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# Seeking Safety beyond Refuge: The Impact of Immigration and Citizenship Policy upon Refugees in the UK

Emma Stewart and Gareth Mulvey

*Western states are concerned about maintaining and securing national borders. Across Europe, one response has been to implement restrictive asylum regimes that prevent ‘bogus’ applicants and grant refuge only to the ‘deserving’. Alongside these concerns, states are eager to encourage socially cohesive communities. One recent tool adopted by the UK government has been citizenship policy, including English language/life in the UK tests and citizenship ceremonies. By drawing upon in-depth interviews with refugees in Scotland (UK), this paper explores the impact of the current asylum regime and citizenship policies from the perspective of individual voices that are often absent from wider debates. It explores how temporary refugee status impacts upon individuals’ everyday lives including employment and education, and impacts upon children. The data also question the reasons for refugees deciding to become British citizens (or not) and highlight instrumental reasons alongside less tangible factors such as gaining a sense of security. Taking the discussion forward, the study explores some unintended consequences of immigration and citizenship policies in the UK. The research suggests that not only do restrictive asylum policies negatively impact upon refugees and their integration but also serve to elevate fear and uncertainty, which can unintentionally spur individuals to seek naturalisation.*

*Keywords: Refugees; British Citizenship; Asylum Policy; Integration*

## Introduction

On the basis of the notion that many asylum seekers are ‘bogus’ and that only limited numbers of individuals are deserving of refuge, national governments and

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policy-makers across Europe have increasingly employed restrictive measures to deter, control and manage asylum flows. Domestic pressures, including the need to reassure the electorate that migration is under control, as well as financial worries over benefits and entitlements have driven countries within Europe and the wider developed world towards stricter refugee policies. In the UK, there has been a moral panic over asylum seekers, who are regarded as unwanted 'others' that threaten social order and national borders (Cohen 1972; Finney and Robinson 2008). Asylum seekers have become tied into broader debates on general migration and race relations policies and are portrayed as a threat to national security, welfare security and national identity (Huysmans 2000; Sasse 2005; McLaren and Johnson 2004). Asylum and immigration legislation in the UK has reflected this in the progressive erosion of the rights of asylum seekers and refugees over the past 20 years (Sales 2005). Policies such as deportation, detention and dispersal have been employed to deter assumed undeserving asylum applicants (Bloch and Schuster 2005; Schuster 2005). Furthermore, refused asylum seekers face destitution and live a precarious existence not unlike stateless people (Gillespie 2012; Blitz and Otero-iglesias 2011). These policies have been routinely implemented and justified as a means to deter or return so-called undeserving asylum applicants. However, there is also an impact upon those whom even the government accepts as having a well-founded fear of persecution.

One key policy change to the asylum regime in the UK, of importance to this paper, has been the implementation of the five-year strategy on immigration and asylum (Home Office 2005a), which led directly into the 2006 Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act. One notable element of the strategy was the move from permanent refugee status to a temporary one, the so called 'cessation clause'. The notion being that country information is to be kept under review to determine what will happen to refugees at the end of the temporary period (i.e. five years). This effectively removes the provision of permanent protection for refugees and replaces it with temporary status, at least in the first instance. The granting of refugee protection for a limited period is not a new or unique phenomenon, but it does signal a significant departure in UK refugee policy from providing permanent refuge to individuals and providing them with the basis to rebuild their lives. Overall, the impact of restrictive asylum policies has been to progressively curtail and erode the rights of refugees and asylum seekers (Morris 2002; Tyler 2010). This paper explores how granting temporary protection for a five-year period can restrict the daily choices and decisions of refugees as well as negatively influencing future plans.

