

BENIGN NEGLECT?

POLICIES TO SUPPORT UPWARD MOBILITY FOR IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

By Rachel Marangozov



**A Series on the Labor Market Integration of New Arrivals in Europe:
Assessing Policy Effectiveness**



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Executive Summary

The United Kingdom's flexible labor market has made it easy for immigrants to get jobs, but hard to move upwards within their occupations. Job tenure is low, creating incentives for employers to create low-skilled jobs rather than invest in training. Sectors that employ migrants are especially likely to have limited middle-skilled jobs and truncated occupational ladders. And barriers to accessing both language lessons and vocational training from within work, especially for low-skilled workers, could further limit the opportunities for personal development and developing native language proficiency. Meanwhile, some new arrivals—especially those who come to form families or as refugees, rather than for work, and those with limited literacy and education—have failed even to gain a first foothold on the ladder and remain among the most disadvantaged in the labor force.

Policies to address these barriers are somewhat scattered. Although the United Kingdom has never had a centralized integration policy, employment support programs for refugees and free English as a Second Language (ESOL) courses for low-skilled workers were until recently widely available and well-funded. But recent years have seen deep cuts to all public services, including refugee integration services, and financial support for ESOL has been stripped back by successive governments. Only jobseekers actively seeking work are now eligible for free ESOL. Against this backdrop, huge reforms to the welfare and employment system have increased the incentives to work for all groups, native and foreign, but may have further narrowed opportunities for low-skilled workers to upgrade their skills.

The United Kingdom's flexible labor market has made it easy for immigrants to get jobs, but hard to move upwards within their occupations.

UK employment services are often described as taking a “work-first” approach, meaning that they encourage jobseekers to get back into work quickly instead of retraining or investing in skills development. Some aspects of the system may encourage immigrant jobseekers in particular to take jobs below their skills and experience. Advisers from Jobcentre Plus, the public employment service, face pressure to prescribe short training courses that meet specific skills deficits rather than more intensive programs, and appear to lack the capacity to recognize foreign skills and experiences and thus help migrants revive their previous occupations. Moreover, not all immigrants can benefit from employment services. Many groups of new arrivals are ineligible for out-of-work benefits, and since face-to-face services are tied to benefits claiming, are unlikely to be able to meet with employment advisers; cuts to translation services may create additional, informal barriers to access for others. Meanwhile, reforms to subcontract the most disadvantaged groups to private organizations may have introduced freedom for providers to tailor services to individual needs, but the payment-by-results system is thought to reduce incentives to address complex barriers, such as language.

For migrants in work, a number of opportunities exist to upgrade their skills, such as apprenticeships and National Vocational Qualifications (vocational qualifications at varying levels that can be gained on the job). One of the strengths of the UK skills system is that it has multiple entry points and few age restrictions. But it also depends more and more on employers, who are disinclined to invest in low-skilled staff or immigrants. Training is especially rare in small firms or in work organized by temporary agencies, both of which are more likely to employ migrants. Moreover, vocational qualifications suffer from a general lack of prestige, and are rarely the gateway into middle-skilled jobs. For example, the absence of a vocational training framework in the construction sector has made it easy for immigrants to get work but curtailed career pathways. Since migrants in low-skilled work are no longer eligible for free ESOL, getting a job sometimes means that migrants drop out of ESOL provision, and few low-skilled workers pursue language training. As a result, low-



skilled workers are rarely able to upgrade their language and skills through training.

While the United Kingdom has not traditionally targeted immigrants, the current fiscal climate and public hostility to immigration have made targeted policy measures even less politically palatable. With measures such as translation services facing cuts, it appears unlikely that the government will seek to make other adaptations that open up services to migrants' needs. Nonetheless, efforts to improve flexibility and individualization in employment services and improve the prestige of and access to vocational training could inadvertently benefit immigrants, once these systems are more established. Yet the lack of access to ESOL remains one of the greatest institutional barriers, especially for migrants in work. While investment is unlikely to increase, more workplace learning, mentoring and online learning programs could plug some of these gaps.

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I. Introduction

Low-skilled jobs in the United Kingdom have traditionally been regarded as offering few opportunities for progression, either within the same organization or to more skilled work elsewhere.¹ Some economists have pointed to a “hollowing out of the middle” of the UK labor market overall.² This is particularly pertinent for new immigrants, who are heavily concentrated in the lowest-skilled jobs. For example, immigrants from new Member States of the European Union—or EU-12 nationals³—are almost three times more likely to be in low-skilled work than are the native born (29 percent compared to 10 percent), despite possessing high levels of education.⁴

While immigrants to the United Kingdom have high employment rates, several features of the employment and skills system in the United Kingdom do not favor their integration or progression in the labor market. Opportunities to access training are increasingly dependent on individual employers, some of whom may have incentives to keep their workforce low skilled and low paid. Providers of employment support services are rewarded for getting clients into jobs, which may mean they encourage workers to take jobs that are below their skill level rather than invest in further training. These obstacles can be significant for newly arrived immigrants in particular, especially in light of recent cuts to public services and funding—cuts that affect language classes in particular. If employers are disinclined to invest in immigrants' training, these workers may find it difficult to progress within their occupations.

This report examines how effectively workforce development and integration policies help new migrants

1 David Devins, Tim Bickerstaffe, Ben Mitchell, and Sallyann Halliday, *Improving Progression in Low-Paid, Low-Skilled Retail, Catering and Care Jobs* (York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2014), www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/employment-progression-skills-full.pdf.

2 Robert A. Wilson and Terence Hogarth, eds. *Tackling the Low Skills Equilibrium: A Review of the Issues and Some New Evidence* (London: Department for Trade and Industry, 2003), www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/publications/2003/wilson_et_al_2003_low_skills.pdf.

3 The EU-12 include the ten countries that were granted accession to the European Union in 2004—Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia (called the “EU-10” in this report)—as well as Romania and Bulgaria, which were granted accession in 2007.

4 New immigrants are concentrated in the lowest-skilled jobs and professional occupations. Their occupational distribution might be depicted as having an hourglass shape. See Tommaso Frattini, *Moving Up the Ladder? Labor Market Outcomes in the United Kingdom amid Rising Immigration* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2014), <http://migrationpolicy.org/research/moving-up-ladder-labor-market-outcomes-united-kingdom-immigration>.



progress from low-skilled work or unemployment to middle-skilled jobs. It begins by providing some key background information on immigration to the United Kingdom. It then analyzes the role of employment services in supporting new migrants' access to labor market opportunities.⁵ The report then sets out how well the provision of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and skills recognition systems in the United Kingdom meet the labor market needs of new migrants, before going on to describe the role of the UK skills system and vocational training. Finally, the report discusses the impact of wider policies and contextual factors on new migrants' work opportunities, before drawing some conclusions.

There is a dearth of evidence on migrant outcomes in the UK labor market. Very few programs have targeted migrants, so relevant data are scarce, both at the level of national employment and skills programs and at the level of individual sectors. Against this background, the report outlines recent changes in employment and skills policy in the United Kingdom and their implications for new migrants.

II. Recent Immigration Policy in the United Kingdom

During the 2000s a series of immigration policy reforms under the Labour administration sought to increase the skill level of new employment-based immigrants to the United Kingdom. For example, a points-based system (PBS) was introduced in 2008 to favor high-skilled workers needed to fill shortages in the UK economy and restrict less-skilled labor migration from outside the European Economic Area (EEA). The coalition government that came to power in 2010 continued this strategy by, for example, raising the language and income requirements of international students and family members hoping to come to the United Kingdom. While there are limits on how much governments can control the skill level of new arrivals—largely because it is difficult to reduce family migration—the United Kingdom has had some success in drawing relatively high-skilled immigrants from outside the European Union, especially when compared with other countries that receive lower-skilled non-EU immigrants.

