

Young Syrian Refugees in the UK: A Two-Tier System of International Protection?

This article explores the experiences of young Syrian refugees in the UK. It looks at how settlement plays out for two ‘types’ of Syrian refugees, those resettled by the UK Government and those who claim asylum in the UK. Drawing on new empirical data from 484 Syrian refugees in the UK, the article compares and contrasts the two groups’ access to educational provisions, the labour market and general support mechanisms that should, in principle, be equally available to all refugees. This reveals the scale and consequences of the existing two-tier system of international protection based entirely on how refugees come to be in the UK, rather than any objective analysis of their reason for flight. In doing so, the article seeks to contribute to debates about the process and implications of how host states label people, in this case by de facto treating resettled Syrians as the ‘good’ refugees, while those who arrive of their own volition, regardless of their needs, are viewed as more problematic.

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Introduction

Since the onset of the civil war in 2011, more than 12 million Syrians have been forced to flee their homes 'making Syria the largest displacement crisis globally' (OCHA 2016, 1). Of these, the majority have been internally displaced by violence, while over 5.6 million have registered as refugees, mostly in neighbouring countries Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraqi Kurdistan, and more recently in Europe, where over a million asylum applications had been lodged by April 2016. The crisis did not only reverse all twelve Millennium Development Goals indicators for Syria, including a contraction of its national economy by 40% and a decrease of life expectancy by over 20 years (OCHA 2016), it also accelerated, and in some cases distorted debates, as to *how* 'host' states should manage the arrival of those forcibly displaced from their homes and *who* is deserving of their support.

The immediate priorities of the international community have naturally been to address the refugees' safety and basic needs, such as health care, water, sanitation, food security and shelter. The protracted nature of the Syrian conflict, however, necessarily also directed attention to other areas. Foremost amongst these are policies designed to empower refugees to integrate socially and economically in host societies, at least temporarily, while the 'push factors' that forced them to leave their country persist (Gibney 2014). Education and skills development -which Aristotle considered 'an ornament in prosperity and a refuge in adversity'- is at the heart of these efforts and forms the cornerstone of policy recommendations for host states to manage the Syrian Refugee Crisis (e.g. World Bank 2015; Global Migration Group 2016).

These efforts, while invaluable, are undermined by a number of factors. First, their focus is almost exclusively on children aged 4–17 (e.g. Moskal and Tyrrell 2016; Deane 2016). Comparative research on forced displacement 'is very limited; on youth it is almost non-existent' (Chatty 2007, 2). Second, data on the skills and educational profile of young Syrians, as recorded regularly by international organisations like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), tend to be descriptive and do not include the type of questions that would clearly capture the refugees' subjective understandings of their predicament, their imagined futures or their aspirations. Third, the question of who is deserving of international protection 'has become deeply politicised' in the context of Europe's 'migration crisis' (Crawley and Skleparis 2018, 49), with labels, often arbitrarily and subjectively attached to migrants, in ways that serve to order them in a hierarchical and

categorical systems of rights (Moncrieffe 2007). Recent studies, for instance, have convincingly shown that using the term ‘migrant’ or ‘refugee’ produces explicitly different understandings as to who is deserving or undeserving of protection (e.g. Gauci, Giuffre, and Tsourdi 2015; Crawley and Skleparis 2018). Could the same etymological and ‘categorical fetishism’ (Apostolova 2015) apply to separate the rights of, and responsibilities towards, refugees, whose only substantial differentiating characteristic is their mode of entry in a country?

To explore this question, and address these gaps in the literature, this article analyses original survey data from 484 interviews with young Syrian refugees in the United Kingdom (UK), conducted between July to September 2017. Our data allows us to compare the experiences of young refugees (18-32 years old) based on their mode of entry to the UK. The two ‘types’ of Syrian refugees who arrive in the UK are those who are resettled (*Resettlement Route – RR*), and those who find their own way to Britain and apply for asylum (*Asylum Route – AR*). The former apply via the United Nations Refugee Agency from neighbouring countries such as Lebanon. In 2015, the UK Government, after significant public pressure, agreed to resettle 20,000 by 2020, as part of the Syrian Vulnerable Person’s Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), a scheme targeting the most vulnerable of Syrian forced migrants. It has subsequently invested significant resources in responding effectively to the needs of resettled refugees. However, the same cannot be argued about the needs of international protection applicants and beneficiaries who have followed the asylum route. A rich body of literature has identified considerable policy gaps in both the pre- and post-refugee status recognition phases of the asylum route process, which hinder the integration prospects of international protection applicants and beneficiaries (e.g. Morris 2002; Strang, Baillot, and Mignard 2018; Bloch 2008). Duffield (2008) adds an extra dimension to this binary of supported versus self-reliant, by looking at questions of containment. Still, to our knowledge, there has been no prior study that comparatively explores the scale and implications of these structural inequalities from the perspective of refugees themselves, whose voices, in the absence of relevant evidence, remain suppressed.