The study also contributes to debates over the incorporation of migrant and refugee groups into national polities (Vasta 2009; Vertovec 2006). Across Europe there has been a trend towards stricter sociocultural integration and a 'thickening' of citizenship legislation (Ersanilli and Koopmans 2010; Baubock 2010). In the UK, there was a relatively quiet period in terms of citizenship policy after the 1981 British Nationality Act. However, several developments have emerged recently from arguments that multiculturalism has failed and that communities are living parallel

lives (Cantle 2005; McGhee 2008). For example, the 2002 Nationality, Asylum and Immigration Act requires that applicants for British citizenship pass an English language test, followed by citizenship ceremonies and the swearing of an oath of allegiance to the crown. The 2009 Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act then introduced the concept of probationary citizenship and proposed an active citizenship requirement for would be citizens, with the suggestion that undertaking voluntary work would speed up the application process (Home Office 2008). This study examines the ways in which these changes to citizenship policy have impacted upon refugee groups.<sup>1</sup>

On the basis of a sample of in-depth interviews with 30 refugees in Scotland, who have been granted refugee status before and after 2005, the paper aims to address two key questions. First, how have recent changes in asylum and citizenship policy influenced refugees' feelings of security and impacted upon their decision to seek British citizenship? Second, how does government policy on integration and citizenship reflect or refract the views voiced by refugees? To address these issues, the paper is structured as follows. The first section explores the connections between refugee integration in society and citizenship acquisition. The second section outlines the methods and explains the specific geographical focus of the sample. The third section documents the impact of restrictive asylum policy as well as the shifting citizenship policy regime upon refugees. The paper then goes on to document the fear and uncertainty experienced by refugees in the UK and the resultant choices and decision-making concerning citizenship acquisition. Insights from government policies on citizenship are then related to those of refugee groups. The discussion section considers the implications of the findings for integration and citizenship policy, while the final part presents some concluding thoughts.

### **Refugee Integration and Citizenship**

Within the academic literature and among policy-makers, the topics of both refugee integration and citizenship policy are well discussed. Nevertheless, the concept of integration is contested, which means that the precise nature of the relationship between refugee integration and citizenship remains somewhat unclear. There is much debate in the literature about what is meant by integration and how this relates to refugees (Ager and Strang 2010; Castles et al. 2002; Smyth, Stewart, and Da Lomba 2010). A key differentiation has been drawn between structural integration which means participation in society's main institutions such as the labour and housing market, and acculturation which relates more to evolving identities and cultures (Korac 2003). Research on refugee integration has focused upon both of these areas including how to facilitate full participation in the labour market (Bloch 2004), how to tackle obstacles to refugee integration (Mestheneos and Ioannidi 2002; Phillips 2006) and examination of community relations (Daley 2007). More recent work has critiqued legal and policy perspectives in relation to refugee integration (Da Lomba 2010; Mulvey 2010; Phillimore 2012). Drawing together the structural and acculturation strands of

thought, Ager and Strang (2008) highlight what they see as the key integration domains for refugees and relate them to access and achievement within housing, employment, education and health. These structural factors are related to and mediated by the processes of social connections including social bonds, social bridges and social links, which connect to the process of acculturation. Underpinning all of these issues are the fundamental issues of citizenship and rights.

Citizenship acquisition can be regarded as a fundamental part of refugee integration. Bloch (2000, 78) highlights the critical importance of citizenship and rights to settlement as they represent some of the key structural factors of refugee integration. She points out that 'anything less than full citizenship will impede settlement because members of the host society do not see the migrant as part of that society'. Similarly, Rudiger points out that 'those with a temporary or precarious status may actually have greater difficulties entering into positive relations with established residents than those heading for permanent residence' (Rudiger in Vertovec 2006, 18). Thus, whether it is gaining access to the labour market or forging social connections, citizenship is seen as an essential part of refugee integration. One way in which the relationship between citizenship acquisition and refugee integration has been theorised has been to regard citizenship as either a tool or reward for integration, which links to different models of integration (Jurado 2008). The assimilationist model views citizenship as a reward that is given to individuals who have proven their loyalty to the state, while the multicultural model regards the rights and responsibilities that come with citizenship as an important tool to encourage further integration. For refugees, becoming a British citizen may facilitate structural integration and thereby help refugees on their journey to integration (tool) or citizenship acquisition may occur at the end of the process after refugees have successfully integrated (reward). Morrell's (2009) research with refugees demonstrates how individuals seek citizenship as a means or tool to facilitate their integration within society. Freedom of movement, the ability to work as well as gaining access to education and services as British citizens were all noted as influencing refugees in their decision making. In addition, however, Atfield, Brahmhatt, and O'Toole (2007) found that refugees' perceptions of integration may not only focus upon functional and subjective aspects of integration but also focus upon aspirations for citizenship (reward).