The other major change of the 2000s was a spike in migration from the European Union following the UK government's decision in 2004 to open its labor market to mobile workers from new EU Member States in Central and Eastern Europe (referred to here as EU-10 and EU-12 nationals). Between 2004 and 2011 the increase in total immigrants working in the United Kingdom (from 1.5 million to 2.5 million) was dominated by EU-12 nationals, with Poles accounting for two-thirds. This unprecedented increase in the number of labor migrants from the European Union shifted the debate in the United Kingdom away from concerns around asylum seekers to focus mainly on EU-12 migration.⁶

The United Kingdom has had some success in drawing relatively high-skilled immigrants from outside the European Union.

Most mobile EU nationals come to United Kingdom for work—and many have a definite job offer—whereas non-EU migrants are more likely to migrate for formal study.⁷ Although recent cohorts of migrants have been

⁵ Although the term “new migrants” covers widely diverse groups in the United Kingdom—and a wide range of corresponding needs—the term is used in this report to refer to all immigrants who have arrived in the United Kingdom over the past decade, including asylum seekers and migrant workers from both inside and outside the European Union. Where evidence allows, specific implications for different groups of migrants are identified, although in most cases, there is no specific evidence on how skills and employment policies impact immigrants of different backgrounds.

⁶ John Salt, *International Migration and the United Kingdom*, Annual Report of the UK SOPEMI Correspondent to the OECD (London: Migration Research Unit UCL, 2012), www.geog.ucl.ac.uk/research/transnational-spaces/migration-research-unit/pdfs/sopemi-report-2012.

⁷ Office for National Statistics (ONS), *Migration Statistics Quarterly Report, February 2014* (Statistical Bulletin, Office for National Statistics, London, February 2014), www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_352080.pdf.

highly qualified relative to the native population, many new immigrants—especially EU-12 nationals—find themselves in low-skilled jobs.⁸ In 2002 the list of top ten occupations filled by the highest shares of foreign-born workers included only one low-skilled occupation; by 2011, this number had grown to five: elementary process plant, food preparation trade, elementary cleaning, process operatives, and elementary goods storage.⁹

III. The Role of Employment Services in Supporting New Migrants

The past 15 years have seen major reforms to the organization of employment services. The Labour government introduced a number of initiatives focused on getting disadvantaged groups and single parents into jobs.¹⁰ In 2002, Jobcentre Plus—the United Kingdom’s working-age, government-operated employment support service—was established to better link the administration of benefits with assistance getting into jobs.¹¹ Since 2011, under the coalition government, Jobcentre Plus no longer has responsibility for the longer-term unemployed. Instead, they are referred to the Work Programme, typically after 12 months of claiming benefits.¹² This program contracts services to external providers who assist jobseekers however they see fit.

Under Jobcentre Plus provisions, all claimants’ needs and barriers to work are assessed in an interview, during which a Jobcentre Plus advisor outlines what is expected of the claimant in return for benefits (in what is known as the “claimant commitment”). Thereafter, the advisor regularly monitors the jobseeker’s compliance with the claimant commitment, typically on a fortnightly basis. Jobcentre Plus offers a number of different employment support interventions—such as work experience placements, help setting up a business, and pre-employment training with a guaranteed job interview in sectors with a large number of vacancies—alongside an online job-brokering system called Universal Jobmatch. The Work Programme is designed to offer more intensive support, from help writing applications and curriculum vitae (CVs) to support in remaining employed.¹³

At the heart of all these changes is a move toward decentralizing employment support services and giving more freedom to Jobcentre Plus, Work Programme providers, and other local partners, including employers. For example, Jobcentre Plus advisors can select the option that they feel is most appropriate for individual claimants from a menu of provisions, and draw from a Flexible Support Fund to cover a range of jobseeker expenses, such as for training courses. To an even greater extent, Work Programme providers decide how best to help jobseekers without prescription from government—the so-called “black box” approach.¹⁴ This

8 Frattini, *Evaluating the Labor Market Integration of New Immigrants in the United Kingdom*.

9 Cinzia Rienzo, “Briefing—Migrants in the UK Labour Market: An Overview,” The Migration Observatory, University of Oxford, September 2013, www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/migrants-uk-labour-market-overview.

10 These included the mid-1930s New Deal of the United States, which targeted disadvantaged and excluded groups, and mandatory work-focused interviews for single parents claiming income support. See Rebecca Riley, Helen Bewley, Simon Kirby, Ana Rincon-Aznar, and Anitha George, *The introduction of Jobcentre Plus: An evaluation of labour market Impacts* (London: Department for Works and Pensions, 2011), www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/214567/rrep781.pdf.

11 Previously, all active labor market programs and job-brokering services were provided by the Employment Service, but most benefits (other than unemployment benefits) were administered by the Benefits Agency, and as a result were not tied to efforts to get claimants into work.

12 Some participants are referred to the Work Programme if, after three months of receiving Jobseekers Allowance, they are not in education, employment, or training. People ages 18 to 24 are referred after nine months. Those 25 and over are most often referred after 12 months.

13 House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, *The role of Jobcentre Plus in the reformed welfare system*, Second Report of Session 2013-14, Volume 1 (London: The Stationery Office, 2014), www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmworpen/479/479.pdf.

14 As the Minister for State at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Chris Grayling described this approach as follows: “We are using a black box approach, we are trust the professionals to deliver the support they know works. We are saying to providers: ‘You do what needs to be done and we will pay you when you are successful;’” see Rt Hon Chris Grayling, MP, The Work Programme, Employment, and Skills Association of Employment and Learning Providers (speech, June 22, 2011), www.gov.uk/



is in contrast to previous welfare-to-work programs that detailed the responsibilities of providers. The new system also emphasizes “conditionality”—i.e., enforcement through financial sanctions such as putting a stop to benefits for claimants who fail to comply with requirements such as actively seeking employment, being available to work for at least 40 hours per week, or applying for any vacancy suggested by a Jobcentre adviser.¹⁵

Despite this emphasis on rapid reintegration into the job market (often described as a “work-first” approach), policymakers have begun to discuss the case for long-term skills development. As such, Jobcentre Plus managers can now access some government-funded training as part of their employment support provision, and colleges and training organizations have more freedom and flexibility to design programs to suit local labor market needs. Conditionality can now mean the requirement to participate in training, rather than to take a particular job.

A. *The Effectiveness of Mainstream Employment Services in Supporting New Arrivals*

Access to both Jobcentre Plus services and the Work Programme is open to economically active mobile EU nationals, as well as those from outside the EEA who have been granted permission to settle permanently in the United Kingdom. But not all immigrants are entitled to employment services. Those on temporary work visas or family visas (such as the two-year spousal visa) often have “no recourse to public funds” stamped in their passports, meaning they are ineligible for most out-of-work benefits and thus limited to online, rather than face-to-face, services. Asylum seekers are usually not allowed to work in the United Kingdom and have very limited access to public funds.¹⁶

Few active labor market policies have targeted immigrants, except those specifically designed for refugees.

These formal barriers aside, little evidence exists on immigrants’ access to or use of employment support services in the United Kingdom—or on the effectiveness of these services in supporting their labor market integration.¹⁷ Few active labor market policies have targeted immigrants, except those specifically designed for refugees (described below). As a result, UK employment services are unlikely to be able to help migrants overcome some of the specific barriers they face in the labor market, such as difficulties getting employers to recognize foreign qualifications, limited language proficiency, and poor understanding of labor laws and employment rights.¹⁸ That said, with translation and diversity training standard for Jobcentre staff (as in most public services), some efforts have been made to open up employment services to diverse needs. And a new screening tool was introduced in April 2014—alongside GBP 30 million more funding for 2014-15—to improve the processes of identifying language needs language instruction (although translation cuts were also announced on the same day). Jobseekers are encouraged to attend ESOL classes that focus on speaking and listening if their English proficiency falls below a specified threshold (entry level 2, equivalent to the language skills of a child ages 7 to 9).

Meanwhile, there are some indications that a significant number of immigrants utilize mainstream employ-

[government/speeches/the-work-programme-employment-and-skills-association-of-employment-and-learning-providers.](#)

15 Exceptions and flexibilities apply to claimants with ill health or disabilities that limit their capacity to work, and also to people responsible for the care of others.

16 Asylum seekers cannot work while their asylum application is being considered. If they have been waiting for a decision for their asylum claim for more than a year, however, they may apply for the right to work.

