



TOWARDS A NEW BEGINNING: Refugee Integration in France

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Outcome of EU funded study on approaches to refugee integration in selected countries.

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Translations: all English translations of national legislation, decisions and reports are unofficial translations by the researchers unless otherwise indicated.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Paris, September 2013.

List of Abbreviations

ACAT	<i>Action des Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture</i> (Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture)
APARDAP	<i>Association de Parrainage Républicain des Demandeurs d'Asile et de Protection</i> (Association for the Protection and Republican Sponsoring of Asylum-Seekers)
APSR	<i>Association d'Accueil aux Médecins et Personnels de Santé Réfugiés en France</i> (Association for the Reception of Refugee Doctors and Healthcare Professionals in France)
CAAR	<i>Comité d'Aide aux Réfugiés</i> (Refugee Assistance Committee)
CADA	<i>Centre d'Accueil pour les Demandeurs d'Asile</i> (Reception Centre for Asylum-Seekers)
CADA-IR	<i>Centre d'Accueil pour les Demandeurs d'Asile – Insertion Réfugiés</i> (Reception Centre for Asylum-Seekers – Refugee Integration)
CAF	<i>Caisse d'Allocations Familiales</i> (Benefits agency)
CAFDA	<i>Coordination de l'Accueil des Familles Demandeuses d'Asile</i> (Coordination of the reception of asylum-seeker families)
CAI	<i>Contrat d'Accueil et d'Intégration</i> (Reception and Integration Contract)
CASP	<i>Centre d'Action Sociale Protestant</i> (Protestant Social Action Centre)
CDI	<i>Contrat à Durée Indéterminée</i> (Contract with indeterminate length)
CESEDA	<i>Code de l'Entrée et du Séjour des Etrangers et du Droit d'Asile</i> (Code of entry and residence of foreigners and of the right of asylum)
CMU	<i>Couverture Médicale Universelle</i> (Universal medical coverage)
CNRS	<i>Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique</i> (National Centre for Scientific Research)
COMEDE	<i>Comité Médicale pour les Exiles</i> (Medical Committee for people in Exile)
CPH	<i>Centre Provisoire d'Hébergement</i> (Temporary accommodation centre)
CROUS	<i>Centre Régional des Œuvres Universitaires et Scolaires</i> (Regional Centre for Academic Publications)
CV	<i>Curriculum Vitae</i>
DPHRS	<i>Dispositif Provisoire d'Hébergement des Réfugiés Statutaires</i> (Temporary Refugee Reception Centre)
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
ECRE	European Council on Refugees and Exiles
ELIPA	<i>Enquête Longitudinale sur l'Intégration des Primo-Arrivants</i> (Longitudinal Survey on the Integration of New Migrants)
ENIC-NARIC	European Network of Information Centres – National Academic Recognition Information Centres
ERF	European Refugee Fund
EU	European Union
EUF	<i>Entraide Universitaire Française</i>
ExCom	Executive Committee
FNARS	<i>Fédération Nationale des Associations d'Accueil et de Réinsertion Sociale</i> (National Federation of Reception and Reintegration Associations)

FTDA	France Terre d'Asile
GAS	<i>Groupe Accueil et Solidarité</i> (Reception and Solidarity Group)
HCR	<i>Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés</i> (see UNHCR)
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HR	Human Resources
INSEE	<i>Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques</i> (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies)
ISM	Inter Services Migrants
IT	Information Technology
JRS	Jesuit Refugee Service
Mediacor	<i>Cellule de Médiation, d'Accueil et d'Orientation</i>
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRG	National Reference Group
OFII	<i>Office Français de l'Immigration et de l'Intégration</i> (French Office of Immigration and Integration)
OFPRA	<i>Office Français de Protection des Réfugiés et des Apatrides</i> (French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons)
PhD	<i>Philosophiae Doctor</i> (Doctor of Philosophy)
PPM	<i>Parcours et Profils de Migrants</i> (Survey on paths and profiles of migrants)
RELOREF	<i>Rechercher un Logement pour les Réfugiés</i> (Refugees accomodation project)
RSA	<i>Revenu de Solidarité Active</i> (Active solidarity income)
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SIAO 75	<i>Service Intégré d'Accueil et d'Orientation</i> (Integrated Service of Reception and Orientation)
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (analysis)
UK	United Kingdom
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
ZEP	<i>Zone d'Education Prioritaire</i> (Priority Education Area)

