or otherwise in local organisations. The most important aspect worthy of note is the fact that the majority (61.8%) of respondents agree with the statement ‘I feel I belong to the neighbourhood’. More than two thirds of respondents agree with the statement that ‘I would be willing to work together with others on something to improve my neighbourhood’.

33. Nearly all respondents indicated that they belonged to one or more organisations or groups but their affiliation varies considerably as do levels of participation. Nearly half of those who participated in the survey are members of refugee or national/ethnic community groups. A similar proportion (45.2%) also belongs to a religious group or faith organisation. These were the largest groups in terms of membership.

34. More than three quarters of respondents said that they intended to stay in Wales. The main reasons provided by respondents for wanting to stay in Wales are community/neighbours (43%), followed by family and friends, public attitudes, employment, and the education of children. Other reasons include ‘feeling settled’, living near the sea, and the support provided by the church and voluntary sector.

35. Although most refugees indicated their intention to stay in Wales, one in five also said they might leave. A wide range of reasons were given, but the primary reasons given were the desire to be close to family, friends and community members living elsewhere, a perceived lack of diversity in Wales which is sometimes reflected in negative public attitudes and/or racism, issues with housing, and difficulties in accessing appropriate employment opportunities.

36. There is a contradiction between refugees’ descriptions of their day-to-day experiences of racism and the comments made by many in relation to their feelings about living in Wales. Among those who indicated their intention to remain in Wales, community and neighbours were cited as the single most important reason for this decision. This would seem to suggest that refugees living in Wales have both positive and negative experiences within their immediate neighbourhoods.

Policy implications

37. The survey provides important new information about the skills, needs and experiences of refugees living in Wales. Many of the key findings of this research are consistent with what is already known about the experiences of refugees living in other parts of the UK.

38. The survey identifies a number of potential barriers to inclusion in the areas of housing, education and training, employment and racism and discrimination. These barriers suggest that future policies should, as a priority, aim to:

- tackle sub-standard accommodation and ensure that refugees are not effectively homeless;
- deal with the specific barriers to accessing appropriate English language training courses;
• remove barriers to education and training;
• increase access to volunteering, especially outside the refugee sector;
• reduce racism and discrimination in finding employment and in the workplace; and
• improve reporting of, and response to, racist incidents.

Future research

39. The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to policies based on evidence and to monitoring and evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of its policies. The lack of systematic information on the skills and experiences of refugees and asylum seekers living in Wales will make the delivery of this objective more difficult in relation to the Refugee Inclusion Strategy.

40. There is scope for improvement in the collection of information on the skills and experiences of refugees living in Wales based on the survey approach developed and piloted in this research. This survey provides valuable insights into the most effective strategies that might be pursued in improving both the quality and quantity of information available.

41. A number of important issues which have been addressed in this research should be taken into consideration in any future efforts to undertake survey research with refugees living in Wales. These relate to the scale and frequency of any future survey work, the techniques that might be used to ensure that the full range of refugee backgrounds and experiences are included, and strategies for improving access and reducing the costs associated with survey work. Given that the Welsh Assembly Government does not distinguish between asylum seekers and refugees in the provision of many services, the inclusion of asylum seekers should be considered in any future research aimed at identifying the skills, needs and experiences of those living in Wales.
Section 1  Background to the survey

1.1  The refugee population in Wales

There is currently very limited information on the background, circumstances and needs of refugees (defined as those granted leave to remain in the UK) living in Wales. This is because of a lack of reliable official data. The only available information relates to asylum seekers who are still awaiting a decision on their claims. The UK Border Agency (UKBA) and other agencies routinely collect data relating to this group. Refugees, on the other hand, have been granted rights of residence, and simply disappear in generic government data sets alongside (and undifferentiated from) other individuals and households (Robinson 2005). The census, for example, does not require people to declare whether they are, or have been, a refugee, nor does the Labour Force Survey or General Household Survey. It is therefore impossible to create a sub-sample of refugees from national generic data sets and describe their characteristics.

Existing information about the refugee population in Wales is largely deduced from what is known about the number and nationality of asylum seekers, a proportion of whom (varying by individual circumstances, date of arrival and country of origin) will be granted to leave to remain in the UK and may choose to continue living in Wales. Others may not be successful in their applications but may continue to live in the area. Their needs and experiences will not be captured in any process and are therefore entirely unknown.

Prior to 2001, relatively low numbers of refugees decided to settle in Wales compared to some parts of the UK. Most of the key groups of refugees that entered the UK in the post-war years did not come to Wales. Wales really only attracted Somali refugees because of existing social connections and networks associated with labour migration into Cardiff in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the fact that the city is host to the UK’s largest British-born Somali population (Robinson 2005).

In 2001, Wales became a dispersal area for asylum seekers arriving in the UK. Four local authorities in Wales are designated as asylum seeker dispersal areas and asylum seekers are now dispersed to National Asylum Support Service (NASS) accommodation located in Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham. In each of these dispersal areas the Local Authority is responsible for arranging the asylum seekers’ access to accommodation and services and managing the integration of asylum seekers into the area.

In one of the only other studies looking specifically at refugees living in Wales, Robinson (2005) presented data showing that, by March 2004, Wales had a NASS-supported asylum seeker population of 2,605 people, of whom 44% lived in Cardiff, 36% in Swansea, 16% in Newport and 2% in Wrexham. Seventy-four nationalities were represented within Wales, compared with 132 for the UK as a whole, and 14 nationalities accounted for 75% of total. The largest nationalities in March 2004 were Somalis, Pakistanis, Iraqis and Iranians, but the size of each nationality had changed over time in line with changes in migration streams to the UK.
More recent data provided by the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership indicates that the numbers of asylum seekers dispersed to Wales has declined slightly, in line with the overall decrease in UK asylum applications. At the end of May 2009, 2,322 asylum seekers were living in Wales\(^1\). This figure excludes unaccompanied asylum seeking children supported by local authorities. Nearly three quarters (71.1\%) of those dispersed to Wales come from nine countries of origin: Afghanistan, China, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan and Zimbabwe (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Number of asylum seekers dispersed to Wales by nationality, end May 2009**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>671</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes**

1 Figures are rounded to the nearest 5
2 These figures include those supported under both Section 95 and Section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999

*Source: compiled from data provided by WSMP, May 2009*

Over half (56.9\%) of all asylum seekers were living in Cardiff at the end of May 2009, whilst Swansea had 562 asylum seekers (24.2\%), Newport 364 (15.7\%) and Wrexham just 74 (3.2\%). Whilst Cardiff has consistently housed the largest number of NASS-supported asylum seekers, the city’s relative share of the Welsh total has declined over time as other authorities have joined as dispersal areas (Robinson 2005). More than half (53.2\%) of all asylum seekers were living in families, a significant proportion of which were headed by women (and are likely to be single adult households). There were significantly more single male compared with single female asylum seekers (911 and 176 respectively).

This data suggests that refugee and asylum seeker populations living in Wales are distinct from the wider refugee population in the UK in some important ways

\(^1\) This figure includes those supported under both Section 95 and Section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.
(Robinson 2005). As noted above, their populations are more concentrated into a limited number of towns and cities and they are drawn from a more limited range of nationalities and linguistic groups. In addition, it seems likely that refugees and asylum seekers are less likely to have chosen to come to live in Wales. Robinson (2005) has suggested that because asylum seekers in Wales are more likely to be in receipt of the full ‘support and accommodation’ package than those in the UK as a whole, they are therefore less likely to have chosen where in the UK they wished to live while waiting for the decision on their asylum claim. The most recently available data (for the period up to the end of March 2009), indicate that only 1% of asylum seekers are in receipt of subsistence only support in Wales compared with a figure of 68% in London, and between 4%-6% for many other regions of the UK (Home Office 2009a). The percentage of all NASS-supported asylum seekers in Wales who are ‘support and accommodation’ cases and have been dispersed to Wales has gradually been rising from 90% in December 2002 to 95% in March 2004 and 97.4% at the end of March 2009 (Home Office 2008a, 2008b). This means that only a very small proportion of refugees living in Wales have actively chosen Wales as a place to live. This is most likely a reflection of the limited history of inward migration from the countries from which asylum seekers and refugees originate, and the corresponding lack of family and social connections.

This clearly has implications, not least because it is unclear what proportions of those whose claims are successful and who are granted leave to remain in the UK decide to continue living in Wales. As is noted by Robinson (2005), we know very little about whether people choose to stay in or leave Wales when they get a positive decision. Nor do we know how many asylum seekers receiving positive decisions in England choose to move to Wales. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some of those who are dispersed to Wales subsequently leave the country to join friends and relatives living in communities in England after they have been granted status (and are therefore no longer dependent on the Home Office for accommodation and support). Similarly those who are refused asylum and continue to live in the UK may choose to leave Wales to look for employment elsewhere, most likely in cities with more ethnically diverse populations and potentially greater opportunities and anonymity. There is also anecdotal evidence that some of those who choose to continue living in Wales are from particular ethnic, nationality or linguistic backgrounds and may therefore have specific needs and experiences. Looking into the future, it seems likely that some nationalities may come to be a more significant proportion of the refugee population in Wales than others. There is emerging evidence that some nationalities (for example, those from Eritrea and Zimbabwe) are currently being granted leave to remain in higher numbers than other groups. This may come to reinforce the existing trend towards a more limited range nationalities and linguistic groups.

