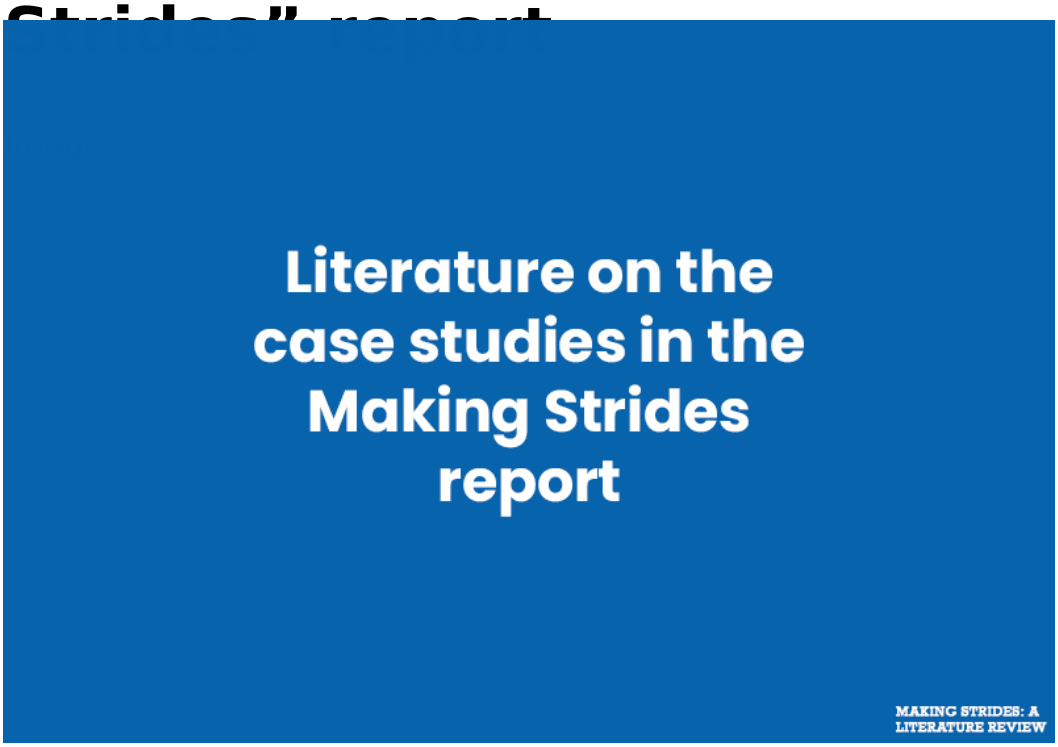
Literature on the case studies in the “Making Strides” report



In our report, we explored the career trajectories of four specific case study groups. However, studies are limited, particularly in the case of humanitarian routes that have only been established in recent years, such as the British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) visa, the Ukrainian schemes, and the Afghan schemes. Below is what is known about people who have arrived on these routes and their experiences of looking for work.

Hongkongers on the British National (Overseas) Visa Route

The Home Office (2022) conducted a UK-wide survey of 500 people who arrived in the UK from Hong Kong on the BN(O) route and found that 69 per cent of visa holders were educated to a degree level or higher, and half had managerial or professional backgrounds. Additionally, a study by the UKHK network (2022) surveyed 1,081 Hongkongers and revealed that the most common concerns were employment and finances. Most respondents required support with language acquisition, employment, and training, with preference for careers in IT and information management, administrative and clerical work education and training, accounting, banking and finance, and transport and logistics.

A third survey of 586 people was conducted by the UK Welcomes Hongkongers project and Good Neighbour church (2022), which echoed these findings. 67 per cent held degrees, while 30 per cent were looking for jobs, 23 per cent were in full-time

employment, 16 per cent were in part-time work, 16 per cent were homemakers and 10 per cent were retired. In this survey, respondents said their main priority was finding suitable homes and school places for children. Second to that was securing employment. This is because BN(O) visa holders must demonstrate that they can maintain and accommodate themselves for a minimum of six months, and therefore, most BN(O) visa holders are likely to have savings to demonstrate eligibility for entry into the UK.