17 Evaluations of Jobcentre Plus, while frequent, contain no data on the involvement of foreign nationals, foreign-born jobseekers, or ethnic minorities. See, for example, Jo Corkett, John Stafford, Stuart Bennett, Mari Frogner, and Kim Shrapnell, *Jobcentre Plus evaluation: Summary of evidence*, DWP Research Report no. 252 (London: DWP, 2005), <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130314010347/http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2005-2006/rrep252.pdf>.

18 Frattini, *Evaluating the Labor Market Integration of New Immigrants in the United Kingdom*.

ment services. According to one study, migrants from new EU countries were more likely than the UK born (or other migrants) to have found their current employment through a Jobcentre. One explanation for this finding is that Jobcentres are better at processing low-skilled job vacancies in sectors with high demand, such as agriculture and construction.¹⁹

Immigrants' limited networks may also mean they rely more heavily on employment services to find work. For example, a study on the use of Jobcentre Plus by ethnic-minority jobseekers, particularly those who do not speak English as a first language, found that these jobseekers place greater value than other jobseekers on face-to-face contact with advisors.²⁰ At the same time, migrants may be less aware of the services on offer. Ethnic-minority users of Jobcentre Plus services are more likely than white British users to have experienced bullying in the workplace and unfair dismissal, yet few know about the support Jobcentre Plus offers to victims of workplace discrimination (and there is reason to think this also applies to EU-12 nationals).²¹ But the future of some of these frontline services is unclear: more and more services are being offered online or on the phone, and translation services cut.

In theory recent moves toward individualization and flexibility in service delivery—both in the Jobcentre and Work Programme—might suit migrants better than a more prescriptive, universal approach. The Work Programme has moved away from targeting subgroups (disabled, single parents, ethnic minorities, youth, etc.) toward an individualized approach. By focusing on individual needs rather than sociodemographic characteristics, providers are well placed to procure specialist services to help overcome individual barriers—such as poor mental health, limited English proficiency, or a criminal record. But preliminary evidence suggests that flexibility has not translated into a focus on individual needs. Few referrals from Jobcentre Plus have been to vocational training;²² meanwhile providers in the Work Programme are making little use of specialist provision, such as ESOL—especially where it is associated with high costs.²³

Evaluations also suggest that many Work Programme providers prioritize more “job-ready” participants ahead of those assessed as having more complex obstacles to employment.²⁴ This finding points to a flaw in the “payment-by-results” model, which rewards providers for getting clients into jobs and helping them maintain employment.²⁵ That said, the Work Programme does pay out more for those jobseekers who face more significant barriers (which could in theory benefit migrants), in an attempt to safeguard against providers neglecting them in favor of those who are closest to the labor market (a practice often referred to as “creaming” and “parking”). But the higher payment rates are thought to be insufficient to cover the real costs of providing the intensive services necessary to get these groups into jobs, or the risks of investing in these

19 Alessio Cangiano, “Employment Support Services and Migrant Integration in the UK Labour Market” (HWWI Policy Paper No. 3-7, Hamburg Institute of International Economics, Hamburg, 2008), www.hwwi.org/en/publications/policy/publications-single-view/employment-support-services-and-migrant-integration-in-the-uk-labour-market//6443.html. Cangiano’s findings are based on Labour Force Survey (LFS) data from 2007, when demand for labor in both agriculture and construction was strong. This evidence predates May 1, 2011. After this date, EU-12 nationals were able to access welfare benefits in the United Kingdom on the same terms as other EU nationals, and so were more likely to have accessed Jobcentre Plus services.

20 This is because they think it would yield a more satisfactory outcome, either in terms of resolving a query, getting more information, securing more help or, in some cases, fostering greater accountability regarding their individual cases. See Steve Johnson and Yvette Fidler, *Jobcentre Plus Customer Satisfaction: Ethnic Minority Booster Survey 2005*, DWP Research Report No. 338 (London: DWP, 2006); Rachel Marangozov, Anne Bellis, and Helen Barnes, *Using Jobcentre Plus services: Qualitative evidence from ethnic minority customers* (London: DWP, 2010), www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/214492/rrep717.pdf.

21 This did not relate specifically to racial discrimination.

22 Joy Oakley, Beth Foley, and Jim Hillage, “Employment, Partnership and Skills” (BIS Research Paper 107, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, London, 2013), www.gov.uk/government/publications/employment-partnership-and-skills.

23 The Work Programme operates a prime-provider approach where one large “prime” contractor commissions and manages a supply chain of subcontractors to deliver the contract.

24 Becci Newton et al., *Work Programme evaluation: Findings from the first phase of qualitative research on programme delivery* (London: DWP, 2012), www.gov.uk/government/publications/work-programme-evaluation-findings-from-the-first-phase-of-qualitative-research-on-programme-delivery-rr821.

25 DWP, *The Work Programme* (London: DWP, 2012), www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/49884/the-work-programme.pdf. The highest payments are made for those on Employment Support Allowance (ESA), a benefit paid to those who have limited capability to work because of a disability or health condition, and so who are considered furthest from the labor market.



workers in the current economic climate.²⁶

Thus far, the new employment support system does not appear to be meeting the needs of those jobseekers who require the most help, including those lacking English language skills. It remains to be seen whether this problem is transitional, resulting from the rapid start-up of the Work Programme and higher-than-anticipated referrals, or whether it points to structural deficits in the payment-by-results model.

B. Targeted Employment Services for Refugees

While mainstream services have catered to immigrants in general, the situation is quite different for refugees. The government established the National Refugee Integration Forum in 2000 to report on the ways in which refugees could be better integrated. In 2005 the government launched its refugee integration strategy,²⁷ *Integration Matters*, which aimed to improve refugees' integration across several dimensions of UK society. Also in 2005, the government unveiled a strategy for helping refugees integrate into the labor market: *Working to Rebuild Lives*.²⁸

The Strategic Upgrade of National Refugee Integration Services (SUNRISE) was at the heart of *Integration Matters*. This project, piloted in five UK cities, provided refugees with comprehensive support immediately after their refugee status had been recognized. Employment support was mainly provided through Jobcentre Plus and other pathways for the highly skilled. Following the positive evaluation of SUNRISE, the government rolled out its services at a national level under the banner of the new Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES). RIES offered 12 months of services to every person granted refugee status and focused even more on employment-related support. Its aim was that 30 percent of refugees enter jobs within 12 months of receiving their status.²⁹ In September 2011 RIES ended due to government cuts to public-sector services. Since then, there has been no government statutory funding to support refugee integration in the United Kingdom.

The delivery of *Working to Rebuild Lives*, meanwhile, was the responsibility of Jobcentre Plus. Instead of providing targeted, discrete services, this program sought to overcome refugees' barriers to integration (lack of English language skills, knowledge of the UK labor market, discrimination, etc.), so that they could access mainstream job-search support. For example, Jobcentre Plus screened all refugee jobseekers for literacy, numeracy, and language needs, and offered interpreters as needed. Those with identifiable English language needs were offered help through language programs and classes delivered by contracted providers. This approach also emphasized local partnerships with other government agencies, private providers, and nonprofit organizations. In one example, support workers with a refugee background interpreted for refugees and offered them advice in Jobcentre Plus offices in Birmingham. In another, Jobcentre Plus and Refugee Action (an NGO) in Liverpool worked together to train refugees to advocate for the interests of refugees in their dealings with statutory organizations, and to provide frontline Jobcentre Plus staff with training on refugee issues.³⁰ A number of initiatives were also developed between Jobcentre Plus and nonprofit organizations to help refugee professionals, such as doctors, nurses, and engineers, find work that matched their skills. Support included help gaining recognition for foreign qualifications, developing professional language skills, and finding opportunities to retrain. For example, task forces on teachers and nurses—established in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders—led to corresponding guides for other refugees seeking work in these occupations.³¹

26 Pippa Lane, Rowan Foster, Laura Gardiner, Lorraine Lanceley, and Ann Purvis, *Work Programme Evaluation: Procurement, supply chains and implementation of the commissioning model*, Research Report 832 (Sheffield: DWP, 2013), www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/197710/rrep832.pdf.