1.2 Policy context

For policy makers and practitioners concerned with the process of integration, the lack of information and data on the background, needs and experiences of refugees living in Wales is highly problematic because it means that the delivery of appropriate services and support can be difficult and inconsistent (Robinson 1999; Threadgold and Court 2005).
The UK’s overall approach to the integration of refugees was first set out in *Full and Equal Citizens* (Home Office 2000), and subsequently elaborated in *Integration Matters* (Home Office 2005). Although there is an extensive academic literature on integration, the definition adopted by the UK government is a simple one: that integration takes place when refugees are empowered to achieve their full potential as members of British society, contribute fully to the community, and access the public services to which they are entitled. The first step towards the integration of refugees must be to identify and help with their most pressing needs. According to the UK government, finding and settling them into safe and appropriate housing, accessing employment or social security support, addressing any health concerns, and getting children settled in school are crucial to enabling refugees to focus on the longer-term aspects of integration. Most recently the government has reiterated its commitment to refugee integration with the publication of *Moving On Together* (Home Office 2009b), which reinforces the importance of being able to speak English and finding a job at the earliest opportunity as key steps in the process of integration. A new Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES) has been established which is designed to improve the chances of new refugees getting work.

It is important to note that whilst immigration control continues to be the responsibility of the UK government, refugee integration is a devolved matter. The three devolved administrations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales hold the view that integration for both asylum seekers and refugees begins from the day of arrival - and that this is essential not only for the asylum seekers and refugees but also for the communities in which they live. As a result the UK national strategy for refugee integration focuses only on England although there are some UK-wide initiatives, for example, RIES is currently being provided for refugees living in Wales.

The Welsh Assembly Government published its own national Refugee Inclusion Strategy in June 2008 (Welsh Assembly Government 2008). The strategy sets out the Welsh Assembly Government’s vision of refugee inclusion in Wales and aims to support and enable refugees to rebuild their lives in Wales and make a full contribution to society. The strategy highlights how the Welsh Assembly Government will work with service providers to realise its vision of refugee inclusion in Wales. One of the key areas which the objectives focus on is community cohesion. These objectives include:

- ensuring good communication exists between refugee/asylum seeking communities and their receiving communities, service providers and government;
- promoting positive relationships between asylum seeking/refugee communities and receiving communities;
- tackling widespread misunderstanding about asylum seekers and refugees; and
- promoting English and Welsh language across all people living in Wales, including asylum seekers and refugees.

Refugee inclusion and integration are conceived of as long term, dynamic, two-way processes which place demands on individual refugees, refugee communities, receiving communities and wider society. This means removing barriers which
prevent refugees from becoming fully active members of society. The Welsh Assembly Government has noted that limited baseline data will make it difficult to monitor progress in implementing the strategy and to evaluate its effectiveness. A range of other organisations and local authorities also require baseline information in order to enable them to provide appropriate services and draw upon the skills and expertise that many refugees bring.

According to Threadgold and Court (2005), the fact that the Welsh Assembly Government has chosen on the whole to use the term ‘inclusion’ as opposed to ‘integration’ reflects a conscious desire to move away from possible connotations of assimilation in the ‘integration’ concept. WAG has refused to construct ‘social cohesion’ as a problem to do just with new migrants (in this case refugees), preferring to see the long-term process of social and economic integration as a two-way process, but going further in recognising a range of different kinds of contribution which would characterise inclusion (Threadgold et al. 2008). This distinction is partly symbolic but also has practical implications for policy. For example, although immigration and asylum matters are not devolved matters, refugees and asylum seekers come into contact with a wide range services which are devolved including health, housing, social services and education. Some of these services make no practical distinction between asylum seekers and refugees in terms of delivery.

Although the Welsh Assembly Government is able to exercise some control over the direction of policies for refugee inclusion in Wales, the fact remains that immigration control issues remain outside of its control and that policies in this area have a direct – and often negative – impact on the ability of refugees living in Wales to rebuild their lives. Three policies are of particular note. The first is the inability of asylum seekers to work prior to receiving a positive decision. This policy is widely considered to impact negatively on the long-term employment prospects of refugees who are allowed to remain, and is known to have significant implications for mental health and self esteem (Bloch 2002). Secondly, policies in relation to those granted refugee status have changed. Prior to the 30th of August 2005, those who were granted refugee status were granted indefinite leave to remain in the UK. However since that time successful applicants have been granted refugee status and five years limited leave to remain in the UK, in line with the Government's Five Year Strategy for Asylum and Immigration announced in February 2005. It seems likely that this change of policy will have significant implications for refugees living in Wales, although these are as yet unknown. Finally, it is worth noting that the New Asylum Model has significantly increased the speed of the decision making process for many asylum seekers. This clearly has implications for policies intended to ensure that refugees are able to access appropriate housing, education, training and work once they are granted leave to remain.
1.3 Survey aims and objectives

As noted above, there is a lack of basic information available on the skills, needs and experiences of refugees living in Wales. This information is needed to ensure that refugees living in Wales are provided with appropriate services and support, and that employers and others are able to draw upon the skills and expertise that many refugees bring. In addition, this information is needed for the Welsh Assembly Government to monitor progress in implementing the Refugee Inclusion Strategy and to evaluate its effectiveness.

The aim of the survey is to gather information about the skills and experiences of refugees living in Wales and to identify any barriers to inclusion, including racism and discrimination. The survey has been undertaken with limited resources and over a limited timescale. This is reflected in the methodological approach discussed below. The survey represents a pragmatic response to the lack of information currently available to inform policy and practice in Wales and the need to find ways to improve the collection of data for the future. The findings of the research represent the first survey of the experiences and needs of refugees living in Wales and therefore reveal interesting new information. Just as importantly, it provides potential learning for any future survey of the needs and experiences of refugees living in Wales.

It is important that the information collected through any survey of refugees living in Wales is useful to policy maker and practitioners. For this reason the survey questions were devised in consultation with policy makers and practitioners and are located within the framework for thinking about integration issues which has been developed by Ager and Strang (2004). This framework is structured around ten key domains that the evidence suggests are of central importance to the integration of refugees. Within each of these ten domains a number indicators are suggested as a means of assessing integration with respect to that specific domain. The ten domains are grouped under four headings, as shown in Figure 2.

The definition of integration implicit within the framework suggests that an individual or group is integrated within a society when they:

- achieve public outcomes within employment, housing, education, health etc. which are equivalent to those achieved within the wider host communities;
- are socially connected with members of a (national, ethnic, cultural, religious or other) community with which they identify, with members of other communities and with relevant services and functions of the state; and
- have sufficient linguistic competence and cultural knowledge, and a sufficient sense of security and stability, to confidently engage in that society in a manner consistent with shared notions of nationhood and citizenship (Ager and Strang 2004, 5).
The framework identifies a number of key ‘markers and means’ by which this process of integration might be both attained and measured. These ‘markers and means’ include the following:

- **employment** provides a mechanism for income generation and economic advancement and, as such, is generally considered by both policy analysts and refugees themselves as a key factor supporting integration. Jobs are also valuable in (re)establishing valued social roles, developing language and broader cultural competence and establishing social connections;

- **housing** structures much of refugees’ experience of integration. Housing conditions impact upon a community’s sense of security and stability, opportunities for social connection, and access to healthcare, education and employment;

- access to – and progress within – the **education** system serves as a significant marker of integration, and also as a major means towards this goal. Education creates significant opportunities for employment, for wider social connection and for language learning;

- **good health** enables greater social participation and engagement in employment and education activities. The key issues here are equity of access to health services and responsiveness of such services to the specific needs of refugee populations;

- **community safety** is a common concern amongst refugees and within the broader communities in which they live. Racial harassment and crime erodes confidence, constrains engagement in social connection, and distorts cultural knowledge; and
- the creation of **social connections** with other communities which supports social cohesion, and opens up opportunities for broadening cultural understanding, widening economic opportunities etc.

The first four of these means of integration – employment, housing, education and health – are simultaneously ‘markers’, because success in these domains is an indication of positive integration outcomes, and ‘means’ because success in these domains is likely to assist the wider integration process. This is recognised in the refugee inclusion strategy (WAG 2008) which aims to ensure that refugees have fair and equal access to housing, education and health and social care, and that they are able to fulfil their potential in relation to employment. Questions relating to all four areas are therefore included in the survey. Issues of community safety and security and links into - and feelings about - the area or community within which refugees live have also been included as ‘markers’ of wider processes of inclusion and integration.

### 1.4 Methodological issues

This research was undertaken through the use of a survey questionnaire which was developed in consultation with an advisory group consisting of representatives of the main organisations working with refugees in Wales (Wales Strategic Migration Partnership and Welsh Refugee Council), the UK Border Agency, representatives of a number of different Welsh Assembly Government Departments and service providers in the areas of health and education. The questionnaire consisted of a total of 74 questions (both closed and open-ended) intended to capture information on the demographic characteristics of respondents, their circumstances and experiences of living in Wales, housing, support, skills, qualifications, employment and health and well-being. There were also a number of questions around issues of safety and security including experiences of negative public attitudes, racism and discrimination and feelings about the neighbourhood or area in which respondents live.

The methodological difficulties of undertaking survey research with refugees have been discussed in detail elsewhere (Bloch 2004, 2007). Sampling respondents is one of the main difficulties faced by researchers who want to carry out surveys with refugees. As noted earlier in this report, once an asylum seeker has received a positive decision and become recognised as a refugee, he or she becomes undifferentiated from the general population for the purposes of administrative data collection and sampling is therefore not possible. Instead most surveys of this kind rely upon access to refugees through community based organisations, larger refugee NGOs or pre-existing contacts as starting points from which to snowball sample. Snowball sampling is a strategy used to obtain further respondents by asking existing respondents to identify individuals who may be willing to be interviewed. It is an especially useful strategy when the focus of research is on a sensitive issue and/or the population is hidden. The non-probability basis of snowball sampling means that it is not possible to measure the precision of the sample in relation to the population as a whole using the standard error, resulting in limitations to the data and difficulties in making generalisations about the findings. The more limited the number of starting points from which to snowball, the more likely that the sample will share characteristics and be more homogeneous in nature than the population from which it is drawn. One way of widening inclusion and therefore the
representativeness of surveys with refugees is the use of multiple networking approaches for the purpose of snowball sampling: “[w]hile the limitations are recognised - especially the unmeasurable bias and the difficulties accessing the most isolated who are not linked to any groups or networks - it is a way of ensuring greater diversity than is achieved by reliance on one or a few refugee or community based organisations” (Bloch 2007, 236).