Finally, an unpublished small-scale qualitative IPPR study on BN(O) visa holders in Scotland underscored the desire among Hongkongers for greater employability support, particularly around skills and qualifications recognition, vocational training, and access to employment-related information and guidance (Mort et al 2023).

Ukrainians on the Homes for Ukraine scheme and the Ukraine Family Scheme

A Europe-wide study found that the labour market inclusion of Ukrainians had been faster than other refugee groups (OECD 2023). Of those who have arrived in the UK through the Homes for Ukraine scheme or the Ukrainian Family Scheme, around 80% are highly educated and possess relatively good English skills. However, challenges persist, including childcare issues

leading to prevalent part-time work. This is likely since women and children have primarily arrived in the UK on these routes.

According to a survey by the ONS (Office for National Statistics) (2022), while many had highly skilled jobs in Ukraine, half of the survey respondents work in different sectors than before, often due to taking any job opportunity made available to them (44 per cent), language barriers (39 per cent), or unrecognised qualifications in the UK (17 per cent). As of June 2022, the most common sectors that Ukrainians were employed in were accommodation or food service industries (29 per cent), manufacturing (8 per cent), and wholesale or retail trade (8 per cent).

Afghans on the Afghan Relocation Assistance Programme (ARAP)

More in Common and USPUK (Universal Sponsorship Pathway UK) surveyed 286 ARAP arrivals, which identified potential for successful integration. While 56 per cent of respondents possessed strong English skills and were often highly educated, the survey also revealed significant disparities, especially among women who were family members of interpreters, who tended to have lower English proficiency. While 38 per cent were employed, 62% remained out of work. Notably, 51% of women were not actively seeking employment (Anstruther et al 2023).

The survey also indicated two key issues that were significant hurdles for Afghans looking to secure work commensurate with their skills and qualifications. First, bridging hotels, intended as a temporary measure, negatively impacted integration efforts because they held families back from “putting down roots and getting consistency in education, healthcare and employment” (Gower 2023). 52 per cent of respondents expressed that securing permanent accommodation close to job opportunities was an urgent priority. However, transitioning from bridging hotels has been challenging, with many families receiving notices to vacate without adequate alternative accommodation being lined up for them.

The second significant hurdle that ARAP arrivals have faced is the lack of recognition of their skills and qualifications. An external review of Operation New Hope, the support programme for ARAP arrivals, identified that limited language support, inadequate skills-based training, difficulties in verifying qualifications and insufficient tailored employment assistance were some of the issues faced by ARAP arrivals. Employers also did not accept references that were not recent. Additionally, jobcentres focus on short-term solutions so that Afghans can secure any job regardless of their background and skills, impacting their ability to find good jobs that match their work background (Tyrone 2022).

Asylum route refugees

While numerous studies explore refugee employment experiences, most focus on those navigating the mainstream asylum system, the primary route for people seeking refuge in the UK, outside of the bespoke humanitarian routes introduced by the government in recent years.

Those granted status through asylum will experience the general barriers discussed earlier but will also be negatively impacted by the employment ban placed upon them while waiting for a decision. Asylum seekers may only work if they have been waiting longer than 12 months or more through no fault of their own. Even then, they are restricted to jobs on the shortage occupation list published by the Home Office.

Fasani et al (2020) conducted a European-wide study investigating the medium- to long-term effect of employment bans. The study revealed that such bans, even when an individual gets their status and the right to work, can reduce employment chances by 15 per cent, disproportionately affecting those with lower educational backgrounds, thus pushing them towards lower-quality jobs.

As of September 2023, 124,461 people waited over six months for an initial asylum decision. The combination of prolonged uncertainty and restrictions on working means that people struggle to make up for lost time once they have gained status and the right to work (Lift the Ban 2020). Significant gaps in employment can also be seen negatively by prospective employers, can lead to the erosion of skills, affect an individual’s

confidence and self-esteem, and adversely impact overall mental health and well-being (Dempster et al 2022).

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