

Resettled Refugee Youth and Education: Aspiration and Reality

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Abstract

This paper reports on research with 86 young refugees (aged 13– 24 years) who were resettled to the UK between 2006 and 2010. Drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data we explore the educational aspirations and experiences of refugee youth, and how they negotiate post-compulsory education pathways. We find that despite the promise of educational opportunity and transformed life chances enshrined in the notion of refugee resettlement, many of the experiences and barriers to education are not dissimilar in kind to those facing refugee youth in countries of first asylum. Support for young refugees to make successful transitions into and through the education system is critical to their future lives and longer term integration outcomes. The discussion is set within global discourses of refugee education and the literature of refugee education in the global north.

Key words: resettled refugee, refugee youth, refugee education

Introduction

Resettlement of refugees to a third country is recognised as one of three ‘durable solutions’ in global refugee protection; the other two solutions are voluntary repatriation and local integration in countries of first asylum (UNHCR 2003). In response to record levels of displacement and in a landscape in which opportunities for the latter two solutions are increasingly limited, there is growing interest in resettlement as a critical tool in global refugee protection (UNHCR 2018a). It is estimated that global resettlement needs are close to 1.2 million persons, although places available in 2017 were just 75,188 (UNHCR, 2018a). In Europe the growing interest in resettlement has been driven in part by the large scale forced migration flows generated by the conflict in Syria, and the aim to provide safe and managed channels for refugees. At the time of this research (2014-2016) the UK resettled approximately 750 refugees per year (UNHCR 2018b); however, in the light of the Syrian crisis this number had grown to 6,202 refugees in 2017, and just over half (51%) were children (aged 0-17) (UNHCR 2018a). Unlike young asylum seekers who arrive without status and have to apply for humanitarian protection in the host country, resettled refugee youth have their status confirmed prior to arrival, and are transferred to a third country which has agreed to admit them and to ultimately provide settlement for them. In terms of education and other services, they have similar rights and entitlements to citizens and do not face the restrictions to post-compulsory education that asylum seekers face. In the UK, government support is provided for resettled refugees, at least for the first year, including a case worker and additional language support, after

which time it is assumed that refugee needs will be accommodated by mainstream service provision (Local Government Association 2016). However, as we shall discuss, resettled refugee youth face considerable challenges accessing and progressing through education.

There is a gap in knowledge of what happens to resettled refugee youth post-resettlement, and particularly once Government support comes to an end. With a few notable exceptions, such as the Good Starts study in Australia, which looks at the first three years after settlement (Gifford, Correa-Velez, and Sampson 2009), much of the research into resettlement outcomes focuses on the first year or two. Research on refugee youth who have been resettled to the global north is limited, and most is from Australia, Canada and US, the three nations accepting the largest number of refugees for resettlement (UNHCR 2018a). There is a dearth of literature on the longer term outcomes for refugee youth in the UK context; in the light of the growing numbers resettled in response to the Syrian crisis it is increasingly important to address this gap. Furthermore, the majority of current research is school based and ends when compulsory education finishes (Dryden-Peterson and Reddick 2017); there is thus a significant lack of understanding of how resettled refugee young people navigate education post compulsory schooling. Refugee youth sit at the intersection of 'youth' and 'refugees', two groups variously identified as vulnerable and facing unique challenges (Nunn et al. 2014). As Nunn et al (2014) point out, both young people and refugees have received research attention, but comparatively little research attention specifically to *refugee young people*. As young people, they are likely to share with their non-refugee-background peers the contemporary emphasis on tertiary education in order to access employment; they are also likely to share the experience of insecure work and/or underemployment, and to follow complex, non-linear transitions post school (Nunn et al. 2014). However, we suggest refugee youth also face specific and multiple challenges accessing education and training. Studies of young people are critical because there are substantial transitions occurring at this life stage, and the importance of opportunities and decision making at this time has outcomes later in life (Holland and Thomson 2009). This paper aims to address this gap in knowledge by investigating the educational outcomes of refugee youth four or more years after their arrival in the UK. We address three main questions: What are the educational goals and experiences of resettled refugees in the UK? How do resettled youth negotiate post-compulsory education pathways? What are the factors which support transition through education, and what are the barriers? The use of quantitative methods enable us to offer measurement of access to different types of education, while our qualitative methods provide understanding of the meaning and relevance of education in the lives of resettled refugees.

In the following sections we outline the growing importance attached to refugee youth education in global discourses and note the inclusion of countries in the global north in the remit of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UNESCO 2016). We then provide a brief overview of the existing literature on refugee education in the global north before presenting the findings from our own research. The paper concludes with a discussion of the extent to which the commitments set out in these global discourses are currently being met in countries of resettlement, and highlights how the same needs and barriers exist post-resettlement as those identified for refugees in prolonged exile waiting a durable solution.