These issues were taken into account in the conduct of the survey. It was initially intended that the survey would be self-administered and various processes were put in place to enable this to happen, including discussion with relevant organisations and service providers to ensure distribution of the survey to potential respondents. Once it became apparent that this approach would not elicit a sufficiently high response rate, the decision was taken to administer the survey through interviews with refugees undertaken by a researcher based at the offices of the key agencies and organisations that come into contact with refugees either at the time that they are granted status or subsequently. These included the offices of the Welsh Refugee Council (Cardiff, Swansea, Newport and Wrexham) and UK Border Agency (Cardiff). Significant efforts were also made to build contacts and relationships with a wide range of refugee support groups and community organisations to secure survey participants from a wide range of socio-economic, demographic and country of origin backgrounds. It was also decided at that time that the criteria for participation in the survey would be open to include those granted refugee status at any time and from any country of origin.

As was anticipated, securing access to refugees willing to participate in the research proved to be one of the most challenging and time-consuming aspects of the survey. Interviews with refugees took place during the period August to November 2008. For reasons of convenience nearly half (47.1%) of the interviews were undertaken at the Welsh Refugee Council (WRC) offices in Cardiff (19.5%), Newport (21.1%) and Swansea (6.5%). Some interviews also undertaken in Wrexham but the number was much smaller reflecting the fact that there are far smaller numbers of refugees living in North Wales compared with the south of the country.

Conducting the research at the offices of the WRC was an extremely effective mechanism for meeting large numbers of potential respondents but not without its limitations. Moreover those using the services provided by the WRC are more likely to be asylum seekers rather than refugees thereby reducing the potential pool of respondents. Those accessing WRC services are, by definition, likely to be those who are in contact with mainstream support mechanisms rather than those who are potentially more marginal and/or vulnerable. From a practical point of view, there are issues around interviewing refugees for research purposes immediately after a meeting with a caseworker, both in terms of physical space in which to conduct the interview and the additional stresses that this places on the respondent.

In addition to those respondents accessed through the Welsh Refugee Council, a significant number of interviews were undertaken as a result of working with individual refugee community and voluntary organisations. These interviews were set up after an extensive period of discussion and consultation with key individuals (often referred to in research literature as ‘gatekeepers’ but perhaps more accurately seen as ‘facilitators’) who were able to put the researcher in contact with individuals
willing to take part in the survey. Interviews were then undertaken at a time and place to suit the respondent, for example, in the offices of a community organisation, in the respondent’s home or at a local cafe. Through a process of snowballing some of these respondents subsequently introduced the researcher to other respondents.

Again, there are both advantages and disadvantages of this approach. On the one hand it enabled access to respondents who might otherwise not have an opportunity to participate in the research and in settings where issues of trust, anonymity and independence were more easily guaranteed. Inevitably however the participation of some organisations but not others in this process led to the pre-dominance of particular nationalities in the sample. Although this approach is extremely labour-intensive and time-consuming, it is perhaps ultimately more rewarding and provides different kinds of insights than those possible through other access strategies.

Finally, substantial efforts were also made to conduct surveys at the offices of the UK Border Agency. The intention was to interview those who were attending the offices to be granted status and therefore to capture the experiences of a different cohort, including those who had arrived more recently and had been processed through the new casework system (often referred to as the New Asylum Model). In the event it proved extremely difficult to identify the times at which refugees would be attending the offices in order to be granted status and therefore to co-ordinate the research process. Only four survey interviews were undertaken with respondents at UKBA offices despite extensive efforts. The location of these interviews also raised additional issues of trust and confidentiality for respondents.

In the absence of any existing strategies for the systematic collection of data on the skills, needs and experiences of refugees living in Wales, identifying an appropriate methodological approach for any future work in this area has been an important objective of the survey. In this context there are a range of other methodological issues associated with the conduct of the survey that are worthy of brief discussion here. In addition to the sampling issues noted above, these include ethical issues, for example ensuring informed consent and protecting the anonymity and confidentiality of information gathered, the use of interpreters and the payment of research incentives and expenses.

In relation to ethical issues, significant steps were taken to ensure that survey participants were properly informed about the aims of the research before they decided about whether or not to participate. An information sheet was provided to all potential respondents (see Appendix 1) and written consent secured in advance of the interview. Respondents were advised that they could withdraw from the research at any point, including during the interview itself. Reassurances were given about confidentiality and anonymity of the information collected and these were generally sufficient, although some respondents remained nervous and were concerned that information given doing the course of the survey might be passed to the authorities, particularly the UK Border Agency. This anxiety may, at least in part, reflect the fact that many of those with refugee status do not feel secure about their future because of the Home Office decision to removed indefinite leave and instead grant limited leave for five years only.
In relation to the use of interpreters it should be noted that although one in five of those who participated in the survey required the interview to be conducted through an interpreter, a lack of resources to cover the associated costs meant reliance upon voluntary organisations and the friends and family of respondents to assist with interpreting. This was not an ideal situation, especially where it became evident during the course of an interview that there were communication difficulties.

In addition there were no resources available to cover expenses associated with participation in the survey or to thank respondents for their time. The only incentive for participation was the promise of feedback and that the findings of research would be used to try to improve the quality of services and support provided to refugees living in Wales. Any future survey will need to ensure that travel and other expenses can be reimbursed to respondents and that, ideally, there is a research incentive to encourage participation. Just over half (57.7%) of interviews to complete the survey took between 30 and 60 minutes. One in five (20.3%) took more than 60 minutes and one in five (19.5%) took less than 30 minutes. On this basis a research incentive of £10-15 per interview might be considered appropriate.

Finally, this survey was undertaken only with refugees who have been granted status. Given that the Welsh Assembly Government does not differentiate between asylum seekers and refugees in the provision of many services, the inclusion of asylum seekers should be considered in any future research aimed at identifying the skills, needs and experiences of those living in Wales. This is the approach taken in other devolved administrations (see, for example, Charlaff et al. 2004).

1.5 Characteristics of the sample population

A total of 123 refugees participated in the survey. The survey respondents were living in the major conurbations of Cardiff, Newport and Swansea with around a third in each city (34.1%, 29.3% and 32.5% respectively). A small proportion of respondents (4.1%) were living in Wrexham. It is important to emphasise that this sample is not representative because of the sampling issues outlined above and the lack of baseline information on the total population of refugees living in Wales. Nonetheless it provides a significant group about which information on skills, needs and experiences of living in Wales is now known.

Figure 3 shows the country of origin of survey respondents. The main countries of origin are Eritrea (21.1%), Sudan (13.8%), Iraq (9.8%), Somalia (8.9%), the Democratic Republic of Congo (6.5%), Iran (6.5%), Turkey (4.9%), Algeria (4.1%) and Zimbabwe (3.3%).
A significant proportion of respondents are from other countries (26 respondents from 22 different countries of origin). This reflects some, but not all, of the main nationalities known to have been dispersed to Wales at the end of 2007.

The decision to work with refugee community organisations to access survey respondents partly explains the predominance of some nationality groups over others. The composition of the sample also reflects the fact that some groups are more likely than others to access mainstream support services, such as those provided by the Welsh Refugee Council, where the majority of the interviews took place.

Around 70% of respondents in the survey are aged 25-44, again reflecting what is generally known about the demographic structure of the refugee population and the predominance of those in this age range (Figure 4). None of the respondents are aged over 65 and this is an aspect of the sampling frame that any future survey work may want to address.
The sample includes a balance of male and female respondents (57% and 43% respectively). Just over half (55.3%) of respondents were married at the time of the survey. Just one respondent was living with a partner. The remainder were single (37.4%), separated, divorced or widowed or chose not to provide information about their marital status. More than half (59.3%) of the respondents have children, and nearly half of those (45.2%) have two children. Very few respondents (5.4%) have more than four children. Around a third (31.7%) of respondents have children aged five years old or under. Very few respondents consider themselves to have a disability and none appears to be registered disabled.

In terms of ethnicity, over half (56.9%) of respondents described themselves as ‘Black African’, 11.4% as ‘White’ and 26% as ‘Other’. It is worth noting that a significant minority of respondents (26%) did not consider that any of the standard ethnic categories accurately described their ethnic group or origins. This is particularly evident for those from the Middle East who often do not perceive themselves as being ‘Black’. Some respondents chose to describe their ethnic group in terms of their country of origin (for example, Iraqi, Afghanistani, Sudanese, Vietnamese or Kurdish). Others described themselves as ‘Arab’, ‘Middle Eastern’, ‘Latin American’ or ‘Berber’. One respondent described their ethnic origin as ‘Somali-Welsh’ (Figure 5).

Respondents were asked about their religion or beliefs. Around half (49.6%) described themselves as Muslim, and just under half (43.1%) as Christian, with smaller proportions of Sikh, Buddhist and Hindu (representing one or two individuals in each case).
The survey asks a series of questions about the length of time that refugees have been living in the UK and Wales, the point in time at which their application for asylum was made (and where they were living at that time), and the point at which they moved to Wales. Questions about time spent in the UK and Wales are important because the length of time spent in a country of resettlement has significant implications for the integration process. In addition the date at which an asylum application has been made is known to have significant implications because of the very substantial changes that have taken place in asylum policy and practice over the past decade, including policies in relation to the process of refugee integration. The length of time that an individual has to wait for a final decision on his or her application for asylum is known to have a significant impact on the process of integration because of the implications for the ability to access the labour market, social housing and other services, including further education (Bloch 2004).

