Research Brief
Workshop 1

What happens to integration after refugees stay long-term?

Introduction

This research brief reviews some of the main ideas and debates that emerged from the first participatory workshop of the project 'Staying, Refugee Integration and Time', funded by the Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) that took place online on Thursday, May 26th 2022. The project aims to bring together scholars and researchers specialised in refugee integration across Scotland, as well as practitioners and refugee led groups, to discuss and develop a collaborative research agenda to enhance our understanding of the process of long-term refugee staying and its relation to integration processes.

The first online workshop included six scholars and researchers, who through a discussion organised across four thematic exercises, identified existing understandings and gaps in knowledge about refugee integration and settlement in relation to time. The transcripts and visual Jamboards derived from the workshop were thematically analysed. The key themes from each exercise are summarised below.

Summary exercises 1 and 2

The first and second exercise were aimed to identify what we know about the relation between time, temporalities and integration. In particular, *1. how do we capture time in the research around integration?*; and *2.What is the relation between multiple understandings of time and refugee integration processes?*

Time is more than minutes, hours, and seasons. But also, time is all of them. Time marks change, while also materialises immobility and 'lost time'. Time has rhythms and means different things depending on who is experiencing that time, it "expands and contracts depending on what is happening and how it is perceived". Six key themes, intertwined across spaces and actors, can be identified across the first and second exercise.

1. Liminality, waiting and uncertainty: refugees' perspective and the rites of passage

Time depicts the tensions that emerge between expecting time to move and the feeling that nothing has changed, showing how people are stuck in a liminal space. This liminal space is experienced by people as the state of transition between stages, related to different ideas or progress or moving from one stage (or status) to another. This state of liminality also relates to the temporalities of waiting in a context of uncertainty.

2. Bureaucratic time (aka Home Office time): bordering practices and the hierarchy of temporalities

The waiting, uncertainty and liminality recognised as part of the asylum experience, are the result of the bordering processes that regulate, determine and control time within the context of asylum. The time that emerges from this *bureaucratic time* also evidences the *hierarchies of temporalities*. The *Home Office time* is marked by appointments and by specific deadlines that have to be accomplished *on time*, with non-compliance repercussions having direct impacts on peoples' lives. This imposition of time, not only as related to the feeling of lost time, but also in relation to being *out of time*.

These temporalities are disjointed from integration processes, as they are part of a hostile environment that focuses on deterrence, bordering practices and government targets (the latter has also influenced policy in different ways over time). Within the context of bureaucratic time, past times also become an act in the present. This is the case in asylum appeals where the past needs to be recreated or re-told in order to impact the present. While bureaucratic time dictates people's temporalities, refugees are not passive and they enact acts and times of resistance to oppose some of the power exercised by these Home Office's temporalities.

3. Markers of time: temporalities, seasons, and the life course

Time is marked in particular ways, some associated with the natural environment, others with the course of life. Markers of time include seasons, minutes, hours, years, seeing children grow up, births, deaths, age, and other events. Even when people are stuck in time waiting, trees continue to grow, nature is changing, and time is being mark by these changes. Life goes on. Religious and non-religious celebrations happening at different times of the year not only mark a particular time in the year but also act as rituals. Alongside rituals and celebrations related to people's life course, the markers of time are also marked and experienced digitally. We watch family members being born or passing away translocally, we spent time together online, we are present even though we're not actually present. And people immortalise those markers of time into 'time bites'. Phones in this context become another marker of time. Alarms, emails and calls remind us of deadlines and manufactured time, while also keeping our ritual time and our family time. Phones as a marker of time, are constant reminders of the dynamics and tensions between the different temporalities that mark our lives.