Refugee Education in Global Context

Humanitarian and global education efforts have until relatively recently focused their attention on providing education for refugee children, while the needs of young people and adult refugees have largely been neglected. There has been a shift in recent years, with recognition of the importance of the full cycle of education opportunities from early childhood to higher education (UNHCR 2012). Education throughout the lifecycle is central to the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable

Development, adopted in September 2015 at a special summit of the United Nations. It is articulated as a stand-alone goal - Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4), which expresses the commitment for all countries to ‘... ensure the right to quality education for all throughout life. This includes commitments to ... equal opportunity in access to effective quality post-secondary education and training’. (UNESCO 2016: 16). SDG4 is based on the underpinning principle that ‘education is a fundamental human right and an enabling right’ (UNESCO 2016: 8), meaning that through education other rights - to better health, employment, equality, citizenship etc. - are realised. Education is also referred to in the targets of 5 other SDGs including SDG 8 which includes the target: ‘By 2020 [to] substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training’ (UNESCO 2016: 8).

The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants in September 2016 highlighted education as a critical international response to the plight of refugees. Adopted by all member states of the UN, the declaration tasked the UNHCR with developing a global compact on refugees (GCR) for adoption at the United Nations General Assembly in New York in late 2018. Central to the approach adopted is the inclusion of refugees in host communities and access to education, underlined by the declaration that ‘to thrive, not just survive, refugees need opportunities’ (UNHCR 2018c; no page). The draft compact included a programme of action to improve services and support to refugees. Education is singled out as of particular importance. In line with the sustainable development agenda, host states are tasked with meeting the specific needs of refugee children and youth through measures such as accelerated education and flexible learning programmes, adapted approaches to cope with psychosocial trauma, language and literacy support and bridging programmes (UNHCR 2018d: 9).

Despite the support of these high profile initiatives, the UNHCR emphasise how for refugees; ‘... the obstacles to an education pile up as a child grows older and tries to retain a place in the classroom. The gap between refugees and their non-refugee peers is vast, and it is growing.’ (UNHCR 2017: 6). Conflict and prolonged displacement mean that refugee children and youth can experience severe disruption to their schooling prior to resettlement. The UNHCR (2017) estimate that globally 61% of refugee children attend primary school and just 23% of refugee adolescents attend secondary school. In low income countries where 28% of the world’s refugees are living, the figure for secondary school attendance drops to just 9%; there is a significant gender disparity: for every 10 refugee boys there are fewer than 7 refugee girls in secondary school (UNHCR 2017). Implicit in the global discourses and accords is the assumption that refugee education is a concern in low and middle income countries and conflict affected areas, and that once resettled to wealthy nations in the global north that refugees will receive the support that they require to thrive. The underlining of the importance of refugee education in recent international instruments and compacts, the greater emphasis on youth and the inclusion of the global north in SDGs, make it particularly timely to examine refugee youth education in resettlement contexts.

Education in the Global North and Normative Assumptions

Refugee young people are a diverse group with different capacities, needs and opportunities, and care needs to be taken not to make broad generalizations. However, the literature on schools has highlighted a number of specific educational barriers which can face refugee children. These include language barriers, lack of familiarity with the education system, and academic expectations (Brown, Miller and Mitchell, 2006); limited education prior to arrival (Naidoo 2009; Miller, Mitchell and Brown 2005; Shapiro and MacDonald 2017); and lack of certification, or lack of recognition of certification (McWilliams and Bonet 2016; Shakya et al 2010). In addition, discrimination and racism (Correa-Velez, Gifford, McMichael and Sampson 2017), and trauma can have an adverse impact on learning capacity and outcomes (Dryden-Peterson 2015; Kanu 2008; McBrien 2005). This complex

mix of personal factors and experiences can combine in different ways and at different times meaning that refugee children and youth will integrate and progress through education in different ways, at different speeds, and will have different outcomes. Less acknowledged in the literature is how education systems based on assumed linearity and normative pathways present structural barriers to refugee children's entry into, and progression through, the education system. Inflexible age based systems, coupled with lack of tailored support and high levels of testing fail to accommodate migrancy.

