

# **Refugees living in Wales: skills, experiences and barriers to inclusion**

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## **Presentation overview**

- Background and policy context
- Aims and objectives of our research
- Key findings of the survey in relation to:
  - Housing and living conditions
  - Employment and employability (including education and language skills)
  - Health and well-being
  - Racism and discrimination
- Implications for policy and practice

## Background and policy context

- Dispersal means that since 2001 asylum seekers have come to Wales in much larger numbers than previously (a total of 2,322 asylum seekers were living in Wales at end of May 2009)
- 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
- Publication of the *Refugee Inclusion Strategy* (June 2008) has further increased the need for robust baseline information for service delivery and to monitor progress towards outcomes
- Between August and Nov 2008, CMPR undertook a survey of 123 refugees from a wide range of backgrounds, more than half of whom had been living in Wales for more than 5 years

## Number of asylum seekers dispersed to Wales by nationality

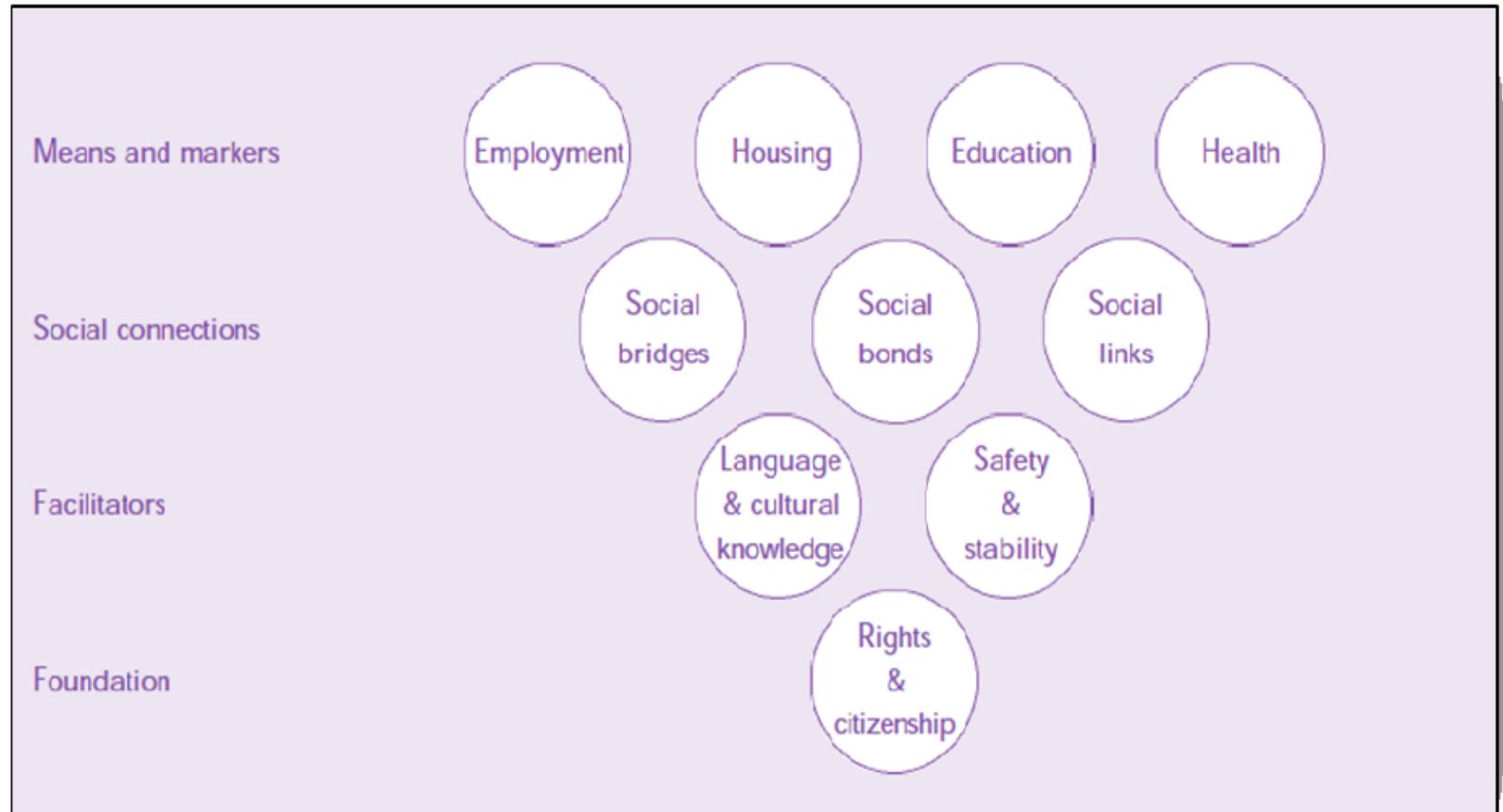
Nationality	Number <sup>12</sup>	Percent
Afghanistan	122	5.3
China	222	9.6
Eritrea	159	6.7
Iran	270	11.6
Iraq	294	12.7
Pakistan	160	6.9
Somalia	111	4.8
Sudan	136	5.9
Zimbabwe	177	7.6
Others	671	28.9