This article compares the differential experiences of young Syrian refugees in the UK based solely on their mode of access: whether they were resettled, and thus part of a small and controlled population, recognised as refugees prior to arrival in the UK, or whether they had to apply for asylum upon arrival and move through the vagaries of the

asylum process. In doing so, it seeks to contribute to debates about the process and implications of how host states label people, in this case by *de facto* treating resettled Syrians as the ‘good’ refugees, while those who arrive of their own volition, regardless of their needs, are viewed as more problematic. The article starts with a theoretical discussion of the politics of bounding, whereby categorical and socially constructed definitions of migrants are utilised to create uneven structures of support for different groups. The next section explores manifestations of such labelling in the UK, from the early 2000s, when the key distinction was between asylum seekers and refugees, and more recently in response to the Syrian crisis, where a two-tier system of support for Syrian refugees was established. Empirical results are presented next, comparing and contrasting Syrian refugees’ access to general support, educational provisions, and the labour market, based on their mode of entry in the UK. Overall, our analysis documents the differential experiences of resettled refugees compared to spontaneous arrivals, a two-tier system of international protection which, we argue, serves to perpetuate and reinforce a simplistic dichotomy used to distinguish, divide and discriminate between those on the move, with important unintended consequences.

The Politics of Bounding

Our work builds on a burgeoning literature on the use of categories in attempts to manage and control migration (Moncrieffe 2007; Zetter 2007; Bakewell 2008; Polzer 2008; Scherschel 2011; Long 2013; Becker 2014; Crawley and Skleparis 2018). This literature suggests that categories – such as those of ‘refugee’, ‘asylum seeker’, ‘economic migrant’ and many others – are social and political constructs designed to assist policy makers and politicians to regulate, manage and exclude migrants. Bureaucracies create and use categories to define specific groups of people, who are assumed to share particular characteristics which allow them to be subjected to the same policy outcomes (Bakewell 2008, 436). Categories are understood by policy-makers as part of a necessary, appropriate, apolitical and even benign process of labelling, which helps bureaucracies identify different groups of potential beneficiaries in order to implement and manage policies designed for them (Zetter 2007, 184-185, 188).

However, the process of construction and deconstruction of categories is inherently political. Categories are not neutral, both for those bestowing the category and

for those claiming it, or indeed having the category forced upon them (ibid: 185). Categories reflect a process of deconstruction and reinvention of interpretations and meanings, which legitimises state interests and strategies to regulate migration, and, at the same time, affects migrants themselves, and particularly their protection and rights (ibid: 184, 188). State interests and needs transform a migrant story into a bureaucratic category and can ascribe a highly discriminatory identity of the 'other', or indeed can act to invisibilise (Polzer 2008). Within this context, adequate protection is far from guaranteed (Zetter 2015, 15). Categories embodying different notions of the 'other' started to emerge and become embedded in policy-making in the 1990s, when many West European countries became host to perceived 'unsustainable numbers' of newcomers (Zetter 2007, 177).

This scholarship suggests that the politics of bounding is a process of differential inclusion, whereby different modes of entry into a country and different protection statuses create different rights and entitlements (see Crawley and Skleparis 2018). Part of the bounding process is about determining legitimacy in order to stratify who has access to rights. The process of categorisation is therefore a deeply political one. Indeed, it could be argued that the stratification at play should also be seen within a broader neoliberal approach to populations, one, for example, that seeks to differentiate the poor into deserving and undeserving categories. The politics of bounding is the mechanism that divides populations into citizens and 'others', and further divides the 'others' into 'refugees', 'spontaneous asylum seekers', and 'economic migrants'. In this regard, every category performs a dual function as a regulatory instrument of inclusion and exclusion. This bounding process where individuals and groups are excluded is joined by, or for Pasquetti, Casati, and Sanyal (2019) preceded by a threat to the very existence of protection as a right (see Borren 2017, Jones 2016). The refugee label is further stratified by gender in terms of who can access the refugee label and in later outcomes. Refugee women are often not recognised as such due to either being tied to a male primary applicant or due to being disbelieved (Asylum Aid 2011). Even for those who are recognised as refugees, outcomes are significantly worse (Cheung and Phillimore 2017), meaning female refugees are often doubly disadvantaged.

We wish to add another dimension to that debate. Thus far much of the literature on the politics of bounding/labelling/categorisation has usefully taken on the notion of forced and unforced migration being binaries, and instead has suggested that if they have

any use, we see it as a continuum (Zetter 2007). Most work thus far has looked at these issues in relation to questioning the ways people from different states are treated, based on some constructed notions of the legitimacy of their claims (e.g. Scherschel 2011; Long 2013; Becker 2014). What our work adds to this debate is the consequences of these constructions of legitimacy for people from the same country, Syria. The consequences of categorisation and the Government's desire for only controlled refugee movements are that people 'from the same street' in Syria can be treated differently by the British and other host states.