Very broadly, the state-funded system in England is divided into four main parts based on age: Primary (ages 5 - 11), Secondary (ages 11 - 16), Further or Tertiary (aged 16 plus) and Higher Education (aged 18 plus). There is an age cap in the UK of 18 years after which full-time publicly funded education ends. Regardless of pre-migration education and language abilities, refugees are expected to slot into the structure with their age cohort. On arrival in the UK refugee children aged 16 and under should be placed in mainstream schooling as soon as possible. However, there are often delays in gaining access, particularly when children arrive mid-academic year; there are also significant difficulties placing children who arrive in the upper years of secondary education (aged 15 and 16) in school (Gladwell and Chetwynd, 2018). This is when schools are preparing students for their General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) exams which are academic qualifications taken at 16, but with preparation typically taking place over the preceding two or three academic years. These are high status qualifications for both young people and schools; performance in GCSE exams is a key measure of a school's academic standing and results are published in annual school league tables. A recent study found that schools were reluctant to admit refugee students at this age for fear they would negatively impact on their results profile (Gladwell and Chetwynd, 2018).

For young people, the number and grades achieved at GCSE determines whether or not they will pursue an academic or vocational route post-school. GCSEs in English and maths in particular are considered the benchmark which all young people should achieve; they are the 'gateway' qualifications which open the door to 'A' level qualification (equivalent to school leaving qualifications) taken at 18, and university, apprenticeships and employment. While alternative qualifications are available for those students deemed unlikely to pass GCSE exams, such as Functional skills English and maths, they do not have the potency or status of GCSE qualifications. Universities, in particular, generally insist on GCSE English as an entry requirement, but some tertiary education programmes also require English and maths. A recent report concluded that without GCSE qualifications in English and maths '...young people's choices and prospects are limited' and that Functional skills qualifications are 'relatively unheard of' and 'lack[ing] the currency among employers that GCSEs hold' (Impetus 2017: 6 and 3).

Young refugees who are deemed not to have sufficient language skills and academic background to access the curriculum in the upper years of secondary school are not placed in mainstream schools; instead they are normally placed in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision in a college. If qualifications are not achieved by the time young people reach the age of 19 they can continue to study if they can support themselves financially, or they can study up to 16 hours a week and claim welfare benefits. Research in the US, where publicly funded high school ends at 21, has highlighted how even with this older age entitlement to education, young refugees struggle to gain qualifications before becoming 'aged out', that is, become too old to continue with their education (Bonet 2018; McWilliams and Bonet 2016).

Education is compulsory up to the age of 18. Research which has looked specifically at post-compulsory education often includes asylum seekers who experience particular difficulties due to their insecure status. There has been a growing body of scholarship identifying the structural

barriers to accessing and participating in Higher Education for refugees (Baker et al 2018; Earnest, Joyce, deMori and Silvagni 2010; Morrice 2011; 2013). For example, the fact that refugee and asylum seeking families and young people are often living in poverty has been shown to affect decision making about education and the ability to progress beyond compulsory schooling (Doyle and O'Toole 2013; Gateley 2015; Stevenson and Willott 2007). There are informational barriers and the need for appropriate advice and guidance to ensure young people make informed and strategic decisions about their education and future careers (Oppedal, Guribye & Kroger 2017; Shakya et al. 2010; Gateley 2015; Stevenson and Willott 2007). Research in Australia and Canada has also identified significant family responsibilities among refugee young people; these include caring for siblings, supporting their parents and contributing financially, and early parenthood (Nunn et al 2014; Shakya et al. 2010). Balancing commitments to childbearing, childcare and other responsibilities particularly impacts on young women's ability to engage and continue in education (Hatoss & Huijser, 2010). Low levels of print literacy created barriers to accessing post-secondary education (McWilliams and Bonet 2016); difficulties locating educational transcripts and proof of qualifications achieved, has also been identified as a barrier (Shakya et al 2010; McWilliams and Bonet 2016).

Method

Participants

The UN defines 'youth' as being between the ages of 15 and 24. However, UNESCO point out that youth is a 'more fluid category than a fixed age-group' and is best understood as 'a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence and an awareness of our interdependence as members of a community' (UNESCO 2017). Therefore, we established the parameters of refugee youth as being between the ages of 13 and 24 on arrival. The lower age of 13 recognises how post-compulsory education choices are shaped earlier in the school career. The participants were selected from a much larger longitudinal study which looked at outcomes for resettled refugees in the UK across a number of domains, including health, employment, housing and education. Quantitative and qualitative data was collected at three timepoints (for details on this study, see Collyer, Morrice, Tip et al. (2018). Participants had arrived in the UK between 2006 and 2010, and they filled out a questionnaire in 2014, when they had lived in the UK for 4-8 years. The quantitative data presented in this paper is based on 86 questionnaires at time 1 (38 men and 48 women; mean age at participation was 24.41 (SD = 3.58; range 18-32), while their mean age on arrival was 18.59 (SD = 3.41; range 13-24)). Participants came from four countries of origin (Ethiopia, 37; Iraq, 19; Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), 18; Somalia, 12); this is broadly representative of the resettled refugee intake at that time. They were resettled to various locations in the UK (Greater Manchester, 58; Brighton and Hove, 8; Norwich, 16; Sheffield, 4). Their routes to the UK also differed (e.g., 55 out of 85 had lived in a refugee camp for a considerable period before being resettled).

