The Sangatte work-visa holder: A 'natural experiment' in immigration policy

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Aims

The article analyses the admittance of Iraqi Kurds as ‘work visa holders’ when the Sangatte camp near Calais was closed in December 2002.

Methodology

Interviews were conducted with 15 respondents found by snowballing through co-nationals.

Key issues

The article reviews the emergence of ‘work visa holders’ as an ad hoc response to the closure of Sangatte in relation to work and asylum in immigration policy. The difficulties of tracing the work visa holders are discussed. Findings present the work visa holders’ stories relating to their intention to reach Britain, the decision to take up the offer of a limited visa, their experience of entry into the UK, responses to a three month waiting time in hotels, settlement and finding jobs. Other issues include their understanding of their status, educational experiences, and intention of staying in the UK.

Conclusions

A rigid distinction between labour market recruitment and humanitarian protection is artificial as the search for both political and economic freedoms is common to most immigrants from less developed countries. The Iraqi Kurds were adaptable, quickly used whatever opportunities were provided, and would have cost the taxpayer very little if their accommodation had been resolved more quickly.

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