In policy terms, the UK government has ambiguously drawn upon both models of citizenship as a tool and reward for integration, but there has been particular emphasis on the latter. Policy has therefore both reflected an assimilationist stance to citizenship acquisition and explicitly drawn upon the multicultural model of integration (Jurado 2008). In several refugee integration documents, becoming a British citizen is viewed positively as a reward or indicator of refugee integration, while also being seen as a helpful tool to refugees in building their new lives in the UK and integrating fully (Home Office 2000, 2005b). Nevertheless, despite the government sometimes employing the language of citizenship as a tool for integration, the trajectory of citizenship legislation in the UK since 2002 (as detailed above) has tended to emphasise the earning

of citizenship. An incoherent approach to citizenship and integration is not only ineffectual and counter-productive, but also threatens to undermine social cohesion and engenders social fragmentation (Jurado 2008). Rutter et al. (2007) found that although individuals may become British citizens, they may still identify themselves as being refugees, at least partly due to feelings of rejection by the host society. For example, government efforts to encourage refugees to become British citizens have been hampered by practical issues, such as costs (Levesley 2008; Kostakopoulou 2010), which can foster feelings of rejection among refugees and affect long-term integration. As such, Jurado (2008) argues that multi-ethnic societies should focus upon the tool approach which prioritises the role of equality and participation rather than the language and identity of the reward model.

The linkages between refugee integration and citizenship are complex and require further investigation, particularly in light of recent changes to the legislation. Government policies on refugees have generally been unwelcoming and it is important to examine how this has impacted upon refugees' everyday lives and aspirations for naturalisation. Indeed, there is a need to study and understand how refugees are affected by state decisions on citizenship and to document how they make decisions in response to such changes. By doing so, this paper will question the effectiveness of restrictive refugee policy in the UK and go on to suggest that not only do such regimes not necessarily have their desired effects but they can also lead to unintended consequences.<sup>2</sup>

### **Researching Refugees and British Citizenship**

As illustrated above, a number of academic articles and government reports have been written concerning refugee integration and citizenship, with some also explicitly linking the two. Nevertheless, quantitative data published with specific reference to refugee populations is somewhat limited. There are a number of sources which publish figures on the total numbers of refugees and of persons acquiring British citizenship. The lack of cross-tabulations between these different sources, however, means that it is not possible to know exactly how many refugees in the UK have opted to become British citizens or the socio-demographic characteristics of the refugees that take both this decision, and those who take the opposite perspective. The limited scope of quantitative data on refugees means that qualitative investigations have much to contribute in this area. Although in-depth interviewing cannot document universal trends, it can unearth rich accounts about the impacts of restrictive policy on a personal level and provide insights into the process of decision-making regarding citizenship. This qualitative project involved collaboration between a third sector organisation and an academic partner (Dona 2007). Challenges related to accessing refugees were addressed by relying upon several gatekeepers in the third sector organisation, as well as snowball sampling (Temple and Moran 2006).

The project adopted a combination of stratified and opportunistic sampling. In terms of the final sample, 30 in-depth interviews were conducted with refugees



during 2010. There were 23 different nationalities interviewed including individuals from Somalia, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Eritrea and Zimbabwe.<sup>3</sup> This means that multiple experiences are presented in the analysis. In terms of socio-demographics, some 20 individuals were male, while 10 females were interviewed. Sixty-two per cent of the sample had children. In terms of the age structure, some 60% of the sample was under 40 years of age while 40% was over 40 years of age. Importantly, the project sought to include refugees who were in Scotland before and after the policy changes in 2005. Some 16 individuals had entered the UK between 2000 and 2004, and 14 individuals had arrived after 2005. Asylum seekers were not interviewed as they are particularly vulnerable and may have felt unable to answer questions about citizenship while their immigration status was undetermined. It was decided that refugees and British citizens were best placed to reflect upon their time as an asylum seeker as well as answer questions concerning citizenship. All respondents have been given a pseudonym in the text with country of origin replaced with region to protect the interviewees' identity.