Measures and procedure

The project was an interdisciplinary research project and the questionnaire included a large number of constructs. For this paper we have selected measures which were relevant for themes found in the qualitative data:

Participants were asked to indicate their gender, age, whether they had children, and the number of children they had. 'What was your highest level of education before you came to the UK?' measured pre-migration educational background in five categories: No education, elementary school, Secondary school/GCSEs, A-levels/college, and University. Their highest education in the UK was

measured with the question: 'What is the highest level of education you got while in the UK?', with six answer categories: No education, elementary school, Secondary school/GCSEs, A-levels/college, University, and ESOL. Their expectations and reality regarding education and employment in the UK were measured as follows: 'When you just arrived, what were your expectations about the life you would have in the UK? How much did you expect...' '...to have access to good quality education?'; '...to get a good job' and 'Now think about the reality. To what extent do you actually...' '... have access to good quality education?'; '...have a good job?'. All of these items had answers ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). Satisfaction with education was measured with the average of two items: 'Is your highest level of education at this moment...' 'the type of education that you wanted?' , and '... education that you are satisfied with?' , with both scales ranging 1(not at all) to 5 (very much), $\alpha = .88$. Employment status was measured in seven categories: Employed, Looking for work, Looking after children, Caring for a sick relative, Studying, and Unable to work due to health problems.

Questionnaire data was collected with assistance from a team of 11 research assistants (RAs), who were themselves resettled refugees and had an existing network among refugee communities in the UK. RAs were paid, and were provided with a week of research methods training. A snowballing technique was used to recruit research participants: the RAs asked people in their own refugee network to participate, and the research team approached people from their networks and people from city and county councils and civil society organizations for further contacts. All data was collected in English; partly as we were recruiting participants who had been in the UK for four or more years we assumed a certain basic level of English language, and partly it enabled us to overcome the potential power dynamics and complexities of working with numerous languages, including tribal languages. At the training, translations of the items used in the questionnaire were extensively discussed and agreed to enable the RAs to translate items where necessary. The refugee RAs also advised on the content of qualitative instruments. However, as we were working in small communities, where concerns about confidentiality might lead to inhibited or guarded responses in interviews and focus groups (Lundy and McGovern (2006), or problems of bias (Jacobsen and Landau 2003), qualitative data was collected by a small team of non-refugee researchers, including the authors. English language proficiency among the young people in the study was generally high and we did not require interpreting support to collect data. We believe this combination of refugee researchers, who are proficient in the language of participants, who bring contacts, insights and understandings of the communities in which they live, coupled with non-refugee researchers who are outside of communities, enabled the most scientifically rigorous approach to data collection.

Our qualitative data was derived from two sources, focus groups and semi-structured interviews, and was collected from a sub-sample of the participants. Two focus groups (with a total of 9 young people) took place at the start of the project in 2014. Participants were recruited through the research team's networks and the purpose was to check and refine the questionnaire, to identify potential topics for interviews and to identify issues specific to young refugees that the research should consider. The format for focus groups was loosely structured and guided by two questions: were there areas of concern which were specific to young refugees, and what factors had supported and hindered their integration. Semi-structured interviews with 24 young people (11 men and 13 women) were conducted at 3 time points between 2014 and 2016. Three young people were interviewed twice and one was interviewed at all 3 time points, bringing the total number of interviews to 29. Having completed the questionnaire, all participants were invited to attend a semi-structured interview. The interviews sought to add depth and complexity to emerging findings from

the questionnaires and the themes were identified in response to questionnaire findings and the initial focus groups. Our research methods were therefore integrated and sequential (Creswell and Creswell 2018; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004). The interview questions asked were broad and addressed different themes. At time 1 participants were invited to reflect on their satisfaction with life in the UK in relation to a number of topics including education, and the support they had received. At time 2 they were asked about their experiences of language learning and employment. At time 3 participants were invited to reflect back on their lives in the UK, what they felt most proud of and what they would do differently. Each interview lasted approximately an hour and was usually conducted in the participant's house; all were audio-recorded and transcribed. Participants have been given pseudonyms and identifying information, including location, has been removed. Qualitative data was first coded and analysed thematically (Braun and Clarke 2006), and then data analysis followed a concurrent design in which focus group, questionnaire and interview data informed each other (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The hope and desire for education, and the difficulties accessing opportunities, emerged as a constant theme in interviews at all three time points and in the initial focus groups.