Within the sample population, applications for asylum are fairly evenly distributed over the past decade with the most applications (15.7%) being made in 2003, followed by 2008, 2002, 2007 and 2004. A significant proportion (44%) of respondents was granted status in 2008, with a further fifth (17.9%) granted status in 2007. This is most likely a reflection of the Home Office ‘backlog clearance’ or ‘legacy’ programme’. Nearly three quarters (71.5%) have been granted refugee status with indefinite leave to remain, with a further quarter (24.4%) granted refugee status for five years, although it should be noted here that the survey questionnaire did not sufficiently differentiate between these two categories of status. Nearly one in five (17.1%) of refugees in the survey has British citizenship and the vast majority (94.1%) of those who do not yet have citizenship are interested in applying to be British citizens when they meet the necessary requirements.
Nearly half (44.7%) of those who took part in the survey have been living in the UK for more than five years and a third (35.8%) have been living in Wales for that time. The majority of respondents (81.1%) were living outside Wales when they applied for asylum (predominantly London) but were dispersed to Wales after making their applications. Ten respondents (8.1%) moved to Wales after being granted refugee status.
Section 2 Housing

2.1 The importance of housing

There is a consensus in the existing literature that housing is a cornerstone for successful refugee integration (Robinson 2006). According to the framework developed by Ager and Strang (2004), housing structures much of refugees’ experience of integration. Housing conditions impact upon a community’s sense of security and stability, opportunities for social connection, and access to healthcare, education and employment. The evidence presented in section 6 of this report suggests that housing issues relate not only to the quality and affordability of the accommodation itself but also its location, and whether or not those living in the immediate neighbourhood are tolerant of diversity.

The importance of housing is acknowledged in the UK’s refugee integration strategy (Home Office 2005) and in the Welsh Assembly Government Refugee Inclusion Strategy (WAG 2008). WAG considers poor quality housing to be an issue for refugees living in Wales and recognises that this is a key barrier to inclusion. In response, guidance on asylum seeker and refugee housing has been issued giving detailed information to help existing and potential service providers to develop and deliver responsive housing services to asylum seekers and refugees. The recently issued All Wales Community Cohesion Strategy (WAG 2009) also recognises that housing provision can be one of the factors that lead to community tensions and result in poor community cohesion, particularly in situations of poverty. Poorly planned housing allocation can cause a heightened risk to personal safety and community tension.

As with other aspects of integration, there is limited evidence on the housing experiences of refugees living in Wales. The notable exception is a study undertaken by Robinson (2006) for the Welsh Refugee Council and the Housing Associations' Charitable Trust (hact). He notes that at a time when the number of households in general is rising, and demand for affordable housing is growing, the social housing stock in Wales has shrunk. It should be noted that homelessness amongst the refugee population in Wales is believed to be a growing problem and relatively recent policy changes mean that refugees may not be entitled to homelessness services in their dispersal area. By contrast in Scotland refugees are not considered for local connection. This gives refugees the possibility of securing accommodation in communities where they feel safe and secure, rather than be forced to live in areas they have been dispersed to for administrative reasons. Finding stable

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2 Section 11 of the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants etc) Act 2004 amended the local connection provisions of English and Welsh homelessness legislation such that asylum seekers automatically establish a local connection with the last area where they were provided with accommodation under section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 (that is, accommodation provided by the National Asylum Support Service). This means that, if an asylum seeker is given leave to remain in England and Wales and subsequently makes a homelessness application, he or she would have a local connection with her dispersal area. If he or she applies for homelessness assistance in a different area of England and Wales and does not have a local connection there for any reason (for example family associations or employment) and a main homelessness duty would be owed, the local housing authority can (if they wish) refer the application back to the local authority in the dispersal area.
accommodation is an essential factor in ensuring refugees can start to rebuild their lives. There is, however, no information on the scale of homelessness among refugees, its impact on the individuals or organisations involved, or its geographical variability. In addition there is evidence of an affordability gap in Cardiff. Housing benefit payments have failed to keep pace with property values in Cardiff, so refugees – along with UK residents – struggle to pay for affordable private accommodation. Robinson (2006) suggests that refugees are doubly disadvantaged because of the difficulties they face in accessing employment (discussed below), thereby reducing their financial independence and access to housing.

2.2 Accommodation and housing conditions

The survey asked a number of questions about the housing experiences and needs of refugees living in Wales, including in relation to tenure and the quality of accommodation. A significant majority (89.4%) of respondents live in rented accommodation, with the council or local authority being the landlord for two thirds (69%). NASS was described as being the landlord by 17 respondents. It is not clear why refugees with status are continuing to live in NASS accommodation, but it seems likely that this is because there is no appropriate social housing into which families can be moved.

Very few of the refugees participating in the survey own their own property with a mortgage or a loan (4.1%). Six respondents said that they are staying with family or friends, described by one respondent as ‘sofa surfing’ and two are staying in hostel accommodation. All of these respondents (6.5% of the total) are effectively homeless. This is consistent with other research which has found that the housing tenure of refugees differs from other ethnic minority people with a higher proportion renting and far fewer owning or buying their properties (Bloch 2002).

Although one in five (20.3%) respondents said that they do not have any problems with their accommodation, the vast majority described significant housing problems including a lack of permanency (36.6%), the condition of their accommodation (28.5%), insufficient rooms (20.3%), problems with neighbours or community (14.6%), and cost (13%). Respondents provided extensive qualitative comments on the quality of their accommodation, with many describing problems with the condition of the property (most notably damp, insect and mouse infestation, dirtiness of rooms and carpets) and with living arrangements (especially overcrowding and a lack of privacy).

Concerns were also expressed about the attitude and behaviour of other residents towards them and their children. These comments were reinforced during the research process where interviews were conducted in respondents’ homes. For example, in one case dog and human excrement was observed on the doorstep of a council-owned property in which a family was living with two young children. The mother had locked herself into the property and was clearly living in fear of her neighbour. It should be noted however that the proportion indicating problems with neighbours or community is much smaller than might be expected given the very strong evidence of racism and discrimination described in section 6 of this report. It is likely that this seeming anomaly arises from two issues.
Firstly, it is possible that the conflation of these two sets of relationships - neighbours and community - into one question within the survey was problematic. The qualitative responses indicate that people perceive the community to refer to others belonging to their country or region of origin rather than the immediate area within which they are living. Secondly, there is evidence that people have very positive interactions with some members of the immediate community and their neighbours whilst also experiencing hostility and racism from others. In other words, refugees may have contradictory experiences – both positive and negative - of living in a particular place. The implications of racism and discrimination as a barrier to inclusion are discussed further in section 6 of this report.

**Quality and location of accommodation**

*It’s not secure as its temporary. There is damp and the windows and doors are in poor condition. The aesthetic condition is very poor and the cost is very high.*

*After exhausting every avenue in an attempt to find adequate affordable housing I was left with no option but to move in to private accommodation which is very costly and which housing benefit does not adequately cover. I am aware of my rights and consider this treatment as an indictment of my entitlement as a refugee. There are massive shortages of affordable housing in Cardiff, all of my friends are suffering from the same problems.*

*Home is far from the children’s school and public transport is not reliable and taxis are too expensive and difficult to access during rush hour. There are no places available in the local school.*

*Eighteen months ago children in the neighbourhood started throwing stones at the property, resulting in a broken window. Since then the incidents have stopped. The police were called but said there was nothing they could do about it as the family or those responsible denied their involvement.*

*We were initially housed in [location in Swansea]. During three years there we were subjected to constant racial abuse, verbal, physical and property damage by young and old. We were re-housed in [location] where the situation continued and worsened leaving us with no choice but to buy our own home.*
Section 3  Skills, qualifications and language abilities

3.1 The importance of education and language

According to Ager and Strang (2004), access to – and progress within – the education system serves as a significant marker of integration, and also as a major means towards this goal. Education creates significant opportunities for employment, for wider social connection and for language learning.

A number of existing studies have examined the educational experiences and qualifications of refugees prior to their arrival in the UK. These studies have generally found refugees to be more highly qualified than their UK citizen counterparts. In the largest ever skills audit of refugees undertaken in the UK to date, Kirk (2004) explored the skills and qualifications of refugees in the United Kingdom using a survey method. Almost a half of those persons surveyed had received ten years or more of education, and over 40% held qualifications before they arrived in the UK. Charlaff et al (2004) found that refugees and asylum seekers living in Scotland are, for the most part, well qualified. More than 75% of respondents said they had completed secondary school education (or an equivalent), over half said they had completed college education (or an equivalent) and approximately 21% of respondents said they had completed a course at a university. Despite this, many refugees experience difficulties in securing employment appropriate to their skills and qualifications (Bloch 2004), an issue discussed further in section 4 of this report. This reflects, at least in part, difficulties in the comparability of educational qualifications from different countries and the issues associated with securing recognition of these qualifications in the UK labour market.

The importance of English language skills for the process of refugee integration are universally acknowledged (Bloch 2002; Home Office 2004; WAG 2008). According to Bloch (2002) and Rutter et al (2008), English language skills are the most important factor in determining access to the labour market. The inability to speak English is the main obstacle to taking up a job or finding employment that engages their skills fully (Home Office 2004). In addition the ability to communicate in English (or Welsh) is important for achieving cohesive and integrated communities. Recent research carried out by MORI found that 60% of people surveyed believed that not speaking English was in fact the biggest barrier to cohesion (WAG 2009), while the Commission on Integration and Cohesion report (2007) places a shared language as being fundamental to both integration and cohesion. An inability to communicate in a host language can also affect an individual’s ability to access their rights and public services.