27 Home Office, *Integration Matters: A National Strategy for Refugee Integration* (London: Home Office, 2005).

28 DWP, *Working to Rebuild Lives* (London: DWP, 2003), www.employabilityforum.co.uk/documents/WorkingtoRebuildLives-executivesummary09-03-05.pdf.

29 Cangiano, "Employment Support Services and Migrant Integration in the UK Labour Market."

30 Ibid.

31 See Yinka Olusoga, *Jobs in Education: A Guide for Refugees* (London: Employability Forum, 2007), www.employabilityforum.co.uk/documents/TeachersGuide_web.pdf; Roswyn Hakesley-Brown, *A Guide for Refugee Nurses and Midwives* (London: Employability Forum, 2006), www.employabilityforum.co.uk/documents/Nurses-Guide-2006.pdf.

The evaluation of this strategy was mixed, and indicated the shortcomings of a mainstream organization trying to support the diverse and often complex needs of the refugee community.³² Many of these shortcomings stem from the fact that Jobcentre Plus has largely been (until recently) process and target driven—two characteristics that have sat at odds with the often personalized and intensive support that some refugees need. While Jobcentre Plus tried to overcome this problem by working with organizations that provide employment programs tailored to refugees, their performance was judged according to the same target-driven and outcome-orientated criteria that Jobcentre Plus had been subject to. The emphasis on short-term job outcomes is thought to have reduced incentives for advisors to support “harder-to-help” refugees, particularly those with English language needs, and encouraged providers to place refugees in low-skill and low-paid jobs, regardless of their skills and interests.³³

Box I. Voluntary Sector Programs to Support Refugees

The “Trellis” project was established in 2005 by the Employability Forum to help refugees in Birmingham find sustainable employment to match their skill sets. It gave tailored support to refugee jobseekers, with the engagement of employers, refugee communities, and other social partners. Link officers—former refugees themselves, trained as advisors on the Birmingham labor market—were matched with jobseekers who spoke the same language. After assessing jobseekers’ barriers to work, link officers developed a tailored action plan, directing clients to the most appropriate support program, training course, language class, or work placement opportunity. They also helped jobseekers update their curricula vitae (CVs), fill in application forms, and prepare for job interviews. The Trellis project also raised awareness among employers and trade unions of the benefits of employing refugees.

The Refugee Education Training and Advisory Service (RETAS) was founded by the charity Education Action to help refugees and asylum seekers overcome difficulties accessing education, training, and employment. RETAS offered a series of two-week job-search and -orientation courses, including an overview of the UK labor market, career advice, training in a number of fields, and support writing CVs and gaining work placement. RETAS also provided International English Language Testing System (IELTS) practice classes for those with good English who wanted to access higher education or were undergoing professional requalification. RETAS was also one of the first organisations to deliver tailored start-up courses for refugees.

The Partnership for Refugee Employment through Support, Training, and Online Learning (PRESTO) brought together 11 organizations between 2004 and 2007 to open up opportunities for refugee professionals in the health, education, and the engineering sectors, as well as for entrepreneurs. Funded by the EU program EQUAL, it put considerable emphasis on partnerships—working with professional institutions, employers, and training institutions; the National Health Service (NHS); engineering institutions; and the then–Department for Education and Skills (DfES). PRESTO took a holistic approach by setting criteria for referrals and planning a clear route of progression through the various services provided by partners. The partnership worked to influence national policy and assess its impact on refugee jobseekers. For instance, PRESTO partners monitored the impact of the government’s 2005 strategy, *Working to Rebuild Lives*, as implemented by Jobcentre Plus (see above), and were able to provide feedback and voice concerns through national conferences. An evaluation found that of 656 recipients of PRESTO services, most gained a qualification or a job, but the referral system did not always work as planned.

Sources: Alessio Cangiano, “Employment Support Services and Migrant Integration in the UK Labour Market” (HWWI Policy Paper No. 3-7, Hamburg Institute of International Economics, Hamburg, 2008); Ceri Hutton, Sue Lukes, and Stephanie Sexton, *How Did We Do? Assessing Performance and Progress against PRESTO’s Own Standards: PRESTO Baseline Comparative Review*, Report by PRESTO External Evaluation Team (London: PRESTO, 2007).

32 Employability Forum, *Jobcentre Plus Refugee Operational Framework: Voluntary Sector Perspective* (London: Employability Forum, 2006).

33 Isabel Shutes, “Welfare-to-Work and the Responsiveness of Employment Providers to the Needs of Refugees,” *Journal of Social Policy* 40, no. 3 (2011): 557–74.



Currently, the only support Jobcentre Plus offers refugees is an interpretation service (provided on request within one working day) and an interest-free refugee integration loan for rental payments or deposits, household items, or education and training.³⁴ Outside of this, Jobcentre Plus can only refer refugees and other migrants to training providers who can offer English language training.

C. *Employment Support Delivered by Civil Society*

There are a number of local, nonprofit-run projects across the United Kingdom—funded by charities and foundations, the government, or the European Union—that support (mostly) refugees. Many such projects have successfully helped refugees enter the labor market by bringing together several local actors to provide intensive support to help refugees overcome complex barriers to employment, and gain work experience and recognition of foreign qualifications and experience.³⁵ Another strength of many of these projects is that their small size (relative to national programs) has permitted a degree of flexibility and innovation in service design and delivery, thus enabling the voluntary sector to draw on its considerable expertise in helping migrant communities (see Box 1 for examples).

A weakness of employment support provided by the voluntary sector is that it depends on funding streams or finite resources that often run out, signaling the end of the support. As a result, most of the projects described in Box 1 were not able to bring lessons or good practices to bear on larger-scale institutions, with the exception of the Trellis project in Birmingham where mainstream employment support programs were tweaked to yield broadly positive outcomes.³⁶

One of the more long-standing sources of advice and support for refugees is the Refugee Council, which is one of the largest charities in the United Kingdom and works directly with refugees to help them rebuild their lives. Part of this support includes free help for refugees who want to access employment opportunities, as follows:

- ***Employment advice and support services for refugees living in London.*** Recipients receive support in accessing relevant training and employment opportunities through one-on-one initial assessments and action plans; expert advice and support; employment workshops; help with job searches, CVs, and interviews; and work experience opportunities. This service also provides a specialist six-week course for those who want to increase their employable skills.
- ***Assistance in gaining qualifications to practice as health professionals.*** This project provides support for London-based refugee doctors to meet UK standards and secure employment appropriate to their professional qualifications. The project provides free six-week preparation courses for parts 1 and 2 of the Professional and Linguistic Assessment Board (PLAB) tests. (PLAB tests are the main route by which international medical graduates demonstrate that they have the necessary skills and knowledge to practice medicine in the United Kingdom.) The project also helps arrange clinical placements for doctors who pass the PLAB Part 2 test, to familiarize them with the National Health Service (NHS). An impact report of the service reported that it provided good value for the money, was on track to meet its target of helping refugee doctors access employment, and had a positive impact on London hospitals because refugee doctors helped meet the needs of a diverse range of patients.³⁷
- ***Refugees into Teaching (RiT).*** This project supports those with a background in teaching who are looking to requalify and access employment within primary and secondary schools across

³⁴ See UK Government, “Refugee integration loan,” last updated June 27, 2014, www.gov.uk/refugee-integration-loan.

³⁵ Cangiano, “Employment Support Services and Migrant Integration in the UK Labour Market.”

³⁶ See Kemal Ahson, *Refugees and Employment: The Trellis Perspective* (London: Lifeworld, 2008), www.employabilityforum.co.uk/documents/TrellisImpactReportFINAL2008.pdf. Trellis is one of several projects that have not been continued.

³⁷ Refugee Council, “PLAB and Clinical Attachments Project, Preparation for PLAB and Orientation for Future Working in the NHS for Refugee Doctors” (October 2009—August 2011, Refugee Council, London, 2011), www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0002/8654/Health_professionals_impact_report.pdf.

England. Funding for many of the services provided under this project ended in 2011 but the project still accepts registrations and provides access to a Facebook group for refugee teachers, website resources, e-mail newsletters containing information about relevant services and events, access to regular training and information workshops, and occasional volunteer opportunities in schools.