Findings

High Educational Aspirations

But the only advantage which I had in my mind was education. I was saying, you know, this is a great opportunity. African ministers, they send their kids to Europe to study. So I had this opportunity to go and study. So, all I had in my mind was education.

(James, DRC)

Our findings echoed those elsewhere that refugee youth and their families have high aspirations for education (e.g., Bonet 2018; Dryden-Peterson 2017b; Kanu 2008; Stermacet al 2011). For the first time, these young refugees had certainty and a predictable future. As the quote above suggests, receiving an education was an expectation and a high priority for young refugees in imagining their futures. However, for a significant number of participants, particularly those arriving from mid-teens onwards, these aspirations for education were not recognised or met in the UK. This was supported by the quantitative data: A comparison of participants' expectations and the reality of access to good quality education in the UK showed that their expectations about education were significantly higher ($M = 4.49$, $SD = .81$) than the reality of their actual access to it ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.45$; $t(85) = 7.13$, $p < .001$).

The Narrowing Pipeline of Educational Opportunities

As to be expected, the pre-migration educational background of the cohort was quite varied. Of the 86, some had received no pre-migration education (N=6), elementary education only (N=17), secondary education or GCSEs (N=44), others had received A-level or college education (N=9) and university education (N=4). Table 1 shows how the educational pipeline narrows as refugees become older: not surprisingly, the younger on arrival the more likely they are to have completed secondary education, A-levels/college, or university. Almost a quarter (24.3%) of those arriving before they were 19 only received English language classes and no other education, while the remainder had received either secondary, tertiary, or university education. Of those who arrived age 19-24, over two-thirds (68.9%) received either no education, or language classes only, while only 31% received some kind of formal UK education. Of the total cohort, almost half reported receiving either no

education, or only language classes. This difference in education between the age groups is significant: $\chi^2(1) = 16.14$, $p < .001$. Thus, among those who arrived younger than 19, significantly more people received education in the UK than among those who arrived age 19 or older.

[Insert Table 1. Here]

The figures for those gaining access to university are stark. Among the refugees described in this paper, only 13.4% reported receiving university level education in the UK. This compares with the estimated 48% of young people between 17 and 30 who went to university in England in 2014-15 (DfE 2017). The structural barriers to achieving and progressing in education are set out in the following sections.

Gaining Qualifications and a 'proper education'

Being placed in school was not always an easy transition. Although exams are not taken until aged 16, the testing to determine which GCSE courses can be taken starts earlier, and GCSE curricula start aged 14. Arriving at 14, Ahmad describes how his future path was narrowed within a few months of arriving.

When I came, I just got thrown into, like, just school straight away. I didn't know anything about English, ok? Like how to speak it or how to study, like, all of that. And I didn't get enough support, like how the system works and all that. As soon as I came, I had to do some exams. The GCSE exams for the year 9 ... we had just arrived. I had to do them exams. And then... So, obviously I'm gonna take them. I messed up. Obviously. And then, well, I didn't know that them exams decide your future.

(Ahmad, Iraq)

Ahmad went on to explain how 'messaging up' the tests at 14 determined his pathway at 16, and how unknowingly the academic route to university he had aspired to was closed down. Like Ahmad, many participants spoke of the difficulties of settling into school and the assumption that, with very limited support, they would be able to catch up with their non-refugee peers and gain the qualifications to progress in education. The key barriers identified were insufficient support with language and lack of support to catch up with academic content, not understanding academic expectations and unfamiliar practices and systems.

Echoing findings noted in the literature review, children who arrived aged 15 or 16 when preparations for GCSE exams are in full swing, often had to wait up to 5 months for the start of the new academic year before being placed in school or college. During this time they were offered part-time language classes. The waiting to enter full time education was experienced as acutely stressful as unlike the full time education they were expecting, the language provision was part-time and generally only for a few hours a week (Morrice, Tip, Collyer, Brown forthcoming); there was nothing else to do on the other days of the week. For example, Temara arrived aged 15 with her older sister and having only completed primary education prior to arrival was desperate to go to school and eventually university. However, she arrived in April, and rather than being placed in a secondary school she was placed on a language course specifically for resettled refugees, two mornings a week at a local college.

But I wanted to go to secondary school. I was in shock. I was expecting to wear uniforms, and dreaming to start school, wake up in the morning and go to school. ... Going [to] school and getting good grades were going to change my life.

Her dreams of school and school uniform evoked longings to join a peer group of young people of a similar age to her and to move forward with a new life and new friends; so to find herself placed in a class with the adults she had arrived with was a bitter disappointment.