Given the importance of language, both the UK and Welsh Assembly Governments have placed significant emphasis on the provision of English language (ESOL) training. Research commissioned by the Home Office has found that the main barrier for refugees wanting to access ESOL is the shortage of classes and long waiting lists across London and the regions (Griffiths 2003). This means that the recruitment and training of ESOL teachers is a priority. In addition whilst basic to higher levels of English are taught on most ESOL courses, there is evidence of a lack of English language-training for professional or vocational development. In all cases there is a
lack of childcare to enable women to take up the opportunities available to them. These issues can also be seen in Wales, where demand has increased and is set to increase further with requirements to demonstrate English language skills at ESOL Entry Level 3 or higher to in order gain citizenship and as a result of increasing numbers of migrant workers, particularly from the European Union countries. WAG recognises that ESOL provision in Wales is currently insufficient to meet demand, resulting in waiting lists for learners in certain localities (WAG 2008, 2009).

3.2 Educational qualifications

Prior to this survey the only information available specifically on the skills of refugees living in Wales comes from an audit of skills undertaken by the Welsh Refugee Council (2007) as part of the Equal Initiative (a European Social Fund programme which aims to tackle all forms of discrimination and inequality in the labour market, both for those in work and those seeking work). The survey of 360 refugees found that 60% of those living in Wales have a further or higher education qualification, and that 27% of these have university degrees.

The findings of the survey are broadly consistent with this and other surveys. A minority of respondents (15.4%) had no qualifications when they arrived in the UK. Three quarters (76.4%) of respondents held a secondary school certificate of education and a further 43.9% had a diploma. More than a quarter (28.5%) had obtained a University degree in their country of origin with a further 8.9% holding a postgraduate qualification. A relatively small number of respondents held vocational qualifications or indicated that they had been involved in vocational or professional training prior to their arrival in the UK.

Respondents were also asked whether they had gained any qualifications since their arrival in the UK. Although a significant minority of refugees living in Wales (38.2%) have not gained any qualifications since coming to the UK, a third (32.5%) have gained an English language qualification and 13.8% have obtained a University degree or postgraduate qualification (8.1% and 5.7% respectively). More than a third (37.4%) of respondents was undertaking educational courses at the time of survey. In addition to English language training, the courses in which respondents were enrolled included PGCE, accounting, music technology, planning, video production, public finance, social welfare, psychology, design manufacturing, childcare and human resources. A number of these courses will lead to degrees or postgraduate qualifications.

The findings of the survey suggest that levels of training being undertaken by refugees in Wales are considerably higher than reported by Bloch (2002), who found that only 4% of refugees who participated in her survey were undertaking training (although a much larger proportion, 60% of respondents, expressed an interested in training opportunities). Half (49.6%) of those who participated in this research have undertaken training courses since their arrival in the UK, including forklift truck training, food hygiene, ICT, first aid, health and safety, counselling, homeopathy, catering and playwork. This may be a reflection of the particular experiences and backgrounds of respondents or of the opportunities available.
A number of respondents described starting - or wanting to start - educational courses or take up training opportunities but being unable to do so or to complete their studies due to ill health or difficulties with funding and/or childcare and domestic responsibilities. Lack of information and only recently being granted refugee status were additional reasons given for the inability to take up training and education opportunities. A significant proportion of those who had arrived in the UK more recently said that they had been too busy with trying to settle into their new life to explore the opportunities for education or training.

### 3.3 English language skills and training

Bloch (2002) has found that on arrival, self-reported English language skills among refugees are generally poor but that these skills improve considerably over time. The findings of the survey are largely consistent with this finding. Respondents were asked to describe their English language skills before coming to the UK and at the time the survey was conducted. Around a third (31.7%) of respondents described their English language skills as ‘very poor’ prior to their arrival with less than one in ten (9.8%) considering their skills to be ‘very good’. By contrast two thirds (65.9%) consider their English language skills at the time of the survey to be ‘very good’ and very few (just two respondents) feel that their language skills can be described as ‘very poor’ (Figure 7).

It seems likely that at least some of the improvement in their own English language skills identified by refugees can be attributed to the provision of language training. Two thirds (68.3%) of respondents have received some formal English language training since arriving in the UK although it also seems likely that the period of time that the sample group has spent in the UK means that the refugees in this survey have better language skills than those who have more recently arrived simply by virtue of living in a country where English is the primary language of communication.

Others expressed concerns about difficulties in securing access to places, the appropriateness of the level of training provided (usually too easy), courses and lessons/classes being too short, a lack of childcare and/or the timing of classes which makes it difficult for parents (especially mothers) with school-age children to attend. Several respondents commented on the associated costs of attendance, particularly bus fares. Around half of those who had not received any formal English language training said that this was because they were already proficient in English, with the other half identifying a shortage of classes and lengthy waiting lists as the main problem.
Figure 7 English language skills (before and after arrival in the UK)
The provision of English language training

The course was not at appropriate level. I was placed with students who had no English knowledge at all.

There is a lack of childcare facilities. The 9 o’clock start is difficult if you have children. There is no transport support. The levels are not hard enough and as the levels progress a fee is expected which is unaffordable.

I couldn’t finish my IELTS course because of there is a £90 exam fee. I asked for support but this was not available.

Bus fares are extremely expensive and I have been unable to claim these back even though I am on job seekers allowance and have been told that I am entitled to a refund. The college is unable to clarify the situation and help. I have spent about £400 so far.

I missed classes due to other priorities required at the time, such as job seeker interviews, house viewings and other things associated with gaining status.
Section 4 Employment

4.1 Employment as a mechanism for integration

Employment provides a mechanism for income generation and economic advancement and, as such, is generally considered by both policy analysts and refugees themselves as a key factor supporting integration (Ager and Strang 2004). Jobs are also valuable in (re)establishing valued social roles, developing language and broader cultural competence and establishing social connections. As Threadgold and Court (2005) suggest, employment is also a significant method of enhancing self-esteem and notions of self-worth and represents a site of vital social and cultural interaction between peers (an opportunity to practice language skills and integrate into the work culture of the nation).

The importance of employment in the process of refugee integration is recognised by both the UK government and reflected in the *Refugee Integration Strategy* and policies of the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP 2004, DWP 2005; Home Office 2005). The fulfilment of refugee potential through appropriate employment is also a priority area for the Welsh Assembly Government’s inclusion strategy.

Despite this, unemployment among refugees of working age is unacceptably high. Estimates about levels of refugee unemployment vary, but all research has shown that they experience high levels of unemployment and under-employment, in spite of the fact that many arrive in the UK with good qualifications and previous work experience in their countries of origin (Home Office 2004). The national average for refugee unemployment is around 36% - about six times the national average - but small-scale local studies have revealed higher percentages among specific refugee communities. Where refugees are working, it is frequently at levels well below their capability (DWP 2004). Research by Harrison and Read (2005) similarly highlights that many asylum seekers and refugees were previously employed in areas that would have required a high-level education and diverse skills.

The causes of under and unemployment are diverse, reflecting the fact that refugees themselves are a diverse group. The causes of disadvantage differ between individuals, often compounded by issues relating to gender and age. Some have been denied education in their home country, are illiterate in their own language and have very poor employability skills. Others are highly qualified with professional level skills and may have learned English to a high level before arriving in the UK. The disadvantages for this second group include difficulties in establishing the transferability of their skills and qualifications to the UK labour market, which for many means a continuum of unskilled work and unemployment (DWP 2004). In addition asylum seekers face structural barriers to the labour market (Bloch 2002). The fact that refugees are unable to work until they receive a positive decision on their application for asylum contributes to a process of de-skilling, particularly where the decision making process is lengthy and protracted.
4.2 Labour market experiences

Research by Bloch (2002) explores the labour market experiences of refugees from Somali regions, Iraq, Kosovo, Sri Lanka and Turkey. The research found that 42% of respondents were working before coming to the UK. The majority (78%) of those working were employed by a company or organisation rather than self-employed, and across a wide range of sectors and occupational categories. By contrast only 29% of refugees were working in the UK. Those who were working were employed mostly in a few industries or types of jobs: catering, interpreting and translation, shop work and in administration and clerical jobs.

The only information available specifically on the labour market experiences of refugees living in Wales comes from an audit of skills undertaken by the Welsh Refugee Council (2007). The survey found that whilst 78% of refugees living in Wales had been working for employers before coming to the UK, 64% are now unemployed. The lack of ESOL classes was identified as one of the largest barriers facing refugees. The main reason given for not attending ESOL classes for those that needed them was the lack of availability of courses in their area.

Evidence from this survey is largely consistent with previous research. The findings of the survey indicate that two thirds (63.4%) of respondents were employed before coming to the UK. Respondents described being teachers, drivers, restaurateurs, electricians, soldiers, farmers, nurses, civil engineers, journalists, geophysicists, accountants and flight crew prior to their arrival in the UK.

The evidence in relation to current employment indicates that by contrast less than a third (31.7%) of respondents had a job at the time of the survey. This is consistent with the findings of research by Bloch (2002) although levels of prior education and employment in the country of origin, and of training in the UK, are considerably higher amongst the group taking part in this survey. Of those refugees who were employed, most were in administrative or clerical positions, cleaning or factory work. Nearly half (46.2%) of those who are employed did not feel that their job was appropriate for their qualifications, skills and experience.

A substantial majority (84.5%) of those who are not employed indicated that they would like a job, with many respondents indicating that they would be willing to do ‘anything’. Others said that they would like to be employed in an area similar to that in which they had previously trained or were experienced or in another skilled trade (for example, as a chef, driver, builder, electrician, hairdresser or computer technician). Those who indicated that they did not want a job were either in full time education or had domestic/childcare responsibilities at the time of the survey.