D. Recognition of Skills and Work Experience

Programs to support migrant employment often draw upon the services of the National Recognition Information Centre for the United Kingdom (UK NARIC). NARIC is the national agency responsible for providing information, advice, and expert opinion on international education and training systems and on non-UK skills and qualifications. For example, it provides “statements of comparability” between non-UK qualifications and UK qualifications for a fee of around GBP 46.³⁸ This can be paid by individuals themselves, their employers, or targeted projects set up to support migrants in the labor market. This official document is recognized by universities, colleges, employers, and government departments, irrespective of whether the award is academic, professional, or vocational. Immigrants of all skills levels can thus get their overseas qualifications recognized to a comparable level in the United Kingdom, in theory at least. Overseas work experience, however, is harder to validate and so many migrants chose to volunteer to build up their work experience in the United Kingdom. Most migrants are likely to find out about UK NARIC through information and advice services that they might access, voluntary support services, or family and friends.

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) offer another route for employed immigrants to gain recognition for their competences. NVQ measure competences gained in the workplace on the basis of national occupational standards laid down by relevant government bodies and sector skills councils. They reflect the skills and knowledge needed to do a job effectively, and show that a candidate is competent in the area of work the NVQ represents. In general, anyone can take a NVQ course provided they are able to demonstrate competence in a work-based environment.

A number of the design features of the NVQ are likely to favor migrants. NVQ courses cover a wide range of subjects—such as health and social care, customer service, administration, IT, and hospitality and catering—in fields where migrants are concentrated. The flexibility of its structure and assessment process is also likely to suit migrants, especially those in low-skilled work or with limited literacy. In contrast to higher education and other more formal courses, NVQ programs can be combined with full-time work. Moreover, there are no age limits or special entry requirements; on-the-job assessments take the place of exams, dissertations, or complicated written work. All vocational qualifications, including NVQs, have recently become more flexible with the introduction in 2011 of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) model, which is a new system for recognizing skills and qualifications in a vocational setting. The flexibility of the QCF model allows learners to gain qualifications at their own pace. Unlike an NVQ, the QCF’s credit-based system means that a student who fails to complete the entire qualification can gain recognized credits for completed work rather than walking away with nothing. It is not clear how many EU-12 migrants participate, although some evidence suggests that NVQ and QCF courses are popular with Bulgarian and Romanian migrants as well as overseas students who are seeking to gain a practical work-based UK qualification while studying.³⁹

For particular professions, there are specific dispensations for the recognition of foreign qualifications. Doctors who have gained their qualification overseas, for example, need to pass the PLAB tests before being able to register and practice medicine in the United Kingdom. Refugee doctors can receive discounts for the registration and standard exam fees, depending on their immigration status.⁴⁰ As noted earlier, the Refugee Council provides free support for refugees seeking to take the PLAB tests.

38 As of November 2013.

39 Immigration Matters, “NVQ and QCF Vocational Qualifications Explained,” accessed October 1, 2014, <http://immigrationmatters.co.uk/nvq-and-qcf-vocational-qualifications-explained.html>.

40 See General Medical Council, “Help with registration fees for refugee doctors living in the UK,” accessed October 1, 2014, www.gmc-uk.org/doctors/fees/fees_refugees.asp.



Nurses who gained their qualifications overseas must register with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), and the only route for registration is through the Overseas Nurses Programme (ONP). The ONP is a compulsory 20-day period of protected learning and supervised practice. Individuals must have a sponsor (an employer) in order to enter the United Kingdom to complete an ONP. Similar requirements apply to teachers from overseas, who must obtain a Qualified Teacher Status (QTS)—the professional qualification for teachers—before teaching in the United Kingdom. QTS is awarded by the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL), which also offers employment-based training courses for those whose qualifications are not recognized in the United Kingdom.

IV. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

English language proficiency is one of the main factors that decide immigrant access to the labor market.⁴¹ Migrants who lack English language skills are often concentrated in low-paid, unskilled or low-skilled jobs with few prospects for progress. ESOL encompasses all English language instruction for adult speakers of other languages, no matter what the provider or setting. Most ESOL classes are provided by accredited further education (FE) colleges, the private sector, publicly funded providers such as local authorities, and some nonprofit organizations. In the past, ESOL was heavily funded by the government. But this has recently changed, as individuals and employers are expected to shoulder some of the cost of ESOL classes.

In the past, ESOL was heavily funded by the government.

ESOL provision has a long-established tradition in the United Kingdom, dating back to the 1960s. However, short-term erratic funding has since been the norm,⁴² and demand for ESOL has grown to outstrip provision. At the beginning of the 2000s, ESOL was incorporated into the *Skills for Life* program, a centralized national strategy for improving access to adult education and “basic skills” (literacy and numeracy). Despite considerable funding for ESOL, evaluations of ESOL provision throughout the 2000s concluded that provision was not meeting demand.⁴³ Other challenges included insufficient employment-related ESOL and limited employer involvement.⁴⁴ These implementation issues, as well as growing pressures on the ESOL budget, led the Labour government to restrict the eligibility criteria for public-funded ESOL in August 2007. This move refocused funding on priority learners (defined as those least able to pay, usually recipients of means-tested benefits) and sought to ensure that those who benefit from migration (employers and/or better-paid workers) meet their share of the costs. These moves attracted widespread criticism that groups who already faced serious risk of economic and social exclusion—such as women, low-paid migrant workers, and asylum seekers—would be prevented from accessing public services.⁴⁵ In response, the government reinstated eligibility for asylum seekers who had not received a decision on their application after six months—and provided GBP 4.6 million in support for vulnerable learners, including low-paid workers and spouses of UK nationals, in the form of a Discretionary Leader Support Fund.

41 Christian Dustmann and Francesca Fabbri, “Language Proficiency and Labour Market Performance of Immigrants in the United Kingdom,” *Economic Journal* 113 (2003): 695–717; Michael A. Shields and Stephen Wheatley Price, “The English Language Fluency and Occupational Success of Ethnic Minority Immigrant Men Living in English Metropolitan Areas,” *Journal of Population Economics* 15, no. 1 (2002): 137–60.

42 Mary Hamilton and Yvonne Hillier, “ESOL Policy and Change,” *Language Issues* 20, no. 1 (2009): 4–18.

43 National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), *More than a language* (Leicester: NIACE, 2006), www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/MoreThanALanguage-ExecutiveSummary.pdf; KPMG, *KPMG Review of English Speakers of Other Languages* (London: Department for Education and Skills [DfES]/Learning and Skills Council [LSC], 2005).

44 Ibid.

45 DfES, *Race Equality Impact Assessment on Proposed Changes to the Funding Arrangements for English for Speakers of Other Languages and Asylum Seeker Eligibility for Learning and Skills Council Further Education Funding—Report and Emerging Proposals* (London: DfES, 2007); Trade Union Congress (TUC), “ESOL Briefing—Changes to ESOL Funding” (Organisation and Services Department, TUC, London 2006).

In 2011, the coalition government went further and reduced the national funding rate for ESOL by 4.3 per cent, compared to 2010-11 levels (this was in common with all FE provision). It also effectively ended the premium paid to providers for running ESOL courses, and so ended any additional financial incentive. More significantly, the government implemented three changes to ESOL provision that would hit migrants in low-paid, low-skilled work particularly hard. First, the government ended funding for ESOL in the workplace, citing that “public funds should not be substituted for employer investment in this way.”⁴⁶ Second, the government further restricted free ESOL provision to those on just two types of benefits—Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)—and within these groups, to those actively looking for work. Third, the government withdrew the Discretionary Learner Support Fund, over 50 percent of which had been used to support low-paid migrant workers in 2007-10.⁴⁷

In spite of the strong demand for ESOL provision among EU-12 migrants, many are unlikely to invest their own, often limited, financial resources in learning English.