No one was helping me at the time, no one directing me where I wanted. What I wanted was at the time, I wanted to go secondary school to learn proper education to get more opportunity so that I can get good grades, and move on.

In fact Temara never went to school and instead went to a local college:

I was gutted when I was told to go to college to study language, communication. Because I should have... when I arrived here I was 15, I should have gone to secondary school instead of college.

(Temara, Ethiopia)

'Proper education' to Temara meant more than just language and communication skills; she wanted the education and qualifications that would enable her to progress through education and train as a nurse. Time spent out of school on language courses means young people fall further behind on academic content, making it more difficult to gain the qualifications needed to progress. Shadrack who arrived from DRC aged 19 describes how he '... tried to apply for plumbing and they refused because they said I didn't have any GCSEs. So then I went to apply for construction...' It is not clear why he was accepted on the construction course and not the plumbing course; it could be that they had different entry requirements, or one course could be exercising a degree of flexibility over requirements, or the courses might have been at different colleges with different policies. However, it points to the muddled and confusing landscape within which young people without standard qualifications have to find their way.

Negotiating unfamiliar pathways

Both Ahmad and Temara refer to the need for support in navigating the complicated and unfamiliar education system and this was echoed in other narratives. One young Ethiopian woman reflected '... they gave us some advice of how to live as a people. But when we come to the education side ... It was hard.' (Focus group 1). Young refugees overwhelmingly felt they were not provided with information and advice on educational pathways and opportunities. The funds of knowledge about the different pathways and what they lead to was not available within refugee communities and neither did they possess the networks and confidence to negotiate them.

To put someone in the education is not just to register him in at school or college. You have need to do more than that because the system is very, very different. [You need] someone who understands like the path of the refugee and what kind of things you've been through.

(Ethiopian man Focus Group 2)

Post-compulsory Education

Young people over the age of 18 were offered language classes and told that because of their age there were no educational opportunities available to them. Instead they were referred to the

JobCentre, the Government-funded agency which provides employment support to those receiving welfare benefits. Lelisa had completed secondary education in Kenya with good grades and was determined to continue her education, but because of her age was only offered language classes:

My age was ... 23. ...I was so desperate to get to anything, there wasn't really any opportunity from our social worker because he said there's isn't very much to do for me. Because of my age.

(Lelisa, Ethiopia)

Those receiving welfare benefits can only study part-time (up to a maximum of 16 hours a week) as they have to be available and actively seeking employment. Some did try to combine welfare benefits with education but they described how the JobCentre requires claimants to undertake volunteering and work programmes which interrupted their education, and for some resulted in loss of the college place. For Mark, who arrived at 19, it also resulted in debt and eviction from his housing. He enrolled on a 3 year agricultural course but after a year was asked to present a letter at the JobCentre confirming the number of hours he studied.

When I took that letter ... I just receive the letter saying my benefit has been stopped because I'm doing a full time course. So what can I do then? I tried to speak with college, maybe they can reduce the school hours, maybe I can just, instead of 19 hours maybe just 14 hours, they said there is no way... so when they said I'm doing full time course they ask me ...to pay that money back.

(Mark, DRC)

Mark did get a job and managed to continue working and studying to complete his second year; he described how complicated and difficult life was financially, and that he still hoped to continue with his studies because '...if you don't get a good education and don't go to school, what can you do? Nothing. You just remain on benefits'.

Families: support and responsibilities

Those who were most likely to succeed in pursuing their educational goals had arrived with other family members. Family was pivotal in the lives of young refugees in Australia providing a key source of support – emotional, practical and material (McMichael et al. 2011). Similarly, in our study having a parent or sibling who could provide material support and encouragement was a key success factor:

You can manage if you have your family, for example, around you like your mum and dad ... So this person he can rely on his family for 2 years, 3 years, get a loan or something like that, and then he study full-time. And he can turn his life this way. If you come on your own you don't have anybody supporting you around you. It's hard ... So that's [the] problem. That's hard to be on your own.

(Moti, Ethiopian man)

Families could be both a support and a hindrance to education. For some young people being part of a family also meant taking on caring responsibilities. Leila arrived from the DRC aged 17 with two brothers and her mother who died shortly after they arrived: '... with no parent I was playing that role in my house being the mother, being the sister...' She describes being constantly tired and finding it difficult to prioritise and focus on education.