The Politics of Bounding in the UK

The politics of bounding in the UK predates the Syrian crisis. Since the early 2000s, successive governments had separated asylum seekers and refugees, with the former considered unwanted and treated with suspicion and the latter reluctantly accepted. The New Labour Government in 1997 subsumed refugee movement within a long-established dual immigration practice, that the limitation of numbers was the key to 'good race relations' (Solomos 1989). Thus, while Labour supported the wars in the former Yugoslavia, they advocated providing support in the region, rather than accepting refugees from Kosovo, arguing that accepting refugees 'would only have assisted Milosevic's objectives' (Hansard March 31st 1999 Col 1090). Under pressure from UNHCR and the EU, the Government eventually agreed to take a small number of people already designated as refugees. Those who arrived in Britain by their own means were dealt with according to the more restrictive practices of the 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act. This dual policy was criticised by an Amnesty International spokesperson who talked of two policies, 'the high-profile one that involves the evacuation of the camps in Macedonia', and the contrast of the 'hidden policy which applies to the vast majority, who are treated as if they are criminals when in fact they are just seeking our protection' (Observer 1999).

The creation of Gateway resettlement schemes with UNHCR began to take the form of the legitimate alternative to the illegitimacy of people arriving in the UK to claim asylum. However, the numbers were small, with just 750 refugees being resettled each year (National Statistics 2018). This was a means by which asylum claims made on UK soil could be separated from the much smaller number accredited abroad. Attempting to legitimise this policy, Home Secretary David Blunkett argued that 'those who currently enter the

country clandestinely, with inappropriate papers, or by applying for refugee status "in country" will be able to enter on a managed basis through the UNHCR without needing to put their lives at risk or to present fraudulent papers' (Hansard Apr 24th 2002 Col 343). The implication is that 'genuine' refugees would have to have had their position pre-determined remotely, while national processes would operate as a second line decision-making process in spontaneous asylum cases but, in doing so, they would effectively be treating people with a 'culture of disbelief' (Anderson, Hollaus and Williamson 2014).

This was all part of a much wider linkage being made between the legitimacy of refugees and numbers. New Labour politicians questioned the ongoing utility of the 1951 Refugee Convention, with Home Secretary Jack Straw, for example, arguing that 'the Convention is no longer working as its framers intended. The environment in which it is applied today is one that has changed almost out of all recognition from that which obtained in 1951. The numbers of asylum seekers have vastly increased' (Straw 2001). However, rather than abolish the Convention, they simply sought to make it more difficult to operationalise by introducing a variety of exceptions, from supposed white list safe countries, to safe third countries and the Dublin Convention allowing removal to the first European country of arrival.

The UK Government's position on the so called 'Syrian refugee crisis', mirrored that in Kosovo, with only those having their status determined abroad being considered genuine and the rest treated with suspicion. It argued that support was best provided to Syrian refugees in and around Syria rather than to Syrians in the UK or elsewhere in Europe (McGuinness 2011). This meant that the UK would take no part in any form of resettlement for refugees who had already made it to Europe, but instead would contribute humanitarian aid in Syria and neighbouring countries. Those attempting to arrive in the UK to claim asylum were therefore treated as problematic and referred to by Prime Minister David Cameron as 'swarms' (Daily Telegraph 2018).

Nevertheless, the Government was not able to completely abstain from any form of support for Syrian refugees, announcing the Syrian Resettlement Programme in January 2014. The scheme was 'small in scale', prioritising only the most vulnerable, and it received just 239 people in the first 20 months of its operation (NAO 2016). It was not until autumn 2015, when pictures of a three-year old boy, Alan Kurdi, being washed up on the shores of the Mediterranean emerged, that concerted public and political pressure led to what

became known as the Syrian Vulnerable Person's Resettlement Scheme (VPRS). The Government set a new target of resettling 20,000 Syrian refugees over five years (NAO 2016). By the end of March 2017, just before this research began, 7,307 Syrian nationals had been resettled in the UK, half of whom were children. Syrian nationals resettled under the VPRS are identified by the UNHCR in refugee settings in the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa) according to eligibility criteria agreed with the UK Government. Following initial assessment, refugees are referred to the Government for further screening and to the International Organisation for Migration for a health assessment. Pending clearance, the Home Office then refers them to local authorities across the UK, which have indicated a willingness and capacity to participate. These local authorities are then responsible for delivering the programme and receive funding for everyone they agree to resettle.