There are many factors that are associated with low levels of employment among refugees in the UK labour market, some of which have previously been discussed. In addition there is evidence of significant labour market discrimination against those from both ethnic minority and refugee backgrounds. Recent research by Rutter et al (2008) has found that among migrants from Bangladesh, Iran, Nigeria and Somalia there is a widespread perception that they face workplace discrimination. Many felt that their qualifications and prior employment experiences were not valued in the UK, a finding supported in much other research on migrant employment.
Many survey participants commented that they had experienced racism and discrimination both in terms of finding employment and in their experiences in the workplace. Issues of skin colour, religion and dress codes (particularly headscarves) were raised as causes of discrimination. Many respondents believe that they are not selected for a job interview because they do not have an English (or Welsh) name.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiences of employment discrimination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When I sent my CV with my name on it was turned down but when I sent my CV to the same job with an English name it was selected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have completed many job applications but have never been asked for an interview even though I am highly qualified for the jobs I have applied for.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I ring the numbers for jobs I am told the job is gone but the next day it is still in the Job Centre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have applied for numerous jobs and I have not been selected. Previously when I was taking an aptitude test for a job I was turned down even though I knew I had passed it. In my current job I feel that my supervisor watches me more closely than everyone else and I have to work that little bit harder just to prove myself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A work colleague told me that she did not like other nationalities coming to the UK and taking their jobs. I was treated in a way that was not equal to others. In the end this attitude made it impossible for me to carry on working there so I left that job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At work I experienced verbal abuse by middle aged men because they were not happy that I was promoted. In the end I was forced to resign.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3 Volunteering

Voluntary work can play an important role in enabling refugees to use their own skills, knowledge and autonomy, aiding new arrivals and contributing to their communities is paramount to the development of self-esteem and notions of self-worth (Threadgold and Court 2005). Volunteering is widely viewed as a potentially important route into employment for many refugees, not least because it can provide an opportunity for refugees to gain work experience in the UK, acquire or develop skills and obtain UK references. Mentoring and work shadowing can be pivotal in helping refugees make the transition to employment. Just as importantly, volunteering and mentoring also provide important opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers to interact with the wider community, create friendships and promote good relations (WAG 2008). The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to improving access to volunteering for people from all sections of society and to take special measures to include those who are vulnerable to social exclusion. At the UK level, it seems likely that the increased emphasis on ‘active citizenship’ as a
mechanism for securing early access to British citizenship will potentially increase levels of volunteering\(^3\).

Although refugees living in Wales are generally under or unemployed, more than half (57.7\%) have been involved in voluntary work since their arrival. This is considerably higher than the 29\% involved in voluntary work in the study by Bloch (2002). Respondents have volunteered for a wide number and range of organisations, many of which are community or church groups working with asylum seekers. Examples of groups and organisations with whom refugees in the sample have volunteered include various charity shops, local and community churches, homelessness organisations and mental health groups, as well as named organisations such as Swansea Bay Asylum Seekers Support Group (SBASSG), Asylum Justice, Welsh Refugee Council, National Park Brecon Beacons Mosaic Project, African Society Community Group, Salvation Army, SOVA, DPIA, Somali Integration Society, Sudanese Community in South Wales, British Red Cross, Sure Start, CAFOD and the CAB.

Although levels of volunteering among refugees are significant, there is some evidence that they are slightly lower than for the population of England and Wales more generally. In the period April-June 2007, 73\% of all adults volunteered (formally or informally) at least once in the last 12 months, with 48\% having volunteered at least once a month (Communities and Local Government 2007). A more comprehensive and detailed study undertaken by the Cabinet Office found that 59\% of respondents had given some sort of formal volunteering help to an organisation in the last year. Two-fifths (39\%) had volunteered on a regular basis (at least once a month) (Cabinet Office 2007).

Lower levels of volunteering could reflect a number of factors. Around a quarter (24.4\%) of respondents in this survey said that they had found it difficult to access volunteering. The main reason given was a lack of information about available opportunities for volunteering. This problem is exacerbated for those who have recently arrived and have limited English language skills. Some refugees said that they had offered their services as volunteers to a number of organisations but none had responded. Several suggested that information should be collated on volunteering opportunities available in Wales and made available through the main support organisations.

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\(^3\) The Government wants to encourage migrants to integrate fully into society if they want to stay here permanently - so those who choose to take an active part in the community will be able to obtain citizenship two years earlier than those who do not. To demonstrate ‘active citizenship’, a migrant might volunteer with a recognised organisation such as a charity, serve on a community body or take part in an activity that advances education or health, advances social and community welfare, advances heritage, arts, culture or sport, benefits the natural environment, benefits children, young people, elderly people, disabled people or other vulnerable groups and/or involves mentoring or befriending.
Section 5  Health and well-being

Ager and Strang (2004) suggest that good health enables greater social participation and engagement in employment and education activities. The key issues here are equity of access to health services and responsiveness of such services to the specific needs of refugee populations.

Gathering information from population groups on health and well-being is notoriously difficult and a survey methodology poses severe limitations on the kinds of questions and issues that can be explored. Nonetheless both physical and mental health are recognised as important aspects of the resettlement and integration process, including within the Welsh Assembly Government’s Refugee Inclusion Strategy (WAG 2008). Reflecting this, a limited number of questions were included in an effort to ascertain some basic information about the physical and mental health of refugees prior to and after their arrival in the UK and access to medical treatment whilst living in Wales.

5.1  Physical and mental health

Respondents were asked to describe their physical health before and since arriving in the UK on a five-point scale ranging from very poor to very good. Responses to this question are illustrated in Figure 8 and suggest that whilst physical health since arrival in the UK is less likely (by 6 percentage points) to be considered ‘very good’, overall physical health is better: nearly a third (29.3%) of respondents considers their physical health since arriving in the UK to be ‘okay’ compared with 17.9% prior to arrival.

Some respondents did, however, comment that their physical health had deteriorated as a result of a change in climate and poor housing conditions, particularly the presence of damp. This had resulted in the onset of bronchial and asthmatic conditions for some respondents.

As with physical health, an improvement can be seen in the overall mental health of refugees after arrival in the UK (Figure 9). Twice as many respondents consider their mental health to be ‘good’ since their arrival in the UK compared with previously, although there is no significant difference in the proportions that consider their mental health to be ‘very good’.

It should be noted however that the proportion of respondents that consider their mental health in the UK to be ‘poor’ is not dissimilar to the proportion prior to arrival. Moreover a significant proportion of respondents indicated that they felt that both their physical and mental health had deteriorated since they arrived in the UK (22.8% and 38.2% respectively).
Virtually all the descriptions of decline in mental and physical health since arrival in the UK are related to anxiety, stress, depression and isolation associated with being a refugee, the asylum process and separation from home and family. There is some evidence from qualitative responses that mental health problems in particular are exacerbated by the housing and employment situations in which many refugees find themselves.
5.2 Access to medical treatment

A third (36.6%) of respondents was receiving medical treatment at the time of the survey. Many respondents said that they are currently receiving treatment for depression, most commonly in the form of anti-depressants and/or counselling. Some complained that they had not received appropriate help with their mental health issues, and commented on the lack of access to counselling and other forms of support. Others stated that they did not want any help and wanted to deal with their depression on their own or with the help of friends and the church.

Nearly a quarter of respondents (23.6%) described difficulties in accessing medical treatment including difficulties and delays in securing appointing with GPs, dentists and hospital consultants, and the length of waiting times for appointments, especially with consultants. Although several respondents commented that doctors and/or receptionists had been rude and sometimes racist in their attitudes and approach, most difficulties appear to be related with general problems associated with the provision of health care services.
Section 6  Racism and discrimination

The process of integration is about more than simply access to services or the labour market: it is also about how communities function on a day-to-day basis, whether individuals feel safe and how they relate to one another. Ager and Strang (2004) suggest that community safety is a common concern amongst refugees and within the broader communities in which they live. This can be a significant barrier to integration because racial harassment and crime erodes confidence, constrains engagement in social connection, and distorts cultural knowledge.

The UK’s integration strategy Integration Matters (2005) identifies negative public opinions and poor information provision as being amongst the main barriers to refugees contributing to the community. The strategy recognises that “in order for refugees to contribute to all aspects of community life, they must feel safe and secure, particularly against racial harassment and racially motivated violence. Experiences of insecurity or victimisation can make it virtually impossible for people to play an active part in the community” (2004, para. 2.13). The Welsh Assembly Government also recognises the need to improve understanding between communities across Wales (WAG 2008). Recent research by Threadgold et al (2008) provides evidence that racism and discrimination can affect services which have a potential role in relation to integration (including language, legal support, housing, education, employment and health) and may be partly related to class as well as poverty.

It is worth noting here that much of the existing research on racism and discrimination in Wales is historical in nature and is sometimes underpinned by an assumption that racism is less of an issue in Wales than elsewhere in the UK. According to Robinson (1999), there is a belief in Wales that the Welsh are a tolerant nation, perhaps partly because of their history of experiencing English oppression. This belief is reflected in a ‘culture of denial’ which suggests that racism and discrimination are less virulent in Wales than in England. A similar point is made by Threadgold et al. (2008) who note that there is a significant history of racism in Wales. The Chinese, for example, have been periodically considered a threat to the labour market and were one of the targets of the South Wales race riots in 1991. The Somalis have an even longer history of being discriminated against. A recent report on public attitudes to immigration and asylum seeking in Wales presents ambivalent results (Lewis 2005). There is also evidence of racism in rural as well as urban areas (Robinson and Gardner 2006).

6.1  Experiences of racism and discrimination

The survey asked a number of questions about respondents’ feelings of safety and security and their social connections. These questions were intended to ascertain the extent to which those with refugee status who are living in Wales feel safe in the place that they live and engaged with the communities of which they are a part.