The in-depth interviews were conducted in Scotland with the majority of research participants living in the city of Glasgow. There are an estimated 20,000 refugees and asylum seekers in Scotland, who represent over 50 different nationalities (Shisheva, Christie, and Mulvey 2013). The asylum and immigration regime in Scotland is complex due to the devolved settlement (Bowes, Ferguson, and Sim 2009). Legislation associated with immigration and asylum is a matter reserved for Westminster, with the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) established in 2000 to manage dispersal on a UK-wide basis. Nevertheless, the multiple agencies that provide support to asylum seekers such as those involved in health, education and social services operate and are controlled by the Scottish Parliament and Glasgow City Council. The sample is Scotland based and although the project makes no claims to represent refugees' experiences across the UK, given that refugee and citizenship policy operates at the UK level, it is likely that several topics raised are not unique to this context.

## **Research Findings: Citizenship and Refugee Integration**

### *Temporariness and Structural Integration*

Talking of the benefits of becoming a British citizen, many interviewees felt that only citizenship would mark the end of their asylum and refugee journey. There was a discernible feeling of lack of security that was directly attributed to the five-year status granted to refugees in the UK. This was likened to an extension of the asylum process, often a long period in which refugees cannot plan for the future and struggle to integrate due to their liminal status. 'Jacob', a young refugee from the Middle East, talked specifically about the temporary nature of refugee security resulting from the change to policy. When asked to compare his present life to when seeking asylum he stated:

Nothing big different can say that, but I'm still waiting now. When I get a British passport I will talk again ... It's now like temporary here now. After five years maybe I have a chance to get a British passport or not. If I have a chance, 100 percent my life change.

Focusing upon structural factors of refugee integration, although refugees have the right to work, it was felt that this was difficult to realise in practice since the move away from indefinite leave to remain. In a joint interview 'Sophia' and 'Gina', who were both unemployed refugees from Central Asia, discussed the challenges:

actually it was quite difficult for me because while I study I did found job but with someone looking at my paper it's for five years, they don't want to take me because it's training, they have to spend time and money for training but they think maybe she's not forever here and we don't want to pay and just it was so difficult for me to find job. (Sophia)

I can't find a job because I'm a refugee for five years ... and I understand for employers why they don't take me for this ... I have a lot of rights, I mean permission to work blah blah blah but the problem is that employers not very happy with my situation. (Gina)

There was a widely held perception that the five-year nature of refugee status meant that employers were unwilling to take refugees on, particularly in roles that require training. In practical terms, five-year status impacts upon employment opportunities and therefore integration. The linkages between employment and wider participation in society were discussed by 'Lucia', who was a young refugee from West Africa. She argued:

When it comes to career wise or contribute to the nation, the country... you'd find it difficult because if you're working for certain company for example and, you know, you feel, you feel that you become part of them in a way that you're also trying to help the company to go forward ... you wouldn't actually think of long term career prospects because you know, you know, that time is coming to an end, so you don't have long term goals basically.

This sense of temporariness exacerbates the existing problems of unemployment and underemployment among refugees as well as operating against the development of longer term goals and aspirations (Bloch 2004). 'Lucia' went on to explain further:

it will have an ... impact on my long term probably ... because I would have to set myself a time frame, well within this five years this is what I can do and this is what my child actually can do, so it will be hard for me to plan for like university for my child, you know, so I think as time goes on, as it comes nearer to the five years then I will start thinking about my fear again of going back to where I come from because of my little girl, so, so yeah, I think that that would be, that would be the impact.

So while refugees may attain employment and appear to have integrated, feelings of temporariness resulting from the policy change to temporary instead of indefinite

protection can persist. Most notably this sense of fear was pronounced for parents. 'Hannah', who is a mother and refugee from East Africa, saw the five years' temporary leave to remain as a period in which she, and more importantly her children, were unable to participate fully in society. She explained that her children were unable to attend school trips outside of the UK because they did not hold a passport. This led to her and her children feeling very frustrated and provides evidence of a lack of integration within the education system. She explained: 'I want to finish quickly five years with my children to get citizen, then to be in part of the Scottish people ... I don't know what's future'.