Resettled refugees in the UK receive a personalised, state-funded integration package upon arrival, which provides them with access to accommodation and social services. By contrast, there is no state-funded, tailored integration support for Syrians who have followed the asylum route, though devolution in the UK creates variation between the four nations. What this means is that individuals fleeing the same conflict are treated very differently. For those recognised as refugees after traversing the asylum process there is no longer any UK-wide integration strategy. A series of strategies existed between 2000 and 2013, with the second part of that period also seeing third sector organisations providing advice and support under contract from the UK Government. However, in 2013 the last strategy ended and responsibility for refugees moved to devolved governments and the English only Department of Communities and Local Government (Mulvey 2018). Unlike resettled refugees, asylum route applicants live in the UK for the duration of the application process without being able to access free English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses,¹ at least in England, or work, and receive statutory support that meets very basic needs, just £36.95 a week, a level widely viewed as leading to poverty (Lindsay, Gillespie, and Dobbie 2010). This, of course, takes quite a toll on the integration of newly recognised beneficiaries of international protection. To understand how these uneven provisions are experienced by refugees themselves, as well as their unintended consequences, the next section presents original findings from interviews with young Syrians in the UK.

¹ In 2011, the provision of free ESOL courses in England was tied to the condition of 'actively seeking work', henceforth, excluding asylum seekers, though it remains in other parts of the UK.

Young Syrian Refugees in the UK: A Two-Tier Refugee Support System

Our empirical analysis explores how the politics of bounding affects the experiences of Syrians who were resettled vis a vis those who had arrived in Britain and made claims for asylum. Findings are based on 484 surveys conducted with young (18-32 years old) Syrians in the UK from July to September 2017.² For the purposes of data collection, 13 young Syrians, all native Arab speakers, were recruited from their communities and trained as peer researchers, privileging female (ten) over male (three) researchers, to minimise known barriers to survey participation by female migrants (see Hamilton 2015). Convenience sampling was employed, necessitated by the lack of publicly available official data at the time of the survey regarding the detailed demographic breakdown and characteristics of the Syrian population in the UK. Despite limitations, convenience sampling is considered the most appropriate avenue for data collection, whereby the primary selection criterion relates to the ease of obtaining a sample, considering the cost of locating individuals of the target population, the geographic distribution of the sample, and obtaining the interview data from the selected individuals.

The questionnaire was administered by fieldworkers mainly through Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI), which accounted for 77% of completed interviews. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the help of tablet devices loaded with an offline version of the Qualtrics survey software. To further maximise the number of respondents and geographical reach of our sample in more remote areas of the UK, the questionnaire was also administered through Computer-Assisted Self Interviewing (CASI), which amounted to the remaining 23% of our sample. A link to an online version of the questionnaire was circulated to personal networks by fieldworkers and to local authorities by the core research team. A comparison of the two datasets, collected offline or online, reveals only minor differences between them in terms of age and gender.³ However, online participants were considerably more likely to have arrived in the UK through the asylum route (73% compared to 47% for the offline sample) and hold a higher education degree

² In the absence of a universal definition of 'youth' across organisations and to obviate the need for parental consent, we adapt the UN Habitat's (2016) 15-32 age range to focus on older youth from 18 to 32.

³ Our analysis indicates that there are no significant differences in results between the face-to-face and online interviews. The absence of an interviewer in the latter was compensated by more detailed written instructions, where appropriate. An identical questionnaire was administered in both cases, available in both Arabic and in English, and including closed and some open questions. Each interview on average lasted 45 minutes. The questionnaire is available on our project site [omitted for anonymous review].

(55% compared to 20% for offline participants). These differences reveal an intuitive point, that those with higher educational skills are more likely to have the confidence to complete the questionnaire online unassisted. When combined, the overall dataset produces a balanced split in the sample in terms of their mode of entry in the UK, which is the main focus of our analysis, with 202 (42%) coming via the asylum route (AR), and 189 participants (39%) via the resettlement route (RR).⁴ Overall, 64% of our respondents were male and 36% female, and more than half of them were residing in Scotland (55%), while 44% were in England at the time of the survey (see Table 1).

[Table 1 about here]

Our findings are presented in three sections, starting with general support experienced by the two groups of Syrian refugees based on their mode of entry, followed by a more focussed discussion in relation to education and access to the labour market. These, however, should not be read as suggesting discreet elements of refugee policy as settlement is clearly polycentric. Indeed, we follow Lowi's (1972) view that in policy everything is related to everything else. Where appropriate we also highlight differences in response by gender. We then go on to look briefly at how bounding in these three areas impacts on people's general experiences and future plans.

General Support

The discussion above on the politics of bounding suggests an uneven set of provisions available to refugees in the UK, based on their mode of entry, but little is known about how these translate to experiences on the ground. This section provides a systematic comparison of the forms of support experienced by AR and RR refugees in the UK across a number of key dimensions, and the implications of these for settlement.