4. Parallel tracks of time

The discussion on the markers of time, remind us that times always moves on, with different temporalities taking place at the same time. **That is to say, one person juggles different parallel timeframes.** This discussion led us to the recognition of coexisting parallel timeframes and how people have caught between all these different parallel tracks of time. The same person may be still waiting for an asylum decision feeling stuck and in limbo, while also celebrating the birth of a new family member. So as life goes on, people navigate different timescales, some are bureaucratic Home Office time and others can be even geopolitical times. As we mark events related to the life course and the change of the seasons, time is also marked and experienced as 'policy times', related to the changes on policy that may also impact people's lives (e.g. the impact of the UK-Rwanda deal for offshore processing). Alongside parallel temporalities, we can also think of how these timelines intersect with each other, reflecting further the hierarchies of time. That is the power related to whose time counts. While some time is associated with waiting for asylum seekers and refugees, the Home Office does not wait (*hard time versus expendable time*). But there are also other hierarchies of time. Some are related to the expectations of integration related to certain means and markers and a sense of progress in relation to these outcomes. "The kind of assumption that the time should be perceived as progress, but quite often it doesn't, but some form of change so we are looking at different pathways, patterns, how people are progressing or not progressing, or, or move forward or not, move on or not in some kind of stage". What should be accomplished in a certain period? Who makes those decisions?

5. Temporalities and place: same seasons and same place, different experiences of time

Time is also understood as dimensional time, as it marks change in specific places, spaces, cities and communities. While these places change, the way that people experience those places can also be a marker of time, "how they experience their local street, their neighbourhood, their community. And these impact their integration and obviously these places change over time as well". Different times are experienced in different places, enacting geographic and social dimensions, both of proximity and distance.

6. Time, resources, and actors

Time is affected in different ways, one of them is related to resource limitations that can also impact long term integration plans. The discussion of resources, time and integration, also sheds light into other actors within integration processes such as CSOs or migrant-led organisations, whose timeframes may be constrained "working on kind of maybe month to month basis". From this perspective, it is hard to plan for long term integration. "How do you plan long term integration strategies, when everyone working in the sort of integration sphere is thinking much shorter terms?".

Summary exercise 3

The third exercise was an invitation to think more concretely about long term integration by engaging with two key questions

• What do you understand by long-term integration?
• How do we capture the notion and practice of long-term integration?

The thematic analysis of workshop discussion revealed key themes summarised below.

1. Long-term integration is an ever changing process that never stops which is neither linear nor circular but is marked by passing events and found it life stories.

• *Integration as process:* The focus of long-term integration should be placed on the process itself and what it entails to avoid normative language and discussions. Recognition of integration as a process places the focus on experiences, life stories about rhythms of life lived in a place that are marked by meaningful events. Such events lead to new stories being told and created. These events however become markers of temporality that come into question of long term integration.

• *Neither linear nor circular but is marked by passing events and found in life stories:* Such recognition indicates that the change over the time within the integration process does not mean the progress. Such recognition allows us to understand why refugees may or may not move-on within particular integration domains. The passing of time can be however marked by diverse events that are meaningful for refugees and as result we can distinguish different life journeys, pathways and trajectories

2. Long-term integration involves constant change of receiving community(ies)

- Long term integration involves people changing how a local place works and is being perceived. Thus the focus on long-term integration should also explore the extent to which people are represented and recognised in the historical narratives and cultural symbols of place. In particular, whose stories are being recognised and represented, and why? Such questions relate to power structures of place representation. Thus, long-term perspective on integration should also explore the ways in which cultural and historical representation of the place are inclusive and reflect the identity, belonging and practices of refugees.

- ***Integration as a process never ends, it is in constant flux:*** Recognition of integration as a process also highlights the fact that it is not something that's ever going to be resolved or end. Such perception recognises mutual impact and change of both the receiving and arriving population over time. As result, receiving populations become mix of native refugee population themselves that then also change the nature of what integration looks like and how it is shaped

- ***It is also important to highlight that integration morphs into diversity of society.*** However, since integration is in constant flux, there's never going to be a point at which it changes from one to the other. Therefore the focus should be what the process entails, how the relation between integration and diversities within society change over time in the long term perspective.

3. Long-term integration is not just about refugees but wider communities to capture and unpack greater structural inequalities that create context in which integration happens.