Refugees participating in the survey were asked whether they had experienced any negative public attitudes or racism since arriving in Wales. Half (49.6%) of all respondents indicated that they had experienced negative public attitudes and racism whilst living in Wales. These figures are significantly higher than the findings
of a recent survey undertaken by the Welsh Assembly Government for the population of Wales as a whole, which found that 12% of respondents said that they had suffered some form of discrimination, harassment or victimisation over the past five years (WAG 2008b). The vast majority of those who have experienced negative public attitudes and racism provided detailed and distressing accounts of these experiences (see box). Indeed this section of the survey elicited the most comprehensive responses from those that participated.

It is clear from the descriptions provided by respondents that many of these incidents involve verbal and physical abuse, often by teenagers and youths. Damage to property is also widely reported. Reference was also made by some respondents to discrimination in the workplace and in dealings with agencies and service providers, including the police. It appears that many incidents are not reported due to concerns about retribution. Many respondents also feel that incidents which are reported are not well dealt with by police, housing providers and the UKBA.

This is not to suggest that all refugees had experienced racism and discrimination or that they had not had positive experiences within their communities and neighbourhoods. Among those who indicated their intention to remain in Wales, community and neighbours were cited as the single most important reason for this decision. This would seem to suggest that refugees living in Wales have both very positive and negative experiences within their immediate neighbourhoods, as reflected in the comments by some individuals that whilst some neighbours have been racist and negative towards them others have been supportive and helpful.

A separate question was asked about whether refugees living in Wales feel that they have ever been discriminated against because of skin colour, ethnic origin or religion. A third (33.3%) indicated that they feel that they have been discriminated against on this basis, a figure that is three times higher than the finding of the Living in Wales survey (WAG 2008). The main examples of discrimination given relate to their children’s education and own experiences of the labour market (discussed in section 4). Visible differences, particularly headscarves, are noted as causing particular problems.
Experiences of negative public attitudes or racism in Wales

I have been spat at and other times when I was walking home with my children I had to pass a group of men who started clapping slowly.

The GP and receptionist have been rude and racist in their attitudes and approach, for example making appointments. The housing provider is very racist towards asylum seekers.

A youth has snatched my headscarf twice, and my house has been stoned.

When I was travelling on a bus in the evening I was attacked by a group of mixed youths...they were pulling my hair and punching me. I went to hospital and police but I did not report it.

During the first year of arrival, while we were in NASS accommodation, some workmen knocked on the door and then just barged in by using their own keys. My sister was trying to cover herself before they arrived and she was very distressed and shocked at their presence before she was able to cover herself. I rang NASS to complain but their response was rude. They said we should be grateful that the work was being carried out.

For three weeks the windows in our home were smashed with stones on three or four separate occasions. Once when I was getting off a bus I was attacked by group of boys. Another time a boy and girl stood outside main window and stared in for over an hour. Then groups of boys just threw clumps of mud at windows and brickwork. Our neighbour on other side has supported us and helped giving their advice. The police were called at first and incidents reported but this fuelled the situation so now we don’t call the police.

I experienced two physical attacks by male youths in the street at night in the centre of Swansea. After the second attack I had to go to hospital. I reported the incident to the police but they didn’t seem to care or want to know. The CCTV was not working on both occasions. I saw one of the attackers again and identified him to the police, but the police said they were unable to do anything as the event had passed.

I have experienced verbal abuse in the street and on public transport, by men and women, young and old. After the arrival of many Polish people the abuse has got even worse as many people think that I am Polish too.

I play semi professional football and at one game in Carmarthen I was verbally abused by the crowd.
6.2 Feelings of safety and security

Refugees were asked a series of questions about their feelings of safety and security in the place where they live. These questions were drawn in large part from the British Crime Survey with a view to being able to compare the responses of refugees living in Wales with the responses of the population of England and Wales more generally. Figure 10 shows the findings of a question asked about feelings of safety in the area of residence both during the daytime and at night.

The vast majority (92.6%) of respondents indicated that they feel safe (fairly or very) in the area where they living during the daytime. Although only a small proportion of respondents (7.4%) respondents feel unsafe (fairly or very) this proportion is nonetheless considerably higher than in the general population (only 3% of whom feel unsafe during the day). Sample size may (or may not) be an issue here. At night the figure for those who feel safe in the area where they live falls to 71.5% and the proportion of those who feel unsafe rises accordingly. It is important to note that one in ten refugees living in Wales feel ‘very unsafe’ in the area where they live after dark. It is also important to note however that this figure is very similar to the proportion of the general population in England and Wales (9%) that feels ‘very unsafe’ after dark (Communities and Local Government 2007).

**Figure 10 How safe do you feel in the area where you live?**

Respondents were also asked how worried they are about being physically attacked by strangers or by being insulted or pestered by anybody, either in the street or in any other public place. It is interesting to note that the response patterns for these two questions are almost identical (Figure 11), with around two thirds of refugees being not very or not at all worried about physical attacks or insults (61.8% and 63.4% respectively).
Although this means that around a third of all refugees who responded to the survey are either very or fairly worried about physical attacks and insults, this figure is not out of line with the population of England and Wales as a whole: data from the British Crime Survey for 2007 indicates that 31.9% of people are fairly or very worried about being physically attacked by strangers and 27.7% are worried about being insulted or pestered by somebody in the street or another public place (Home Office 2008b).

Figure 11 How worried are you about being physically attacked or insulted/pestered?

6.3 Social integration

Ager and Strang (2004) suggest that the creation of social connections with other communities supports social cohesion, and opens up opportunities for broadening cultural understanding and widening economic opportunities. In addition they highlight the importance of ‘feelings of belonging’ in the process of social integration. Refugees themselves – and most approaches to integration – understand that a sense of belonging to a particular group or community is crucial. Without this sense of identification with a particular ethnic, religious or geographical community, integration risks being ‘assimilation’.

Reflecting this, the survey asked a number of questions which aim to explore respondents feelings and relationships towards the neighbourhood or area within which they live and their involvement or otherwise in local organisations including political parties and groups, trade unions, religious or faith organisations, refugee or national/ethnic community groups, school and housing associations, and social clubs and groups. We also asked for an indicated of the regularity of participation in these groups. Responses to statements about the neighbourhood or area in which refugees live are provided in Figure 12.
Figure 12 Neighbourhood connections

The most important aspect worthy of note here is the fact that the majority of respondents agree with the statement ‘I feel I belong to the neighbourhood’ (61.8%). This compares with a figure of 75.7% of the general population of England and Wales who feel very or fairly strongly that they belong to their neighbourhood (Communities and Local Government 2007).

More than two thirds (69.9%) of respondents agreed with the statement that ‘I would be willing to work together with others on something to improve my neighbourhood’, with smaller majorities agreeing with the statements that ‘I like to think of myself as similar to the people who live in this neighbourhood’ (52.8%) and ‘I regularly stop and talk with people in my neighbourhood’ (56.9%). The only statement with which respondents were less likely to agree was ‘I borrow and exchange favours with my neighbours’. Responses at both ends of the spectrum (‘strongly agree’ and ‘strongly disagree’) were very small (less than 3%) for every statement except ‘I would be willing to work together with others on something to improve my neighbourhood’: 13.8% of respondents strongly agreed with this statement.

In terms of membership of organisations and groups, virtually all respondents indicated that they belonged to one or more groups but their affiliation varied considerably as did the level of participation in these groups. Nearly half (47.2%) of refugees who participated in the survey are members of refugee or national/ethnic community groups. A similar proportion (45.2%) also belongs to a religious group or faith organisation. These constituted the largest groups in terms of membership by
some margin. Women’s groups, sports groups and community or civic groups also appear important (13.8%, 15.4% and 19.5% respectively). Nearly two thirds (61.2%) of respondents participate in the activities of the groups with which they are involved often (once a week) or very often (2-3 times a week).

6.4 Feelings about living in Wales

The vast majority of respondents (78%) said that they intended to stay in Wales. It is important to acknowledge that this response is almost certainly skewed because those who have decided to leave Wales after receiving a positive decision will not be included in the survey. At least one respondent is known to have left Wales to live in London shortly after the research was completed.

The main reasons provided by respondents for wanting to stay in Wales are community/neighbours (43%), followed by family and friends (36%), public attitudes (32.5%), employment (21.9%) and the education of children (21.1%). Other reasons include ‘feeling settled’, living near the sea, and the support provided by the church and the voluntary sector. Again, it is worth noting the seeming contradiction here between those who cite community/neighbours as being the most important reason for staying and experiences of racism and discrimination outlined above. Refugees may feel very much connected with others from their own country living in other areas and often meeting on a regular basis, but simultaneously experience racism and hostility in their local community. It is not clear to what extent the decision to stay in Wales is influenced by the fact that it can be difficult to secure appropriate and affordable accommodation elsewhere because of the requirement that a refugee has a ‘local connection’ to the area in which he or she wishes to live.

Many of the responses appear contradictory, including the fact that refugees like living in Wales because they feel it is small enough to be well known in, but also large enough to be anonymous. The following comment from one respondent illustrates these contradictions as well as the importance of general opportunities and freedom from conflict associated with living in the UK:

“Wales is big enough and small enough. I love the sea. Welsh people although they can be racist can also be friendly. Swansea has provided us with an opportunity that was not available in [country of origin]. Also there is no war in the UK”.

Although the majority of respondents indicated that they are intending to stay in Wales, one in five (19.5%) went on to say that they might leave Wales. A wide range of reasons were given, but the primary explanations appears to be a desire to be close to family, friends and community members living elsewhere, a perceived lack of diversity in Wales which is sometimes reflected in negative public attitudes and/or racism, issues with housing and difficulties in accessing appropriate employment opportunities.
Section 7  Conclusions and policy implications

As noted at the outset of this report, the lack of official data relating to refugees living in Wales undermines the ability to of policy makers and practitioners to deliver appropriate services and support and to harness the existing skills for the benefit of both refugees themselves and the Welsh economy and society more generally. The survey provides important new information about the skills and experiences of refugees living in Wales and identifies a number of barriers to inclusion, including racism and discrimination.