According to the government’s ESOL Equality Impact Assessment, published in July 2011, these funding changes were likely to have a serious impact on EU-12 nationals, many of whom would not fulfill the criteria for funding support.⁴⁸ Although the figures in the assessment are not broken down by country of birth or nationality, the figures for ethnicity reveal that 43,600 ESOL learners in 2009-10 were “white-other” compared to 46,100 of all other ESOL learners—a figure that the assessment states can be explained by EU-10 migration to the United Kingdom.⁴⁹ Since evidence suggests that language is critical to occupational mobility, obstacles to language learning might contribute to immigrants becoming trapped in low-skilled work. A recent study found that despite relatively high levels of qualifications and technical skills, many migrants became stuck in low-skilled work because they lacked the opportunities to improve their English language skills, particularly in jobs with a high concentration of immigrants.⁵⁰ In spite of the strong demand for ESOL provision among EU-12 migrants, many are unlikely to invest their own, often limited, financial resources in learning English—which will in turn limit their progress in the labor market.

Even for migrants who are out of work and/or receiving benefits, and thus eligible for free ESOL, current provision is not sufficient to meet the needs of many.⁵¹ In London, efforts have been made to improve ESOL provision for Jobcentre Plus customers.⁵² However, the overall picture in London is still patchy, with some areas reporting better service provision than others.

46 Skills Funding Agency, “Guidance Note 6,” 2010, http://readingroom.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/sfa/skills_funding_agency_-_guidance_note_6_final_-_14_december_2010.pdf.

47 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), *English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Equality Impact Assessment* (London: BIS, 2011), www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32297/11-1045-english-for-speakers-of-other-languages-equality-impact.pdf.

48 NIACE, *Policy Update: The Impact on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Learners of the Funding and Eligibility Changes* (Leicester: NIACE, 2011), www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/ESOL%20policy%20update%208%20Sep_0.pdf.

49 BIS, *English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Equality Impact Assessment*.

50 Anne Green, Gaby Atfield, Duncan Adam, and Teresa Staniewicz, *Determinants of the Composition of the Workforce in Low-Skilled Sectors of the UK Economy* (Warwick: Institute for Employment Research, 2013), www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/257272/warwick-insti.pdf; Ibid; Anne Green, *Immigrant Workers and the Workforce Development System in the United Kingdom* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2013), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/immigrant-workers-and-workforce-development-system-united-kingdom; Greater London Authority (GLA), *Migrants in low-paid, low-skilled jobs: barriers and solutions to learning English in London* (London: GLA, 2013), www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Low%20paid%20work%20and%20learning%20English%20%20Final%20report_0.pdf.

51 Oakley, Foley, and Hillage, “Employment, Partnership and Skills.”

52 GLA, *ESOL works: embedding best practice for supporting people into work* (London: GLA, 2013), www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/ESOL%20works%20-%20embedding%20best%20practice%20for%20supporting%20people%20into%20work%20June%202013.pdf.



V. Vocational Training

There are two key developments in the UK workforce development system that may have particular implications for migrants' occupational mobility.

The first is the expansion of vocational training since the 1990s, particularly apprenticeships. Successive British governments have made attempts to promote and expand vocational training, concerned that the United Kingdom was falling behind its industrial competitors. But it was not until the introduction of publicly funded, so-called Modern Apprenticeships in 1994 that participation in vocational training markedly increased. The numbers of apprentices have continued to grow, alongside the numbers of youth enrolled in full-time education or training until age 18. Following the Leitch report in 2006 on adult skills in the United Kingdom, the Labour government extended funding to cover apprenticeships for adults (ages 25+), and the numbers of adult apprentices have risen sharply since.⁵³ Apprenticeships are now the basis for the coalition government's flagship vocational training policy, and its primary means of delivering work-based training.⁵⁴

The creation, and subsequent growth, of adult apprenticeships present opportunities for working-age migrants' occupational mobility, since some of these apprenticeships are in sectors where migrants are concentrated. Around one in five employers in the construction and manufacturing sectors offer apprenticeships, according to one recent study.⁵⁵ The largest growth in apprenticeships has been in the health, public services, and social care sectors.⁵⁶ There is evidence that apprenticeships have tangible benefits for both employers and individuals. One study analyzed data on the wages received between 2004 and 2010 by employees who had completed an apprenticeship, and found that these wages were higher than those of similar employees who had not completed an apprenticeship.⁵⁷ Another recent study found that almost half of employers surveyed considered vocational qualifications as attractive as academic ones.⁵⁸

Successive British governments have made attempts to promote and expand vocational training, concerned that the United Kingdom was falling behind its industrial competitors.

A lack of data on ethnicity and nationality make it impossible to accurately assess the extent to which migrants benefit from the growth in adult apprenticeships. Furthermore, adult apprenticeships are only 50 percent subsidized by the government, with employers expected to provide the remaining costs. Hence, migrants' access to these opportunities depends heavily on individual employers. Finally, in the context of austerity, government-funded vocational training, such as fully funded qualifications for active jobseekers and basic skills training for adults, is for unemployed individuals only and so would not benefit migrants with jobs.

The second key development in vocational training in the United Kingdom has been in the way in which it is

53 Between 2009-10 and 2011-12, the number of apprenticeships begun rose from 279,700 to 520,600, an increase of 86 percent. The growth rate varied by age: it was 11 percent for people ages 16 to 18, 42 percent for those 19 to 24, and 367 percent for those ages 25 and over. This can be explained by the abolition of the Labour government's adult skills program Train to Gain, in favor of apprenticeships. Figures obtained from the Data Service Statistical First Release (SFR), June/July 2013.

54 Green, *Immigrant Workers and the Workforce Development System in the United Kingdom*.

55 Jan Shury, David Vivian, Katie Gore, and Camilla Huckle, *UK Commission's employer perspectives survey 2012* (London: UK Commission for Employment and Skills, 2012), www.gov.uk/government/publications/employer-perspectives-survey-2012.

56 The Data Service Statistical First Release (SFR) data, June/July 2013, reported growth of 148 percent in this sector.

57 National Audit Office, *Adult Apprenticeships* (London: The Stationery Office, 2012), www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/10121787.pdf.

58 Cranfield University School of Management, *The new vocational currency: investing for success* (Sheffield: Learndirect, 2013), www.ldstatic.co.uk/resources/forms/learndirect-vocational-currency.pdf.

delivered. The coalition government launched “Skills for Sustainable Growth” amid efforts to reduce the fiscal deficit and decentralize the delivery of public services.⁵⁹ This strategy signaled significant changes in the United Kingdom’s workforce development system, including more decentralized, flexible delivery, and a shift from improving the supply of skills to raising the demand for skills by employers. These changes may have relevance for migrants’ occupational mobility.

The relative flexibility of the current skills system—which has few age restrictions to accessing education and is characterized by the availability of adult apprenticeships—means that, along with the relative lack of regulation and qualification requirements in some sectors, the labor market is more accessible for migrants without host-country qualifications.⁶⁰ Certainly, in the construction sector, where EU-12 migrants have been heavily concentrated, the absence of a comprehensive vocational education and training system has facilitated migrant access to jobs in the sector and fueled demand for more migrant workers.⁶¹ However, while these features can facilitate migrants’ access to the labor market, it can also limit opportunities for training and progression. When employers depend on migrant labor, it may lead to a situation in which neither British-born nor migrant workers are trained.⁶² An abundant supply of migrant workers means that low-skilled workers are easy to replace, and perennially low paid.

Employers whose business model depends on low-skilled workers have little incentive to invest in the up-skilling of their workforce.

The shift to a skills development system that focuses on raising employers’ demand for skills may also have negative effects on the occupational mobility of low-skilled migrant workers. When the decision to train employees—and the content of training—is largely left to employers (rather than being regulated by the state or negotiated by social partners),⁶³ it may in effect limit immigrants’ access. This is of particular concern for those EU-12 migrants concentrated in low-skilled sectors. Employers whose business model depends on low-skilled workers have little incentive to invest in the up-skilling of their workforce.⁶⁴

This means that new migrants, who are predominantly concentrated in low-skilled sectors, are likely to miss out on training. A recent study found that even though immigrant workers in low-skilled jobs⁶⁵ were the most likely to want to progress, they were the least satisfied with their opportunities for promotion and progression. Those who were working on temporary contracts through agencies felt that this limited their access to training opportunities and progression more generally because employers did not see promoting them as either necessary or worthwhile.⁶⁶ While the study identified some training opportunities for low-skilled workers, these tended to be induction and health and safety training. In general, opportunities

59 BIS, *Skills for sustainable growth* (London: BIS, 2010), www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32368/10-1274-skills-for-sustainable-growth-strategy.pdf; BIS, *Investing in skills for sustainable growth* (London: BIS, 2010), www.gov.uk/government/publications/investing-in-skills-for-sustainable-growth-strategy-document. Although skills policy in the United Kingdom is devolved, this report focuses on skills policy in England, as it accounts for 85 percent of the UK population.

