The impact of housing on refugees: an evidence synthesis

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Aims

The aim of the article is to synthesise the available evidence on the impact of housing in refugee settlement, in order to fill a gap in the knowledge base on this issue. It was produced by the University of Huddersfield for the refugee housing pathways project undertaken in partnership with Migration Yorkshire, as part of Refugee Integration Yorkshire and Humber, part-funded by the European Union Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund.

Methodology

This was a scoping review, and a peer-reviewed search protocol was used. Databases and grey literature were included in the search. 118 documents were included in the review. Nearly half of the studies were UK-based.

Key issues

The authors identified a number of key themes arising from the literature:

- Dispersal and its implementation in the UK renders people seeking asylum vulnerable. Studies identified negative impacts as a result of dispersal to deprived areas with limited history of diversity. They also highlighted the links between negative experiences both of housing and the related wider social issues, and mental health issues for asylum seekers.
- The literature is critical of housing and welfare systems in relation to asylum seekers and refugees – in particular the complexity of these systems, and the impact of the private sector's role.
- The poor quality of initial accommodation was seen to impact negatively on mental health, and on opportunities for integration.
- The impact of the 28-day notice period for newly granted UK refugees to leave accommodation provided through the Home Office, was seen as problematic, increasing the risk of homelessness, and with refugees often moving into temporary or otherwise unsuitable housing.
- Studies concluded that initial housing pathways are more difficult for people who have come through the asylum route than for resettled refugees, but that after this point, experiences were to an extent similar to others facing challenges within the housing system. Issues of discrimination by landlords and letting agents were also highlighted in the literature. Social networks and refugee community organisations were seen as important sources of support for refugees struggling with housing issues.
- The important role of support workers was highlighted in the literature, particularly in facilitating access to other services, and filling gaps.
- Problems with housing quality and affordability were major themes in the literature, as was housing insecurity.

- Experiences of discrimination and segregation were apparent from the studies in the review, although the authors note the heterogeneity of the group and that people in certain groups may face particular vulnerability, for example single and disabled people. Differential experiences relating to gender are also highlighted.

Conclusion

The authors conclude that while many excluded groups face challenges in relation to housing, refugees face particular disadvantage.

Recommendations

The authors identify a need for research in several areas:

- the impact of initial accommodation on individuals
- the role of social networks in relation to refugees' access to housing
- refugees' longer-term housing pathways
- health risks to refugees relating to housing quality and neighbourhoods
- providing 'restorative environments' for refugees.

The authors also make methodological recommendations, for example for more longitudinal research, and that diversity should be considered in future research in this area. Finally, they suggest that a role for academics in this field in terms of contributing to an evidence base which could be used to challenge structural inequalities.

Web Link
https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02673037.2022.2045007
Migrant Group
Asylum seekers

Refugees
Topic
Community and society
Dispersal
Housing and welfare
Housing needs
Housing patterns
Integration
NASS
Policy
Refugee community organisations
Place
UK - inc. Yorkshire & Humber element
Year
2021
Month
7
Resource Type
Journal article
Resource

Extra Information

The authors have also produced a shorter research digest, summarising the findings of the review, available via this link: https://pure.hud.ac.uk/en/publications/the-impact-of-housing-on-refugees-a-research-digest

Source URL: *https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/research-entry/impact-housing-refugees-evidence-synthesis*