Having a child has been identified as a significant factor shaping education outcomes among refugee youth (Nunn et al. 2014; McMichael 2013). The focus on parenting and associated financial responsibilities means that education is truncated or put on hold for young mothers and sometimes fathers. Early parenthood was common amongst the young people in our sample with 50% having one or more children and the majority of them had more than one: 40% had one child, 20% had two children, 25.7% had three, 8.6% had four, and 5.7% had five children. Early parenthood represented a significant barrier to completing and continuing with education, but it did not change their desire to continue their education. For example, Gloria arrived aged 16 with her three year old daughter and her mother. She had been attending school in the refugee camp in Zambia and was placed in school when she arrived in UK. She started a childcare course at college when, aged 18, she got married and left her mother's house. Her husband was abusive and she was moved three times to escape him, and ended up in a different city and without support. Her daughter is settled in school and she would like to return to her studies but cannot afford to:

I really, really want to go to college. When I was coming here I was saying I'm going there to learn my childcare, because I love child, to work with kids. But I can't go to college, if I go then they can stop my benefits, yeah, so you need to help us with that.

(Gloria, DRC)

Youth Strategies to Pursue Education

Despite challenges outlined above, refugee youth employ a range of strategies to pursue their educational goals. These include seeking material support from family members and combining part time paid work with full time study. It also included not telling the JobCentre that they were studying. This is classed as benefit fraud and is a particularly risky strategy for refugees as it can jeopardise their right to permanent settlement.¹ Once in education, young refugees spoke of actively seeking support and guidance from tutors and not being afraid to ask questions. Encouragement to persevere was also important.

When Lelisa was told that she was too old for full time education, she initially claimed benefits, but she 'left the JobCentre' because they wanted her to go on a course which she considered 'a waste of time'. Instead, she found a job working night shifts and went to college during the day time. She describes how she 'sacrificed her sleep' in order to pursue education:

I have to work night shift throughout, to learn as well, to go to college in the morning, it was like really tough.

(Lelisa, Ethiopia)

It was her partner who told her about an Access to Health Professions course which prepares mature students without traditional qualifications for entry to Higher Education. The course accepted the secondary school certificate she gained while in Kenya and she was offered a place. Once at college she felt she had good support from the college in terms of applying for university, but she emphasised 'you have to find your own way'. Lelisa is now trained as a nurse. Her younger sister Temara had only completed primary education and she took 5 years to work her way up through the levels to eventually reach her goal of a place on a nursing degree.

¹ Refugees are granted 5 years limited leave to remain in the UK. After this time they are eligible to apply for settlement; as part of the application they are obliged to state any criminal convictions or penalties received.

In a matter of time you can get what you want to get if you have patience and determination to carry on, if you don't give up.

(Temara, Ethiopia)

She describes being 'overwhelmed by happiness' at being offered a place at university, particularly as she had been rejected by three universities as she did not have GCSE English, only functional English. When asked how the system could be improved, both Lelisa and Temara emphasized the importance of a mentor who could provide advice, guidance and encouragement in education, and they pointed to the absence of role models in refugee communities. They were aware that their achievement was exceptional among the resettled refugee community and they were not aware of anyone else who had succeeded in getting to university.

Future lives

Although 30.7% (N = 23) of the cohort were studying, the majority of narratives point to lives in a constant churn of low paid, precarious employment interspersed with periods of unemployment. Of the cohort just 26.7% (N= 20) were in employment, 20% (N= 15) were looking for work; the remaining 22.7% (N=17) were caring for children or a relative. The narratives show an acute awareness of the importance of education and the expectation that it will lead to better jobs and a better future. At our final interviews at time 3 we asked participants to reflect on the support they had received and, looking back, what they would have done differently. For the majority of young people their current lives were very different from the futures they had sought to create on arrival. Economic considerations and the immediate needs to earn a living had overshadowed longer term goals of gaining education. Regrets and disappointment at not having invested in education, or having had the opportunity to invest in education, were a major theme. Some had entered employment on the belief that they would progress from entry level jobs, but found that without the qualifications they remained stuck in low level jobs. Feeling they had 'wasted their time', had been 'let down', 'couldn't get help', 'told I had to get a job', 'they just put us on benefits' were commonplace, and many said they wished they had tried harder to get an education rather than settle for language classes. Young people said they had felt pressured into finding work; as one young Ethiopian reflecting back to the time he arrived said 'They pushed me just only to find work. They don't care about my future' (Focus Group 1). The disappointment in the type of employment that they had achieved was reflected in the quantitative data: Comparing participants' expectations and the reality regarding having a good job in the UK, their expectations about getting a good job were significantly higher ($M = 4.40$, $SD = .95$) compared to the extent to which they indicated to actually have a good job ($M = 2.40$, $SD = 1.44$; $t(85) = 10.56$, $p < .001$).