60 Green, *Immigrant Workers and the Workforce Development System in the United Kingdom*.

61 Paul Chan, Linda Clarke, and Andrew Dainty, “The Dynamics of Migrants Employment in Construction: Can Supply of Skilled Labour Ever Match Demand?” in *Who Needs Migrant Workers? Labour Shortages, Immigration and Public Policy*, eds. Martin Ruhs and Bridget Anderson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

62 Ibid.

63 With the exception of training that leads to formal qualifications.

64 For example, analysis of the 2011 UK Commission’s *Employer Skills Survey* (ESS) found that employers are disinclined to invest in low-skilled staff. Employers at the “higher” end of the market are more likely to train their staff and to provide broader professional development, while employers at the lower end of the market tend to require fewer skills from staff, being more focused on mass production and value. See Green, *Immigrant Workers and the Workforce Development System in the United Kingdom*.

65 The study focused on low-skilled work in two sectors: construction and food and accommodation.

66 Green et al., *Determinants of the Composition of the Workforce in Low-Skilled Sectors of the UK Economy*.



for skills development were limited except in a few large firms. Routes to career advancement were often unclear, particularly in smaller firms, and required a great deal of employee initiative.

The Role of Trade Unions

Trade unions have taken a positive and active approach to the needs of immigrants. Unions have provided advice to migrant workers and campaigned for their rights in the labor market.⁶⁷ They have also had some success in targeting education and training programs to migrants.⁶⁸ Participants in many ESOL courses are encouraged to join a union—and a significant number do, if only for the duration of the course. Learning centers and unemployed workers' centers in the northwest also promote training and course access for migrants. However, much of this activity has been and remains small scale, uncoordinated, and short term, even if it is more innovative than similar union activity in other countries.⁶⁹ The general decline of trade union membership over the past few decades also limits unions' potential to help immigrants access labor market opportunities.

VI. Discussion: The Impact of Other Policies and Contextual Factors

A number of other factors work to support or undermine new migrants' access to and progression within the labor market. These are detailed below.

A. Cuts to Government Spending and the Economic Crisis

Perhaps the biggest implication of government spending cuts is a reduction in the support services available to new immigrants. In addition to the termination of the Refugee Integration and Employment Service, there have been significant cuts to advice services, core support, and training programs directly benefitting refugees. As a result, the voluntary sector—which has traditionally played an important role in supporting migrants and which also been affected by the recession and associated austerity measures—has seen increased demand for its services.

Spending cuts also affect welfare programs. Over the past three years, there have been various cuts to welfare spending, including tax credits and child benefits. Most immigrants do not claim benefits, reducing the impact of these decisions. Of those immigrants affected, EU-12 nationals along with immigrants from African countries, Pakistan, and Bangladesh—are over-represented among recipients of tax credits and child benefits, and so may feel the pain of reductions in these two areas slightly more.⁷⁰ These benefits are aimed at those in low-paid jobs. Cuts imply less financial flexibility to undertake training, pay for ESOL classes, or cover the costs of any additional childcare needed to undertake training.

67 For example, see WorkSmart, "Migrant workers – working in the UK," accessed October 1, 2014, www.worksmart.org.uk/rights/migrant_workers; also the Migrant Workers Participation Project run by UNISON, BIS, Migrant Workers Participation Project, UNISON – case study (London: BIS, 2010), www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32161/10-1099-migrant-workers-participation-unison.pdf.

68 Heather Connolly, Miguel Martinez Lucio, and Stefania Marino, *Trade Unions and Migration in the United Kingdom: Equality and Migrant Worker Engagement without Collective Rights* (University of Manchester: Manchester Business School, 2013), <https://research.mbs.ac.uk/european-employment/Portals/0/docs/LeverhulmeUK.pdf>.

69 Ibid.

70 Demetrios G. Papademetriou, Madeleine Sumption, and Aaron Terrazas, *Migration and Immigrants Two Years after the Financial Collapse: Where Do We Stand?* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2010), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/migration-and-immigrants-two-years-after-financial-collapse-where-do-we-stand.

The economic crisis has also impacted immigrants' access to the labor market, in particular to low-skilled employment opportunities. The sectors most affected by the crisis (construction and services) also attract the highest share of migrant workers. Recent evidence suggests that immigrants are at higher risk of being unemployed since the latest economic recession.⁷¹ Another effect of the crisis has been salary cuts in those sectors where migrants are most likely to work, such as construction, hospitality, and catering. Agricultural earnings remained flat between 2009 and 2010, and for workers in manual and unskilled occupations they actually declined.⁷² Immigration is thought to have put downward pressure on the wages of those at the bottom of the wage distribution. This implies that recent migrants are likely to earn less, in lower-paid jobs, than is appropriate for their level of skill and education.⁷³

B. The Pace of Change in Workforce Development and Employment Policy

The rapid, recent changes to the UK skills system may further disadvantage the most vulnerable migrants, who may not be able to navigate the complexity of the system.⁷⁴ Changes to the UK workforce development system are frequent, and funding and delivery mechanisms are complex.⁷⁵ Employment policy has likewise seen several changes under both the previous Labour government and the current coalition government. The responsibility for skills training and employment support is split across multiple agencies, including the Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills (BIS), the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), local authorities, the Department for Education, the National Careers Services, the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS), and other players such as local enterprise partnerships, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, and sector skills councils. This presents new migrants with a complex system that may be difficult to navigate.

C. System Effects

"System effects"—from the institutional structure and regulatory framework of the British labor market to wider welfare and public policies—also decide how employers recruit migrant workers.⁷⁶

Some of these system effects have implications for new migrants. Although a relative lack of regulation in the UK labor market generally facilitates migrants' access to employment, it can in some cases also encourage the exploitation of vulnerable groups of migrants. For example, without much regulation, women migrants may be more likely to perform domestic work with low wages and insecure tenure.⁷⁷ They are also more likely to be in nonunionized work and more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. This is especially so under new visa rules, introduced in 2012, that prevent domestic workers from changing employers while in the United Kingdom and from staying more than six months.

Migration policy in the United Kingdom also affects the labor market integration of new migrants—and asylum seekers in particular. Current policies, such as the dispersal of asylum seekers outside London and

71 ONS, *Migration Statistics Quarterly Report, February 2013*; Jonathan Wadsworth, *Immigration and the UK Labour Market—The latest evidence from economic research* (London: Centre for Economic Performance, 2012), <http://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/pa014.pdf>.

72 Helen Newell, *UK: Evolution of Wages During the Crisis* (Dublin: Europeans Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2012), www.eurofound.europa.eu/ewco/studies/tn1203015s/uk1203019q.htm.

73 Christian Dustmann, Tommaso Frattini, and Ian P. Preston, "The Effect of Immigration along the Distribution of Wages," *Review of Economic Studies* 80, no. 1 (2013): 1–29.

74 Green, *Immigrant Workers and the Workforce Development System in the United Kingdom*.

75 Kathrin Hoeckel, Mark Cully, Simon Field, Gábor Halász, and Viktória Kis, *Learning for Jobs: OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training—England and Wales* (Paris: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2009).

76 Martin Ruhs and Bridget Anderson, eds., *Who Needs Migrant Workers? Labour Shortages, Immigration and Public Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

77 Presentation by Sonia MacKay given at the conference "Labour Migration in Hard Times" on November 20, 2013, in London, hosted by the Institute for Employment Rights. Similar findings have been reported by Virginia Mantouvalou, "What Is to Be Done for Migrant Domestic Workers?" in *Labour Migration in Hard Times: Reforming Labour Market Regulation?*, ed. Bernard Ryan (London: Institute for Employment Rights, 2013).



the South East, entails relocation away from community networks, and into weaker labor markets. Further, asylum seekers are prohibited from getting a job for the 12 months after their arrival.