### *Role of Immigration Legislation*

Beyond the practical restrictions in everyday life caused by temporary refugee status, the research found evidence of fear and lack of security among refugees resulting from the regularity of immigration rule changes. 'Mohammed', who was a refugee from the Middle East, stated that:

Now I'm refugee, I don't know ... maybe now a change of government, new system now, everything new, everything change ... When you have a British passport you have a, like, guarantee of your right to stay in this country ... guarantee to stay here. Maybe after one, two days say sorry. Maybe you have to have a document or you're at once back to your country.

Fear among refugees about what will happen if rules change, what will happen at the end of the five years and what happens, or more pointedly what does not happen, during those five years was a commonly expressed feeling. Again this was particularly pronounced for people with children. Even individuals who had indefinite leave to remain, that is, who got status prior to the introduction of temporary status, still voiced concerns over changing immigration rules and regulations. When asked why he decided to become a British citizen rather than remain as a permanent status refugee, 'Joshua' from East Africa explained:

rules change and if you don't become fully British or become naturalised and fully British then at the back of your mind you might think, at some stage, they might revoke your status or the rules might change. If the rules change then it might affect you, so just as a completion of your journey, you see, you prefer to be on the safe side and to be on the safe side is to be fully British citizen ... you never know what will happen after a month or after six months or after a year, always rules and regulation is change, especially in the Home Office because a lot to do with immigration and politics and things.

Fear of changing immigration rules led to the decision to try to become British being taken much quicker. Besides a general fear of immigration regulations changing, there was an explicit fear of being deported from the UK. The resultant feeling was not that citizenship was desired in some cases, but that there was little choice

involved. This lack of choice was similarly voiced by a number of our interviewees with different personal circumstances. For example, some individuals were effectively stateless and so felt they needed some sense of citizenship. As 'Elsie' explained:

if I had walked in the (country of origin) Embassy when I got my indefinite stay and they give me a (country of origin) passport, I would not ... I don't think I would have paid seven hundred and so much pounds to get a British nationalisation ... it was my own decision to become British, I wasn't forced into it, but in a way I was, if the (country of origin) Embassy had given me a (country of origin) passport, I would not become British, so sometimes the circumstances lead you to it that way.

'Elsie' had entered the UK as an unaccompanied asylum seeking child from Southern Africa and in adulthood now sought permanent citizenship. A rejected application for citizenship of her country of birth left her feeling that she had no other option but to apply for British citizenship. However, for others the lack of choice was more prosaic. Having not made the conscious decision to come to Britain, and/or having little ability to go elsewhere, becoming British was something of a Hobson's choice. 'Abraham', a refugee from the Middle East explained:

happy here but not choice. To be a British citizenship or to change your passport or to change your, your citizenship, that's come into your life without your choice, this has come to you, my life without my choice, if this ship stop in America or stop in China I'm not going to say I'm British, yeah.

Nevertheless, fear of rule changes continues to push refugees towards British citizenship, regardless of how and why they arrived here.

### *Refugee Identity and Social Integration*

The lack of choice facing refugees and the apparent compulsion to become a British citizen was also motivated by a desire to shed the refugee label and identity. 'Joseph', a British citizen originally from Central Africa, explained:

once you have citizenship the major thing that change is that you have British passport, you can apply for British passport, and you can choose not to be labelled as refugee all the time.

'Joseph' referred to the desire not to be 'labelled' as a refugee, suggesting that negative experiences and connotations are associated with this status. Being 'labelled' as a refugee can result in prejudice and negative treatment (see Schuster and Solomos 2004), so to become a British citizen was regarded as one way to shed this undesirable identity. 'Hassan', a refugee from the Middle East went further when he stated:

a person cannot be a refugee for the rest of his/her life. The people's look is different when you are a refugee and when you are a British citizen.