Discussion and Conclusion

The educational pathways of young refugees in countries of resettlement are imagined and constructed through normative ideas which are temporally limited and assume linearity. Such normative frameworks fail to recognise the ongoing impact of pre-migration education, the material realities and immediate necessities of resettlement. The pathways of young refugees are elongated and delayed, not just through catching up with academic content and skills such as language in order to obtain the qualifications needed to progress, but also through material realities such as not having family support and resources, and early parenthood which particularly impacted on young women's abilities to continue education. While policies such as limiting access to free full time education up to the age of 19 affects all young people who do not achieve qualifications in the normative framework, refugees are clearly disproportionately affected by this education policy. For

those who arrive at post compulsory school age their education is constructed as language learning, and they face almost insurmountable barriers to accessing education or training. Their lack of language and disrupted pre-migration education is equated with lack of aspiration, and the education offered is limited and limiting. Access and participation in education is recognised as a key marker and a means of integration (e.g. Ager and Strang 2008; OECD/European Union 2015); Success in education is a critical marker of youth integration and the future integration of adults. Our findings suggest that refugee youth are particularly vulnerable to exclusion from education, and that without significant educational and social support they are assimilated into a low wage economy of precarity and poverty.

Resettled refugees are the smallest group UNHCR's 'durable solutions', less than 1% of the 17.2 million refugees of concern to UNHCR in 2016 were resettled in that year (UNHCR 2018a). It is therefore not surprising that international strategies for refugee education focus on countries of first asylum where the majority of children and young people are located, waiting for a durable solution to their plight. Third country resettlement is imagined by the global community and refugees themselves as automatically providing '...access to effective quality post-secondary education and training', as set out in the Sustainable Development Agenda (UNESCO 2016: 16). The research presented here identifies a constellation of intersecting themes which give rise to a unique set of challenges and structural barriers, suggesting that this is not the case. Structural barriers identified in the research include certification to enable progression in education and employment, long waits for access to school, and in some cases being denied access to school, and 'aging out' of education. The failure of education systems to effectively manage migrancy, and the consequent structural barrier, have received relatively little attention in the global north, and instead attention has focused on the needs and deficits of refugees. The findings lend weight to arguments that resettlement is not the end of the refugee experience and that educational and other challenges continue long after resettlement (e.g. Nunn, Gifford, McMichael and Correa-Velez, 2017).

Appositely, the draft global compact on refugees identified a number of actions with regard to the education of refugees '[p]ending the realization of durable solution' (UNHCR 2018d: 8). These are paraphrased here and include: the need for longer term investment and focused efforts to support refugees; minimising the time spent out of school to a maximum of 3 months; the crucial importance of access to recognised certification to enable progression in learning; the need for flexible forms of education such as catch-up and bridging programmes to help recoup missed content or acquire language or other skills required for the new system; expanded access to secondary and tertiary education; and treating education for refugees as an investment (UNHCR 2018d: 9). All of these actions are relevant to the UK. We found that there was little investment in supporting refugee children in schools, and that children were waiting for several months to gain access to school. The posing of binary options between school or language classes for young people in their mid-teens meant that often they were placed in English language classes at college, rather than school. Where children and young people did not have the academic content or language skills to access the curriculum they were not provided with catch-up or bridging programmes, rather they were referred to language classes. Despite an education system which requires all children to gain GCSE in English and maths in order to progress, additional support to achieve this certification was not provided for refugee children. There was no flexibility in terms of extending access to publicly funded education beyond the age of 19 years which might have enabled young refugees to gain qualifications to progress. In short, there is little to suggest that education for refugees is regarded as an investment; based on the earlier literature review, similar findings are likely in other third countries of resettlement.

The chasm between the aspirations of refugee youth and the reality of systems and policies to support them point to the ambivalence at the heart of resettlement policies; on the humanitarian side resettlement is transformative, providing safety, security and the promise of a new life, but this new life is not supported by policies or the resources needed to overcome the unique challenges facing refugee youth in resettlement contexts. It is an ambivalence which gives rise to 'contradictory policy and social outcomes that are humanitarian without being socially just, equitable, and empowering' (Shayka et al 2010: 73). A longer term and maximal approach to the educational needs of refugee youth is required which goes beyond trying to merely fit them in to existing normative systems, and instead recognises their different trajectories, and provides the structures and opportunities to enable them to invest in their futures. The increasing numbers of refugees resettled to the UK, the growing number of asylum seekers and refugees in other resettlement countries in the global north, makes this an increasingly urgent issue.

Acknowledgements

This research is funded by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council. Reference ES/K006304/1 Optimising Refugee Resettlement in the UK: a comparative analysis <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/migration/refugeeresettlement> The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in <https://www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/get-data> 'Optimising Refugee Resettlement'.

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