First, in terms of housing, 81% of our RR respondents stated that either the state or local authorities pay for their rent compared to 49% of our AR participants. Indeed, providing for their own accommodation expenses is a necessity for two fifths (40%) of those who have been granted refugee status through the asylum system, compared to only 11% of

⁴ From our sample, 93 respondents (19%) did not provide us with information regarding their mode of access to the UK or were not recognised as refugees at the time of the survey and are therefore excluded from the analysis. It is also worth noting that only 10 AR respondents (5%) in our sample were in the UK before the eruption of the war in Syria in 2011.

RR refugees. AR refugees are also more likely to be in shared accommodation (26% vs. 11% for RR), though this should be placed within the context of more families arriving through the RR route. Thus, on arrival and for a time afterwards, resettled refugees do not have to worry about paying their rent and reside in their own accommodation, whereas AR refugees are almost immediately faced with questions of housing expenditure.

Second, in terms of financial support, 84% of our RR participants reported that they relied on government support as their main source of income. This was the case for less than half (43%) of AR refugees. The financial and administrative support that accompanies resettlement then, is in stark contrast to the experiences of refugees after going through the asylum process. It is worth reiterating that the UK Government has made an explicit point of taking more vulnerable refugees through the RR route and there is a likely link between the need for support and vulnerability.

Another way in which the two-tier system of refugee support manifests itself has to do with access to social welfare services. Forced self-reliance and the feeling of higher individual responsibility among AR refugees appear to shape their life orientation strategies, leading to higher engagement with employment related social welfare services. AR refugees reported more experience of many such provisions compared to those who had been resettled, be that provision of job search facilities (36% against 29%); volunteering/work placements to gain experience (28% against 25%); provision of computer skills training (21% against 15%); training provision by job centres (13% against 6%); training provision by employer (13% against 6%); provision of career counselling services (10% against 3%); conversion/recognition of overseas qualifications (9% against 5%); and organisation of recruitment events by employers (5% against 2%). Such an approach links AR refugees to broader welfare practices. Indeed, it integrates them into an employment first welfare system.

One key provision for which RR refugees reported higher experience compared to AR refugees was English language courses (83% against 62%).⁵ Language provision is built into the Syrian resettlement programme so there is a degree of automaticity to language learning for RR refugees. The situation is very different for AR refugees. For them, improvement of English language skills often depends on their ability to identify and access

⁵ The second one was provision of cultural awareness training courses, from which 23% of RR refugees reported that they have benefitted compared to 10% of AR refugees.

language classes that are not provided specifically for refugees. Despite the Government's positive decision to channel an additional £10 million to ESOL courses over the next five years, a development that did not make up for the previous 2-years of cuts (Home Office 2017), the scheme's reach remains restricted to resettled Syrian refugees, and so continues to exclude all those who are resettled through other programmes, such as the Gateway, as well as the majority of refugees in the UK who follow the asylum route (including Syrians). Thus the differential inclusion Crawley and Skleparis (2018) refer to is evident.

Integrating ESOL classes into the Syrian resettlement scheme constitutes a recognition on the part of Government that language is a crucial factor in accessing work and education, and, indeed, in general life orientation. Successive UK Governments have emphasised the importance of speaking English, yet have simultaneously cut financial support to ESOL. What we see in this case is a form of rights stratification, with only RR refugees having an explicit right to access language provision regardless of their employment status. English language proficiency can help newly recognised international protection beneficiaries become more self-reliant, and subsequently better and faster integrated (Cebulla, Daniel, and Zurawan 2010). Indeed, our data suggests that Syrian refugees with better English language skills tend to be more satisfied with their jobs and education in the UK, have higher self-efficacy and have more positive contact experiences with British people, in line with findings by Collyet et al 2018. The fact that there are limited opportunities for AR refugees to learn English affects employment and educational progression prospects. Indeed, barriers to English language learning often result in refugees finding work far below their skills, qualifications and experience. Such barriers include long waiting lists for English language courses, inadequate number of teaching hours, and high travel costs to and from ESOL classes, among others. Female refugees experience additional barriers related to their childcare responsibilities.

[Figure 1 about here]

These differences on the level of support are reflected in the evaluation of key actors by two groups of refugees separated only by their mode of access to the UK. RR refugees have been exposed to more multi-agency support than those coming through the asylum route and are predictably more positive about the support they have received from them. RR refugees speak more positively of Local Authorities; International Organisations;

and National Civil Society/NGOs. Interestingly though, they also speak more positively of the British population, suggesting perhaps that minus the hostile anti-asylum environment and a need to prove their 'legitimacy' as refugees, Syrians are able to live relatively free of overt hostility. By contrast, employers are the only actor AR refugees evaluate more positively, since only a handful of RR refugees are actually employed (see *Figure 1*).