7.1  Key findings of the research

Housing

Most refugees live in rented accommodation, much of which is owned by the local authority of the area in which they live. Despite having secured refugee status, and corresponding rights of access to housing provision, some refugees do not have their own home but are staying with family or friends, or living in temporary or hostel accommodation. This may be as a result of the requirement that they have a ‘local connection’ with the area in which they are living in order to be entitled to homelessness services. The vast majority of refugees describe problems associated with both the quality of their accommodation and the attitude and behaviour of other residents towards themselves and their children.

Education and training

Education creates significant opportunities for employment and for wider social connection. Previous studies have generally found refugees to be more highly qualified than their UK citizen counterparts. The findings of the survey are broadly consistent with this evidence. More than a quarter had obtained a University degree in their country of origin with a further 8.9% holding a postgraduate qualification. More than a third of respondents were undertaking educational courses at the time of survey and a significant proportion had gained an educational qualification since arriving in Wales. Although levels of training being undertaken by refugees in Wales are considerably higher than reported elsewhere in the UK, there remain issues of access with a number of refugees unable to start educational courses or take up training opportunities due to difficulties with funding and/or childcare and domestic responsibilities. There is also evidence that some refugees are unable to access appropriate English language training courses, a problem already noted by the Welsh Assembly Government in its Refugee Inclusion Strategy. The evidence from the survey suggests that what is needed is not only increased ESOL provision, particularly classes at a higher level than those currently provided, but also support for transport costs and childcare.

Employment

As elsewhere in the UK, under- and unemployment is a significant issue for refugees living in Wales. Although nearly two thirds of respondents were employed in a variety of professions before coming to the UK, less than a third (31.7%) had a job at the time of the survey. Of those refugees who were employed, most were in
administrative or clerical positions, cleaning or factory work. Nearly half of those who are employed did not feel that their job was appropriate for their qualifications, skills and experience. Many refugees commented that they had experienced racism and discrimination both in terms of finding employment and in their experiences in the workplace, suggesting the need for improved information to employers about rights of refugees to work and more rigorous enforcement of anti-discriminatory practices in recruitment. Levels of volunteering are higher than reported for refugee populations living elsewhere in the UK but lower than for the population as a whole. There would appear to be a lack of accessible information for refugees about the volunteering opportunities that are available to them, particularly outside the refugee sector. Such opportunities are important in broadening workplace experiences and improving language skills. They also provide opportunities for wider processes of integration and inclusion to take place.

Health and well-being

Although limited, the survey provides some basic information about the mental and physical health of refugees living in Wales. This information strongly suggests that whilst, in general terms, the mental and physical health of refugees improves in the UK, for a significant minority there is deterioration, particularly in relation to mental health. Virtually all the descriptions of decline in both mental and physical health since arrival in the UK are related to anxiety, stress, depression and isolation associated with being a refugee, the asylum process and separation from home and family.

There is some evidence from qualitative responses that mental health problems in particular are exacerbated by the housing and employment situations in which many refugees find themselves. These issues suggest the need for greater emphasis on mental health support services for refugees to ensure that they are able to adapt to life in Wales and take advantage of the opportunities that become available to them once they have been granted leave to remain. It should also be noted that the policy to grant limited leave to remain for five years (rather than indefinitely) may serve to further undermines refugees' sense of stability and security, and in turn undermine the long-term integration process.

Racism and discrimination as a barrier to inclusion

It is important to remember that the process of integration is about more than simply access to services or the labour market: it is also about how communities function on a day-to-day basis, whether individuals feel safe and how they relate to one another. In this context perhaps one of the most significant findings of the survey is that despite the fact that all of those who participated have leave to remain in the UK – and therefore can be considered legitimate or bone fide – and have been living in Wales for a number of years, half have personal experiences of negative public attitudes and racism. This figure is significantly higher than the findings of a recent survey undertaken by the Welsh Assembly Government for the population of Wales as a whole. A significant number of incidents were described, many involving verbal and physical abuse, often by teenagers and youths. Damage to property was also widely reported. Reference was made by some respondents to discrimination in the workplace and in dealings with agencies and service providers, including the police.
It appears that many racist incidents are not reported due to concerns about retribution. Many respondents also feel that incidents which are reported are not well dealt with by police, housing providers and the UKBA. These experiences clearly have implications for community cohesion in Wales and broader community cohesion agenda.

It should be noted however that refugees have both positive and negative experiences. This has implications for policies to promote social and community cohesion. Although more than three quarters of respondents indicated their intention to stay in Wales and cited their community and neighbours as the most important reason for this choice, one in five cited a perceived lack of diversity in Wales as reasons why they would want to leave. This evidence suggests that refugees may have mixed experiences: on the one hand they may feel closely tied to other individuals from their country of origin or ethnic background, and also to individual friends and neighbours. But they may also have more hostile experiences within the community more broadly defined and from some members of the neighbourhood within which they live. Tackling these wider relationships will be crucially important both for community cohesion in general and for ensuring that individuals and their families feel safe, secure and integrated into wider Welsh society.

### 7.2 Implications for policy

The findings of the survey have implications for future policy work in relation to the inclusion of refugees living in Wales. The survey identifies a number of potential barriers to inclusion in the areas of housing, education and training, employment and racism and discrimination. These barriers suggest that future policies should, as a priority, aim to:

- tackle sub-standard accommodation and ensure that refugees are not effectively homeless;
- deal with the specific barriers to accessing appropriate English language training courses;
- remove barriers to education and training;
- increase access to volunteering, especially outside the refugee sector;
- reduce racism and discrimination in finding employment and in the workplace; and
- improve reporting of, and response to, racist incidents.

The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to evidence-based policymaking and to monitoring and evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of its policies. There is, however, a shortage of research and data relating to refugees living in Wales. This lack of data will make it difficult to monitor progress in implementing strategies for refugee inclusion and to evaluate their effectiveness. In addition, local authorities and other organisations will need to better understand the composition of their communities in order to foster cohesion.
One strategy for dealing with the current lack of information is to further develop strong multi-agency networks which can provide bridging links between organisations and ensure that the limited data which does exist is collated and shared (Threadgold and Court 2005). However this will not resolve the problems associated with a lack of basic data about the skills and experiences of refugees living in Wales. There is also a need for the systematic collection of data relating specifically to this population. One of the ways in which a survey of the kind undertaken for this report can improve policies for refugee inclusion is by providing a benchmark against which the effectiveness of policies can be measured over time. This would require that the survey be repeated on a regular basis, ideally every two to three years and that the scale of the survey is increased to include between 300 and 500 respondents. Whilst not necessarily representative of the wider population (whose characteristics remain unknown), this would constitute a significant cohort, the breadth of which could be maintained through deliberative sampling and snowballing techniques.

Recently introduced policies, including the Refugee Employment and Integration Service, may provide an appropriate mechanism for accessing respondents and this possibility should be explored. The use of community researchers would ensure that those groups whose experiences are least well known and understood (for example, particular nationalities or age groups) can be accessed. Sufficient resources would need to be available to cover the costs associated with interpretation and for the provision of research incentives and expenses to survey respondents. Finally, this survey was undertaken only with refugees who have been granted status. Given that the Welsh Assembly Government does not differentiate between asylum seekers and refugees in the provision of many services, the inclusion of asylum seekers should be considered in any future research aimed at identifying the skills, needs and experiences of those living in Wales. This is the approach taken in other devolved administrations (see, for example, Charlaff et al. 2004).
References

All web pages accessed on 23 June 2009.


Appendix 1  Participant information sheet

You are being invited to take part in a survey of refugees living in Wales. Before you decide whether or not to participate it is important for you to understand why the survey is being undertaken and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Talk to others about the study if you wish.

What is the aim of the research?

Very little is currently known about the needs, skills and experiences of refugees living in Wales. The survey will help us to find out more about these issues. The information will be used to make sure that appropriate services and support are provided, and to inform policy development.

Who is undertaking the survey?

The survey is being undertaken by researchers at the Centre for Migration Policy Research (CMPR) which is based at Swansea University (www.swansea.ac.uk/cmpr). The survey is funded by the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership (www.newport.gov.uk/wsmp) and the Welsh Refugee Council (www.welshrefugeecouncil.org).

What will I have to do?

We would like to complete the survey with you during a face-to-face meeting with a researcher. You will be asked a series of questions about your background, education, skills, employment, housing, health and community relations. The meeting will last around 30 minutes.

Do I have to take part in the research?

You do not have to take part in the survey if you do not want to. You can change your mind about participating in the survey at any stage, including during the meeting. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. You do not have to give your reasons to the researcher.

Will anyone else be in the meeting?

There will be no one else in the meeting apart from the researcher. If you need an interpreter please let the researcher know so that one can be arranged.

Will anyone know that I have participated in the research?

Everything you say during the interview is confidential. The information you provide will be anonymised so that it will not be possible for anyone reading the final report to know that you have taken part in the survey. You do not need to provide your name or contact details but if you do it will enable us to stay in touch with you so that we can find out about your experiences of living in Wales.
Will I receive any feedback on the findings of the research?

We are committed to providing feedback on the findings of the survey to everyone who participates in the project. If you provide us with your contact details we will send you a copy of the results of the survey. Alternatively you can contact us at migration@swansea.ac.uk and we will send a copy to you. Or you can obtain one from the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership (Selina.Moyo@newport.gov.uk) or the Welsh Refugee Council (sam.mcalister@welshrefugeecouncil.org).