'Hassan' referred to the different ways in which individuals are treated by society depending on their legal status and he suggested that being a British citizen would result in preferential treatment when compared to being a refugee. Similarly, 'Eric' from Europe referred to the different ways in which individuals are treated by society depending on their legal status, suggesting that being a British citizen would be favourable across a range of areas. These interviewees also regarded refugee identity as being time limited and desired to make the transition to British citizen not only due to fear of negative treatment but also to ensure their full social integration. Indeed, the interesting analogy of the transition from being single to being married was used by 'Rosie'. For her, when British citizenship and identity begins, refugee identity stops.

### *Citizenship: Tool or Reward?*

As discussed, while the UK government has ambiguously drawn upon both assimilationist and multicultural models of integration, in recent times citizenship policy has focused upon the former. For example, when David Blunkett was Home Secretary access to citizenship was identified as 'a lever that could be used to encourage civic participation and a sense of belonging to the wider community' (Spencer 2011, 226). Nevertheless, the subsequent five-year strategy was much more explicit in regarding citizenship as a reward, that is individuals 'must pass a residence test; be intending to make the UK their home; be of good character; and pass an English language requirement and (from later this year) a test of knowledge of life in the UK' (Home Office 2005b, 22). A key factor which significantly motivates refugee populations and impacts upon integration, but which appears to be absent from such government thinking around policy, is the sense of security seen as coming with citizenship. Although other migrant groups may face uncertainty over their legal status, this is more pronounced for refugees for two main reasons. First, refugees can face a long asylum process, which leads to extended periods of uncertainty. This was referred to by 'George' from West Africa, who said:

being a refugee ... it's a long process. You came, you apply, and after you have to wait and it's a very, very difficult to get your papers after that. And I think that many people, after all this ... after all that bad day they pass, I think many of them want to become British, to get the passport to be free ... to be more free, more relaxed.

Second, refugees have no option to return to their home country and so the need to feel safe and secure is more pronounced, as explained by 'Robina' from the Middle East, 'I don't feel that I'm completely settled, you know, we're concerned about the future and I don't know why but anyone who, who enforced to leave his or her country he still feels he is not settled'. Robina's comments are interesting given that she had been granted refugee status in another EU country and was naturalised. Seeking better opportunities for her children's education, the family had decided to onward migrate to the UK. Nevertheless, despite holding an EU passport, she still voiced the comments above

regarding security and her search to feel settled and with it a sense of belonging. When 'Robina' was questioned about the benefits of becoming British, she struggled to elucidate tangible reasons. Instead, it was the feeling of security that was linked to gaining nationality, 'just for me it's, there was nothing, there was nothing changed but just a kind of feeling to have the nationality, you feel more, more secure, this is the only thing'. As a parent, 'Robina' also explained that she was concerned about her children's future. Parents felt the need to have secure legal status in order to guarantee their children's future, in terms of practical issues such as education, but also to develop a sense of national belonging.<sup>4</sup>

The notions of security and safety pervaded the narratives of respondents. Security is intrinsically linked to safety, and citizenship was seen as being the key guarantee of that safety.<sup>5</sup> The future is uncertain while the past has produced a fracture in status and belonging. 'Marko' from East Africa said, 'I'm scared now, but I'd love to become British because I'm safe ... I want safe really, like as British, or citizen, I'd love to become'. This narrative highlights the dichotomy and coexisting feelings of security and fear, absent from government policies, which are now based almost entirely on the economic benefits and perceived strains on public services. Indeed, security now has a very different connotation, entirely concerning securing 'us' against 'them'. Home Secretary John Reid argued that, while motivated by a desire to create a more just and equal society, 'without security none of those things are possible' (BBC News 2006). This point re-emerges in a government response to the House of Lords European Committee 10th Report which was critical of the Hague programme<sup>6</sup> placing emphasis on security at the expense of a rights-based approach. The government responded that it agreed on the need to find 'the right balance between protecting people in the exercise of their fundamental rights and ensuring that they live in a secure and just Europe', but that '*improving security is vital and without it freedom and justice could not flourish*' (Filkin 2003, emphasis added).