[Table 2 about here]

RR refugees also have a more positive overall outlook on social cohesion and relations compared to entrants through the asylum route: they were consistently more eager to respond 'not at all' when asked about the extent to which various social and political factors caused divisions between Syrians and UK citizens (see Table 2). This all suggests that RR refugees are indeed experiencing a more supportive environment than those who have gone through the asylum system. The next section narrows down the comparison to access to education, which, especially for young adults, represents a key challenge and priority.

Education

Prior to the outbreak of the war Syria had one of the most advanced educational systems in the region, with almost universal completion of primary school and a secondary school completion rate of 74% (Bouchane, 2016). Indeed, the majority of participants (79%) in our survey had completed intermediate education, amounting to around 9-years of full-time education. Among them, 28% reported intermediate education, 25% general secondary, and 26% university as their highest obtained educational qualification. It is worth noting that women appear to be more qualified than men in our sample, with 30% (against 23%) reporting a university degree as their highest obtained educational qualification. However, two fifths of our participants (41%) said that they were unable to complete their studies due to the war. We observed no significant differences on the impact of war on the completion of studies between the AR and RR cohorts but among both our AR and RR respondents men were more affected than women (49% against 24% among AR; 44% against 27% among RR). This reveals a gender dimension in the impact of war on one's ability to complete their studies due to, for example, forced conscription of men (Davis, Taylor, and Murphy 2014).

Nevertheless, it is clear that the mode of access to the UK has other educational dimensions (see Figure 2). Our AR respondents were much more likely to have high levels of qualifications compared to their RR counterparts, with 34% reporting a higher education degree as their highest obtained qualification against 10% of RR respondents. This is not necessarily a surprising outcome for two reasons. First, there is an extensive literature on more affluent and educated people being more likely to manage to escape from refugee producing situations (see, for example, Van Hear 2006 and Sasnal 2015). In addition, the UK Government have consistently claimed to be only resettling the most vulnerable refugees (Cameron 2015), and we might assume that there is a symbiosis in many cases between lower educational levels and vulnerability, though this should not be overstated.

[Figure 2 about here]

The high levels of education disruption due to war among young Syrian refugees potentially informs the main aspiration in the UK for one out of three of our respondents (31%): to be integrated into the country's education system. A major challenge towards this direction, however, seems to be the lack of formal documentation, as almost half of our respondents (49%) stated that they did not have with them any form of documents to verify their educational qualifications. Indeed, the lack of documentation generally has been used by successive UK Governments as a way of questioning the credibility of asylum claims (Noll 2005). Nevertheless, there is a significant variation in the possession of educational documents between AR and RR refugees, with 61% of the former reporting that they possess such documentation compared to just 32% of the latter. While we cannot be sure as to the reason for this, it is likely that at least part of the explanation comes from the fact that many RR refugees have spent considerable time in refugee camps prior to their relocation whereas AR refugees have travelled across Europe carrying all that they have of any value. It is important to note that there is a gender dimension therein too, with women demonstrating higher rates of documentation possession, compared to men among AR respondents (66% against 59%), but lower among RR participants (28% against 35%).

In terms of UK experiences of education, RR respondents demonstrated higher rates of integration into the UK's education system than their AR counterparts (40% against 31%). The resettlement process could be seen as a supportive period but also one where

there is a buffer, which affords those being supported a little more time to make decisions about their future rather than being integrated into a work first welfare system. The rates, however, were lower for women compared to men among both the AR and RR cohorts (29% against 32% among AR; 36% against 42% among RR).

Overall, the picture that emerges is one whereby those categorised as the legitimate refugees, the resettled ones, appear to be having more success in accessing the education system in the UK, despite having less documentary evidence, compared to the unwanted, AR refugees. While it is unclear from our data whether these differences are a result of the UK government's stratification policies and labelling, they clearly indicate that mode of access has a previously unforeseen impact on the fulfilment, or potential fulfilment, of young refugees' educational aspirations.

Employment

Another tangible marker of the effects of the two-tier protection system in the UK relates to employment. Access to the labour market for RR refugees is, in theory, open from the minute they arrive in the UK, though significant barriers to such access remain. By contrast, those who follow the asylum route have no access while waiting for decisions on their applications and are left to fend for themselves through work and/or mainstream benefits once they are granted protection (Basedow and Doyle 2016, 6).

Skills and educational levels are also reflected in employment biographies and job experience of our participants. In the six months prior to leaving Syria, significantly more AR refugees were in some form of salaried or self-employment, 52% compared to a figure of 36% for RR refugees. While much of this variation can be explained by the higher number of 'homemakers' among RR refugees, 22% against 6%, this does not explain the full variation. AR refugees also have more high-skilled job experience, with 38% stating they were in a professional or highly technical job in Syria, compared to only 19% of RR refugees, who were more likely to be in skilled manual labour employment (34% against 22% of AR refugees). Interestingly, gender differences are evident, particularly among AR refugees, with 71% female versus only 25% of male participants working in a professional or highly technical job six months prior to leaving Syria. An equivalent higher share of women across both entry

routes is seeking to find a professional or highly technical job in the UK: 63% against 25% among AR refugees and 41% against 9% among RR refugees.