- ***Focus on wider community:*** The focus should be placed on wider community (or localities) to capture experiences among all individuals living within the community. Such focus should however avoid generalisation of diverse communities including 'Syrian/Afghan/Kongo/Scottish community' . The focus on wider community also allows us to unpack existing structural inequalities that shape power relations within the community.

- ***Unpacking greater structural inequalities:*** Recognition of structural condition should also take into consideration cultures and places beginning well before 'arrival' through colonisation and globalisation. For example, some refugees may seek sanctuary in places where they may have personal connections (e.g. family and friends).Recognition of colonial past may help us to understands the narratives and dichotomous perception of refugee migration being 'illegal' and 'undesirable'.

- Long-term integration should also be a society-wide aspiration where diversities are being welcomed and supported to promote inclusion.

4. Integration should not be the golden standard in the context of increasing mobility.

Increasing mobility of people through their life course may question whether integration should be a golden standard for people on the move.

Such situations may be particularly relevant for refugees transiting through 'transit countries' wishing to seek sanctuary in other places. However, existing evidence also shows the places to which people initially travelled were often destinations rather than 'transit countries'. This raises the question about the usefulness of integration in the context of increasing mobility.

5. **How we can monitor integration and avoid the danger of normative perspective.**

Monitoring and evaluation of integration processes often falls into the danger of normative discussion on what are desirable outcomes of integration processes in opposition to exploration of what integration is. This however raises the question on how we can avoid the danger of normative language when we evaluate integration? However, such danger should not prevent scholars seeking the answer to the question of what integration is. Thus **we should allow ourselves the freedom to let integration morph into other concepts, including wellbeing. Integration is about humans flourishing in society.** So not the human flourishing to the detriment of others, but collectively and collaboratively and as such the notion of solidarity is also useful there.

Summary exercise 4

The final question focused on lessons learned [*What do you take from the conversation about the different meaning of time in the relation to integration process?*] and questions that we still need to answer [*what do we still need to know?*]

The participants came out with a list of questions that should be taken into consideration in future research on refugee integration in the long-term perspective. **Questions to be raised/ addressed include:**

- In discussion about long-term integration, how can we productively hold onto the tensions on integration/ diversity, community /individual, categorising people as refugees but also resisting labelling, markers of integration, but also just everyday life?
- What is the quality of integration itself as a concept that we can use in the study of diversity within society?
- In what ways is time as a concept with multiple meanings and roles useful for us to capture the change within the integration process?
- How do our understandings of time link to existing models of refugee integration?
- Solidarity and diversity: how can they co-exist?
- The process of refugee integration includes diverse refugees in terms of gender, age and nationality. How do those diversities have an impact on the ways in which refugees are able to navigate the system. In particular, there is little research on unaccompanied refugee children, how do they navigate the system?
- How historical narratives and cultural practices facilitate or hinder integration/wellbeing/ belonging.

Moving forward and next steps

- **Meeting 2 (26th October 2022, in-person delivery): Refugee integration: supporting integration services in long-term perspectives.**

The second meeting will involve representants of refugee-led organisations, practitioners and scholars. The workshop discussion, again facilitated using the KETSO method, will focus on current state of service delivery and gaps in existing provision to develop research questions for collaborative routes moving forward. The final point of the discussion will focus on exploring how data from the workshop and future research can inform service and policy development (New Scots 2022-26).

- **Meeting 3 (month February 2023, Hybrid delivery) Setting up Research Methodology.**

The third meeting will include all participants from workshop 2 and will focus on exploring good practices in developing research methodologies in refugee studies.

- **Meeting 4: (March 2023, Online meeting via Zoom) Summary and next steps**

Building on development from meetings 1-3 , the project will identify funding streams and potential further collaboration initiatives (both research and practical) in order to deliver new work on refugee integration in Scotland. The discussion will also focus on plans for future collaborative publications and will set the next steps for research funding opportunities, external collaborators along with the division of roles and responsibilities of the project role. The final step will include dinner in Glasgow for all workshop participants.

For more information about this research, please contact:
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