D. Lack of Demand for Training

Some low-skilled sectors are characterized by a lack of demand for training. In the hospitality sector, for example, demand has always been low because of the expectation that staff will leave after a short period of time or will be poached by competitors. This problem is exacerbated among immigrants, whose employers assume that any investment in training will not yield long-term benefits since migrants will seek out other avenues toward progress.⁷⁸ Some analysts conclude that the sector will continue to be characterized by low pay and poor career progression as long as employers consider high turnover rates to be inevitable.⁷⁹ Even when the direct costs of training have been met by external agencies, uptake within the sector has remained low: only about 6 percent of employees have attended government-funded courses.⁸⁰

These issues may not be limited to the hospitality sector. Recent government efforts to engage a variety of employers and encourage them to invest in skills have yet to have a significant impact. Forty-five percent of employers participating in the 2010 UK Employer Perspectives Survey, for example, considered government efforts “largely irrelevant” to their training and development programs.⁸¹ In addition, the majority of those employers who did provide workplace training chose not to align their training with the central government’s skills and qualifications system.⁸²

To further incentivize employer investment in skills, the government launched the Employer Ownership of Skills Pilot⁸³ in 2012 and is also piloting the apprenticeship trailblazers,⁸⁴ which are employer led. It remains to be seen what success these measures will have in encouraging employers to invest in skills, particularly at the lower end of the market. However, in March 2014, it was announced that the construction sector would be the latest apprenticeship trailblazer; other low-skilled sectors in which migrants are concentrated could follow.

The government is also looking into ways to encourage employers to offer more opportunities for their low-skilled workers, especially who work part time, in order to reduce the number of employed people claiming benefits. Pilot programs are testing ways to incentivize employers to train their workers, create more middle-skilled jobs, or allow workers to pull together full-time-equivalent hours from more than one employer.

78 Rosemary Lucas and Steve Mansfield, “The Use of Migrant Labour in the Hospitality Sector: Current and Future Implications,” in *Who Needs Migrant Workers? Labour Shortages, Immigration and Public Policy*, eds. Martin Ruhs and Bridget Anderson, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

79 Ibid.

80 Caroline Perkins, *Counting Those Pennies, Government-funded Training Provision: Who, What, Where and How?* UK report (London: People 1st, 2006).

81 Green, *Immigrant Workers and the Workforce Development System in the United Kingdom*.

82 Jan Shury, David Vivian, Katie Gore, and Camilla Huckle, *UK Employer Perspectives Survey 2010* (Wath-upon-Deane, UK: UK Commission for Employment and Skills, 2011).

83 The Employer Ownership of Skills pilot was a competitive fund open to employers wanting to invest in their current and future workforce in England. Employers were invited to develop proposals that raise skills, create jobs, and drive enterprise and economic growth. The government committed to investing in projects in which employers were also prepared to commit their own funds in order to make better use of combined resources. The pilots will come to an end in 2014.

84 These “trailblazers” aim to make apprenticeships more rigorous and responsive to the needs of employers. They are made up of leading large and small employers and professional bodies in various sectors that collaborate to design apprenticeships within their sector. Standards have already been designed for new apprenticeships in the aerospace, automotive and digital industries, electrotechnical, energy and utilities, financial services, food and drink manufacturing, and life sciences and industrial sciences.

VII. Conclusions

Workforce development and employment support policies and services in the United Kingdom have not targeted immigrants, with the exception of some measures to integrate refugees into the labor market. The coalition government, in power since 2010, has moved even further away from targeting subgroups of the unemployed than did the preceding Labour administration. As a result, advances in immigrant integration through more targeted policy measures are unlikely, particularly given the lack of public appetite for policies that require additional spending on migrants. Instead, the Work Programme (the government’s flagship program for the long-term unemployed) now focuses on individuals’ demonstrable needs, and Jobcentre Plus (the public employment service) has been granted greater flexibility in delivering services to meet individual needs.

In theory, this move toward greater individualization in employment support services is better suited to immigrants (themselves a heterogeneous group) than a more prescriptive universal approach. In practice, this depends upon employment advisors having the knowledge and understanding of the obstacles facing new migrants seeking to access labor market opportunities. Evidence suggests that Jobcentre Plus advisors are still grappling with the recent changes to their services, and connections to the Work Programme. Still, in the long term—as the new becomes routine and advisors get used to their new flexibility—these changes could benefit migrants. The digitalization of services may provide an opportunity to develop a more individualized employment service, with more employment preparation and work-search support. And while Work Programme providers are currently underusing specialist provision and prioritizing those who are more work ready, there may be opportunities in the future to cater to migrants’ specific needs and offer more specialized ESOL provision.

Advances in immigrant integration through more targeted policy measures are unlikely, particularly given the lack of public appetite for policies that require additional spending on migrants.

The skills system in the United Kingdom offers mixed opportunities for new migrants. The current skills system, with few age limits and the opportunity for adult apprenticeships, is flexible and has multiple entry points; coupled with the relative lack of regulation and qualification requirements in some sectors, this can smooth access to the labor market for migrants without host-country qualifications. The continued emphasis on “work first”⁸⁵—as opposed to a focus on training, for example—is also likely to facilitate migrants’ access to the labor market, particularly at the low-skilled and entry levels. The greatly expanded system of apprenticeships and the competence-based nature of the NVQ system hold the most potential for improving the occupational mobility of new migrants, although this increasingly depends on individual employer’s willingness to invest in workforce development.

On the other hand, the fact that access to training is increasingly dependent on individual employers means that not all immigrants will benefit from these opportunities. Despite government attempts to engage employers more and encourage them to invest in skills, employers at the lower end of the market may have little interest in doing so. This could either be because migrant labor sustains a low-skill equilibrium in some sectors, or because some sectors’ chronic underinvestment in skills has a long legacy difficult to overturn.

Perhaps the most significant institutional barrier for new immigrants is lack of ESOL provision and the associated costs attached to this. Migrants in low-paid, low-skilled jobs are unlikely to have the financial resources to support their language learning. Levels of investment in ESOL provision are unlikely to increase

⁸⁵ Newton et al., *Work Programme Evaluation*; Oakley, Foley, and Hillage, “Employment, Partnership and Skills.”



in future years, as even more cuts to public service take effect. Although no substitute for classroom provision, training in the workplace and online—some of it led by volunteer mentors and coaches—could plug some of the gaps.⁸⁶ The requisite resources and expertise are already available but are fragmented and scattered across a range of locations (both physical and virtual). Bringing these resources together might be of particular benefit to those in low-paid, low-skilled work.⁸⁷

Ongoing developments in immigration policy also present a significant barrier to new migrants' access to labor market opportunities.

Cuts to ESOL provision are just one among many. Reduced public-sector services and provision are likely to undermine labor market opportunities for new migrants. Cuts to advice services, training budgets, locally based support and advocacy organizations, and local authority budgets will hit new migrant communities. It is unlikely that voluntary and community organizations will be able to pick up the slack, given their own funding setbacks. Alongside diminishing support for migrants, the pace of change in the current skills and employment system is likely to make it more difficult for migrants to navigate the system and access appropriate support.

Finally, ongoing developments in immigration policy also present a significant barrier to new migrants' access to labor market opportunities. Restrictions on asylum seekers accessing labor market opportunities are likely to remain in place, even as the UK government investigates ways to restrict migrants' access to welfare support and the NHS. At a time when there is a popular perception that migrants compete with the British born for public resources and labor market opportunities, immigration policy is not likely to prioritize integration measures for migrants.

⁸⁶ GLA, *Learning English in Low Paid and Low Skilled Work in London*.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

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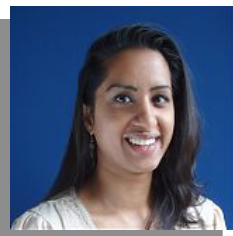
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