However, in terms of accessing the labour market in the UK, and particularly accessing it at an appropriate level that matches a refugee's skills and aspirations, the barriers are well known. Bloch (2008), Mulvey (2013) and others, find high levels of underemployment among refugees. Non-recognition of skills and qualifications joins the aforementioned lack of documentation and language issues, and these are also foregrounded by the so called 'ethnic penalty' (see Modood and Khattab 2016). At least part of this penalty is a result of discrimination, meaning alongside the more refugee or migrant specific issues they also join established minorities in facing barriers to employment. Young Syrians in our study identified language (62%), lack of prior work experience in the country (41%), and lack of prior experience in applying for jobs and attending interviews (27%) as the main three obstacles in accessing the labour market. Surprisingly, the language barrier was particularly acute among RR refugees (80%), despite having greater access to ESOL. This indicates, and our data confirms, that, as well as having lower qualifications, RR refugees also have less developed language skills (see *Table 3*). More specifically, AR's self-reported English language skills are above average (Mean=6.2), with the relative majority, almost one in three, stating that they are fluent (Mode=10). In contrast, RR's self-reported English language skills are below average (Mean=4.2), with the largest group, about two in five, reporting a basic to average knowledge and understanding of the language (Mode=3.3).

[Table 3 about here]

Clearly, these obstacles curtail the ability of refugees to access the labour market. At the time of our survey, only 27% of our respondents were in some form of employment (i.e. full-/part-time, salaried/self-employment). One fifth (19%) reported that they were unemployed and looking for a job. While for many newly recognised refugees there is a trade-off between immediately trying to access the labour market at a fairly menial level and upskilling or attempting to get skills accredited, the comparative results are interesting nevertheless. Unemployment was particularly acute among RR refugees (see *Figure 3*). Only 9% of them were in some form of employment, while 26% were unemployed and in search of a job. At the same time, 42% of AR refugees reported that they were in employment, and

17% unemployed and searching for a job. Yet, only 22% of them reported that they managed to find a similarly high skilled job (i.e. a professional or highly technical job) to the one they had back in Syria, while one fourth (25%) was in skilled manual work.

[Figure 3 about here]

It is possible that the difference in employment levels between the two groups can be explained by the time RR refugees are given by the resettlement process, where they have more leeway to learn English and perhaps attend educational courses without the immediate need to generate their own income. On the other hand, AR refugees have generally had less access to English language provision or education, meaning that the trade-off mentioned above is perhaps less prescient for that group. That is, there is little incentive to delay employment, and indeed the pressures of the general welfare system militate against such a delay. Nevertheless, refugees' experiences differ by route and appear to emerge from a confluence of individual characteristics (e.g. pre-existing skills) and state categorisation processes.

There is also a gender dimension in the effects of labour market obstacles and forced self-reliance on the employment status of AR refugees in the UK. Indeed, male and female AR refugees do not experience these effects homogeneously. Male AR refugees' current employment rate (48%) more or less coincides with their employment rate six months prior to fleeing Syria (53%). However, female AR refugees' current employment rate (29%) is far from both their previous employment rate in Syria (50%), and even more so from their aspired employment rate (56%). In all, despite the fact that female AR refugees have recent employment biographies and high skilled job experience, obstacles to labour market access, as well as forced self-reliance, take a toll on their employment prospects. Many become homemakers (23%) despite only 11% indicating this to be their desired role. Therefore, at present female Syrian refugees are not only more likely to be unemployed than men, but they are also more likely to be significantly more underemployed. Bounding is joined by a broader governmental approach to employment and the welfare state. AR refugees alongside existing recipients of social welfare are being forced to take any employment on offer rather than seeking appropriate employment. This narrowing of options is not as visible for RR refugees, who appear to have some space in which to develop their options.

To further tease out the relationship between mode of entry and the labour market, we ran two logistic regression analyses (N=313), with 'currently being employed in the UK' and 'currently studying in the UK' as the dependent variables. Our focus here is on exploring whether mode of entry (AR or RR) has an independent effect on these issues, controlling also for gender, language competence and support, as well as educational qualifications and documentation, which were identified as key issues in our analysis and literature.

[Table 4 about here]

Results, presented in Table 4, reveal the importance of mode of entry, which is not only statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) in both cases, but it also appears to have the strongest effect for access to employment and one of the two strongest for access to education. More specifically, AR young Syrian refugees are about 6 times more likely to be in some form of employment compared to their RR counterparts, who, by contrast, are about 2.5 times more likely to be studying in the UK. Gendered effects are also identified, with female Syrian refugees being about two times less likely to be in employment but 2.2 times more likely to be participating in the education system than men are. These findings are consistent with the comparative picture presented earlier, and demonstrate that the politics of bounding have a real, yet underappreciated effect in the realities young refugees experience on the ground.