### **Discussion: Seeking Safety and Security beyond Physical Refuge**

This study challenges the notion that providing physical refuge and temporary refugee status will necessarily lead to long-term integration. Evidence from our sample suggests that the granting of five-year refugee status impacts negatively upon individuals. Although individuals granted refugee status do gain many rights and opportunities vis-à-vis being asylum seekers, there are still key challenges (Stewart 2005). This research suggests that problems do not stop when individuals are granted refugee status and can begin to participate in society's main institutions. Instead, by granting refugees five-year status, after which their cases may be reviewed, the UK government is creating obstacles to the permanent structural integration of refugees. This is not only on a functional level, where individuals may be prevented from entering the workforce, but on an emotional and psychological level, as respondents expressed fear and uncertainty over their future. As explained elsewhere, although refugees may 'obtain physical security by coming to the UK, they may not immediately experience psychological

security – a sense of being settled and safe’ (Goldsmith 2008, 121). The five-year period of protection freezes the lives of refugees and detrimentally impacts upon long-term integration and settlement. It is essential, therefore, to consider refugees’ needs beyond securing refuge to recognise the ways in which temporary refugee protection negatively impacts upon how refugees rebuild their lives in exile.

The New Labour government from the outset sought a more ‘active’ form of citizenship and instituted, for example, citizenship courses into English schools. However, the focus for migrants and refugees has been more incoherent. The 2002 White Paper ‘Secure Borders, Safe Havens’ suggested that the disturbances in Northern English towns in the summer of 2001 were associated with a lack of a sense of common values or civic identity to unite around (Home Office 2002). These common values were linked directly by the paper to citizenship. The paper continued that commonality ‘means ensuring that every individual has the wherewithal, such as the ability to speak our common language, to enable them to engage as active citizens in economic, social and political life’ (Home Office 2002, 30). It could be argued that temporary status is not compatible with the desire to have active citizens engaged in all aspects of economic, social and political life. That is, the ability to ‘be’ permanent and in time to obtain citizenship was subsequently progressively denied. Just three years after the proclamation of the need for active citizenship and participation, the government’s five-year strategy for asylum and immigration suggested that ‘long term settlement must be carefully controlled and provide long term economic benefit’ (Home Office 2005b, 1). Temporariness had come to supplant the common values associated with citizenship. When Prime Minister Gordon Brown later commissioned the Goldsmith review to examine all facets of citizenship, one important finding was that attachment to Britishness (the government’s apparent aim) often only came after decisions about the future in Britain had been made, a future that was being moved outwith the agency of refugees (Levesley 2008). That is, a combination of the insecurity of temporary status highlighted as a driver to citizenship in this paper, and the fear of any status less than citizenship started to drive decision making.

This research has provided detailed insights into the decision-making of refugees regarding naturalisation in the UK. It was found that a sense of fear of immigration rule changes and the need for a secure legal status ultimately drive refugees to become British citizens. The constant reviewing and revising of immigration policies to demonstrate a tough approach on asylum has instilled fear in refugees, which motivates them to secure their legal status through citizenship acquisition. These fears and the accompanying decision making are a result of the contradictory nature of government thinking. While making integration demands of refugees, and indeed other migrants, they have simultaneously made the process of citizenship acquisition both longer and more complex, and have therefore prevented refugees from making positive decisions to access the rights associated with citizenship, rights also related to integration. It appears that policies introduced to limit the permanency of refugees in the UK only serve to heighten feelings of fear and uncertainty. This means that for some refugees the decision to become British is not primarily based upon a desire to

integrate in the UK, or influenced by a sense of attachment that develops through time, but perceived as the only way to end their feelings of temporariness and gain a sense of security beyond physical refuge. Indeed, it appears that the indirect consequence of the many and varied changes and restrictions in UK asylum policy has not been to deter so-called bogus applicants but to create fear, with citizenship seen as the key way of guaranteeing permanent residence in the UK.