Source: compiled from data provided by WSMP, May 2009

## Aims and objectives of our research

- The refugee survey represents a pragmatic response to the lack of information currently available to inform policy and practice in relation to refugee integration
- Survey questions were structured around a number of key domains that existing evidence suggests are of central importance for refugee integration
- Ager and Strang (2004) have identified a number of 'markers and means' include access to appropriate **employment** opportunities, **housing** conditions, access to – and progress within – the **education** system, good **health** and equality of access to health services, **community safety** and the creation of **social connections**
- **Racism and discrimination** is a cross-cutting issue that can undermine progress in relation to these indicators of integration

# The indicators of integration framework



Source: Ager and Strang 2004

## Housing and living conditions

- Housing is widely considered to be a cornerstone for successful refugee integration
- Most refugees (89.4%) are living in rented accommodation with very few (4.1%) owning their own property compared with around 70% of the general population. Some are effectively homeless.
- The vast majority of refugees described significant housing problems including lack of permanency (36.6%), poor conditions (28.5%), overcrowding (20.3%), problems with neighbours (14.6%) and cost (13%)
- Extensive comments were made on the quality of accommodation with many describing problems with conditions (damp, infestations, dirtiness) and living arrangements (especially lack of privacy)

## **Employment and employability**

- Refugees participating in the survey were found to be more highly educated than those born in the UK with more than a quarter holding a University degree
- Although two-thirds had been employed in their country of origin across a range of professions, less than a third of those interviewed were in employment. Most are employed in administrative or clerical positions, cleaning or factory work
- Barriers to appropriate employment include a lack of recognition of previous experience / qualifications, insufficiently high standard of ESOL training and a lack of access to volunteering opportunities outside the refugee sector
- Many refugees have experienced racism and discrimination in finding employment and in the workplace

## Health and well-being

- The survey provides some basic information about the physical and mental health of refugees living in Wales
- There appear to be significant improvements in physical, and particularly, mental health for most refugees after arrival
- A significant proportion of respondents felt that both their physical and mental health had deteriorated (22.8% and 38.2% respectively)
- Nearly all attributed the decline in mental and physical health to anxiety, stress, depression and isolation associated with becoming and being a refugee, the asylum process and separation from home and family
- The research identified some issues with securing access to GPs and appropriate medical consultants

## **Racism and discrimination**

- Half of all refugees participating in the survey had experienced negative public attitudes and racism whilst living in Wales (significantly higher than other surveys)
- Incidents included verbal and physical abuse, often by teenagers and youths, as well as damage to property
- Discrimination in the workplace and in dealings with agencies and service providers, including the police, was also reported
- A significant proportion (61.8%) feel that they 'belong to the neighbourhood' and more than three quarters indicated their intention to stay in Wales
- There appears to be a contradiction between refugees' day-to-day experiences of racism and their much more positive attitudes towards living in Wales more generally

## Implications for policy and practice

- Our report makes a number of concrete policy recommendations for reducing barriers to refugee inclusion including:
  - Tackling sub-standard accommodation and homelessness
  - Dealing with barriers to appropriate ESOL training courses
  - Increasing access to volunteering, especially outside the refugee sector
  - Reducing racism and discrimination in finding employment and in the workplace
  - Improving reporting of, and response, racist incidents
- Need for on going research and information-gathering in relation to the experiences of refugees – and asylum seekers – living in Wales in order to monitor the impact of policies for refugee inclusion