Perhaps surprisingly, educational qualifications and documentation, as well as acquired language skills do not have a statistically significant effect on access to the labour market. When it comes to employment, the structural and gendered inequalities that the two-tier system produces override the influence of objective factors, such as migrant skillsets, which tend to dominate the public discussion. Young Syrians accessing language provisions while in the UK are about two times less likely to be in employment but 2.5 times more likely to be in education, indicating that language training, preferentially available to RR refugees, enhances their opportunities to complete education. On the other hand, those not getting language support are entering the labour market, often at a lower level than they should. More intuitively, having good English language skills reduces the barriers to

accessing the education system, while already holding a university degree reduces the likelihood of doing so – both factors are statistically significant. Of greatest policy relevance is the finding that having documentation of educational qualifications is one of the two strongest predictors of accessing the education system (2.8 times more likely). Providing alternative accreditation⁶ of past qualifications and skills with minimal bureaucracy would therefore help young refugees meet their aspiration of completing their education, which for many was interrupted by the civil war in their country.

Conclusion

Bounding and categorising migrant populations is a fundamental part of how the British immigration system works and is a deeply political process, imbued with the state's understanding of itself and its desire for control. This mechanism, not only divides people into citizens and 'others', and then 'others' into 'migrants' and 'refugees', as the relevant comparative literature rightly points out; it also further stratifies recognised refugees into 'deserving' and 'less deserving' of support, based solely on how they entered the country. In other words, categories function as regulatory instruments of, not only inclusion and exclusion, but also, and, perhaps, most importantly, differential inclusion. Our analysis demonstrates that this two-tier system of international protection produces structural and gendered inequalities that have far-reaching ramifications.

In the case of young Syrian refugees, one consequence of delineating populations into legitimate or not, deserving or not, is that there is a more supportive environment for RR refugees than for those who have gone through the asylum system, despite no objective differences in the factors that forced their flight. Bounding is therefore playing out in a very real way around the social rights and experiences of young refugees. Empirical findings suggest that there is less social tension for RR refugees, perhaps due to the fact that they do not have to prove who they are and why they are here. Instead, the population and services take as a given that they are deserving of support, which is reflected, among others, in the more positive evaluations of the British public by RR refugees, 87% compared to 72% for AR refugees. There may, therefore, be a degree to which the overall population ingests

⁶ A possible model of skills auditing can be found at the 'UK National Recognition Information Service' or the 'European Qualifications Passport for Refugees'.

questions of legitimacy from the political bounding process, a question that should fruitfully be explored in future research.

All of these findings can be encapsulated in two more general findings that, at least in part, emanate from the differential levels of support that, in principle, equally deserving refugees are receiving. RR respondents appear to settle better than those coming through the asylum route, despite being further away from accessing the labour market and the Government supposedly taking more vulnerable for resettlement, which also impacts on their future plans. While 70% of Syrian refugees who come through the asylum route plan to remain in the UK, the figure for those resettled is 83%. This is at the very least indicative of what may seem like an obvious point, that where people feel treated well and are supported, they imagine and invest in building a new life there. The UK Government categorising of refugees as legitimate – if small and controlled numbers – or illegitimate – if traversing the asylum process –, therefore, has profound consequences. RR refugees are provided support and breathing space, time to take stock and think over future plans and are not questioned about their right to be here, whereas AR refugees must traverse the ‘culture of disbelief’ in the Home Office and then are left to largely go it alone from the moment they are recognised as refugees.

From the perspective of refugees themselves, the biggest concerns are raised by those who follow the asylum route rather than those who are resettled in the UK. Indeed, the latter receive a personalised, state-funded integration package, which provides them with accommodation and access to services upon arrival. However, compared to elsewhere in Europe, and especially in countries adjacent to Syria, numbers are small. The spontaneous movement, on the other hand, is treated as a threat. Indeed, Zetter (2015) points to a change from normative principles to a management of protection approach, an approach that seeks to limit numbers and in so doing emphasise control. Alongside this movement, he suggests that the bounding and the status-based approach that it implies requires challenge from a needs-based or rights-based approach. At present, bounding is in part based around the desire to be in control, or at least be able to present the image of being in control. Uneven support is but one of the political ramifications of bounding, but this has consequences for how refugees experience their lives and will likely have ongoing impacts on how they experience settlement. De-legitimising the protection needs of populations based solely on how they come to be in a host country, rather than what they are fleeing,

undermines and further disintegrates the refugee protection regime (Jones 2016; Borren 2017; Halper and Reifer 2019; Pasquetti, Casati, and Sanyal 2019), shifting its essential character from being a 'right' to being a 'favour' (Fassin 2016).

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