Furthermore, there are fundamental barriers to refugee integration from racism and ignorance experienced at both personal and institutional levels, and enforced dependence and marginalisation. Besides participating in society's main institutions, there was a strong desire to be accepted by society, experience equality and not to be identified as 'different'. It could be argued that negativity, prejudice and inequality experienced by refugees indirectly leave individuals feeling that they have little choice but to become British citizens. The step towards citizenship may therefore only be taken by individuals due to feelings of marginalisation and the fear of not being able to successfully integrate without citizenship. This demonstrates the gap between government perspectives on citizenship and integration when compared with the personal viewpoints of refugees. Alongside structural factors of integration less tangible emotional benefits are derived from citizenship acquisition, which is not fully appreciated by current government policy.

Indeed, Levesley (2008) points out that although there is only a small gap between the rights obtained by people with indefinite leave to remain and those with citizenship, those with the latter also derive emotional benefits from their status. There was a discernible insecurity of status voiced by refugees, which was in stark contrast to the feelings of security expressed by refugees who are now British citizens. Our research strongly identified security beyond physical refuge as being of great importance to refugees when making decisions about citizenship. This means that any attempt to encourage citizenship based on common values, as espoused by the government, will be absent from those refugees who opt to become naturalised for reasons of security rather than values and belonging. Indeed, this could lead to a form of citizenship by default and may not act to create the 'active citizenship' and cohesion the government claims it wants from citizenship provisions.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Overall, this paper has presented findings from the perspective of refugees that are often absent from wider debates on the issues of refugee and citizenship policy. These findings provide a useful starting point for challenging the multiple and varied changes adopted by immigration policy-makers by documenting the negative and unintended impact of policies on everyday lives and how these experiences shape future decision-making regarding naturalisation, as well as some of the perverse consequences of policy. This study concludes that much policy towards refugees, and more particularly asylum seekers, has negative and often contradictory consequences. Both the environment in which refugees are expected to integrate into and the



consequences of temporary refugee status have had negative impacts on their ability to integrate. Indeed there are identified unintended consequences of policy and policy-making. The most enduring are that refugees are being encouraged to become citizens but for the wrong reasons, and with ramifications for any future decision-making. Not only does the five-year status freeze the lives of refugees and increase feelings of insecurity but it can also unintentionally spur individuals to seek naturalisation either for the wrong reasons, in relation to successive UK governments' stated policy aims, or by taking this step much earlier than planned. This seems to suggest quite perversely that policies introduced to limit the permanency of refugees in the UK only elevate fear and uncertainty, which can unintentionally spur individuals to seek naturalisation and therefore permanency in the UK.

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### Notes

- [1] Although issues pertaining to citizenship policy for refugees could be applicable to other migrant groups, it is worth stressing the particularity of the situation facing refugees. Refugees are different from other categories of migrants, being unable to return to their home country and losing their permanent legal status.
- [2] Research in the USA suggests that restrictive immigration policies do not have their desired effects of reducing the migrant population but can lead to circular and repeat migration flows (Hagan, Eschbach, and Rodriguez 2008). Furthermore, not only do such policies impact upon the daily lives of migrants but also another unintended consequence of strict immigration laws has been for increasing numbers of migrant parents to seek dual citizenship for their children (Hagan, Rodriguez, and Castro 2011).
- [3] Analysis of Home Office Asylum Statistics for the past 10 years indicates that the top 10 nationalities granted refugee status, ELR or humanitarian protection from 1998 to 2008 in the UK were from Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Serbia and Montenegro, Eritrea, Zimbabwe, Iran, Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone and Angola. Grants of refugee status are not published for Scotland specifically but published data indicate that the top five nationalities of asylum seeker supported by NASS in Scotland over the past 10 years were from Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Somalia and Iraq (Home Office Asylum Statistics 2001–2008).
- [4] Despite this, there are still different loyalties or feelings of belonging which exist within families, with parents identifying with their countries of origin while children identify with Britain, Scotland or more often their locality.
- [5] The permanence of British citizenship voiced by refugees contrasts starkly with the reality of citizenship being revoked and increased denationalisation occurring within liberal states (Gibney 2011).
- [6] In November 2004, the governments of the EU signed up to the Hague Program. It aimed to develop European competencies and standardisation in a number of areas, particularly,

guaranteeing fundamental rights, procedural safeguards, and access to justice; fighting organised crime; repelling the threat of terrorism; providing protection to refugees; and regulating migration flows and controlling the external borders of the Union.

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