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Introduction

Since 2012, the newly elected French government has insisted on the need to reform both the asylum system and integration policies in France in order to better protect and provide for the needs of asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants. In May 2013, Mr. Manuel Valls, French Minister of the Interior, announced that the government would undertake consultations with civil society actors on the asylum system, including asylum procedures as well as reception and housing conditions. The aim is to reform the French asylum system, which is widely considered to be in a state of crisis, notably with regard to the length of procedures and the non-availability of dedicated housing for a significant segment of asylum-seekers. Mr. Valls also announced his intention to reform the *Contrat d'Accueil et d'Intégration* (Reception and Integration Contract), a requirement for all migrants aiming to settle permanently in France since 2007, in order to better welcome migrants who aim to stay. The French government commissioned a report on integration in France. Mr. Thierry Tuot, State Counselor, produced a critical report on the state of integration in France (Tuot 2013). In his report, Mr. Tuot highlights the shortcomings of 30 years of French integration policies. He notably mentions the close connections between asylum and integration. Importantly, Mr. Tuot criticizes a dysfunctional asylum system that creates irregular migrants, treating asylum-seekers with a lack of respect and constituting an avoidable financial burden for the state. Against this backdrop, he advocates for a complete reform of the asylum system to ensure prompt and quality asylum decision-making and fairer treatment of asylum-seekers, thereby facilitating their integration. In such a context, the UNHCR study on refugee integration in France has clear potential to help inform debates and policy reforms.

Rationale for undertaking the study

UNHCR has been entrusted by the United Nations General Assembly with the mandate to provide international protection to refugees and, together with governments and partners, to seek permanent solutions to the problems of refugees. For the majority of refugees in Europe, local integration is the most relevant durable solution. UNHCR's interest and involvement in integration thus stems from its mandate to seek solutions; the 1951 Refugee Convention's Article 34, which encourages states to facilitate the integration and naturalization of refugees; as well as policy documents related to integration, such as UNHCR's ExCom Conclusion No. 104 on Local Integration and the 2009 note on strategic approaches for combating discrimination.

The logic of the Convention framework is that, with the passing of time, refugees should be able to enjoy a wider range of rights as their association and ties with the hosting state grow stronger. In this sense, the 1951 Convention gives refugees a solid basis on which they can progressively restore the social and economic independence needed to get on with their lives. In this regard, ExCom Conclusion No. 104 calls on states to facilitate, as appropriate, the integration of refugees and recalls that special efforts may be necessary to facilitate their integration.



While refugees within the European Union (EU) have rights commensurate with those set out in the 1951 Convention, support, information and advice is often required before refugees can integrate successfully as fully included members of society.

Many countries in Europe have in recent years been working to improve integration of third-country nationals generally. Efforts have also been made to measure both social and economic impacts of integration policies and support. Refugees, as part of this group, however have specific needs due, among other factors, particular hardships sustained in the country of origin, or during flight, their experiences of persecution or armed conflict, and the separation and loss of family which often follows as a consequence of flight. Obtaining documentation while in the country of asylum may also prove a challenge. Measuring impact of integration policies on refugees without an understanding of their particular needs may lead to misguided policy development and a lack of crucial support needed to avoid long-term dependency, marginalization and isolation of refugees, which in turn can lead to an increase in irregular movements or challenge social cohesion in the host state.

Aims of the study

The aim of this study is to review trends in development of integration indicators and consider the methods of integration evaluation and the inclusion of refugee specific data, as well as to explore specific refugee barriers or facilitators to integration.

Based on a review of literature relating to refugee integration and through dialogue with integration stakeholders and refugees, this study tests assumptions reflected in integration policy and literature about what are thought of as relevant integration indicator policy areas in the case of refugees, what is known about refugee integration based on existing literature and what are the main factors of influence in refugees' levels of "success" in those areas. Four national teams, one each in Austria, France, Ireland and Sweden, sought to explore the differences relating to integration which set refugees apart from other sectors of the migrant populations. This may include identifying additional integration indicator policy areas for refugee integration or identifying influences which are specific to refugees or more critical for refugees when compared with wider migrant integration.

The study does not aim to evaluate refugee integration, nor does it aim to evaluate policies or programming relating to integration at either national or EU level. This report is therefore not an evaluation report. Within the literature review and consultations, the study considered what approaches to integration appeared to have positive or successful outcomes, and sought to identify examples of good or interesting practice which can be considered by others. However, practices identified in this report are not the outcome of any evaluation nor are the cited examples of practice exhaustive.

Definition of integration

For the purposes of this study on refugees, integration is understood as the end product of a dynamic and multifaceted two-way process with three interrelated dimensions: a legal, an economic and a social-cultural dimension. Integration requires efforts by all parties concerned, including preparedness on the part of refugees to adapt to the host society without having to forego their own cultural identity, and a corresponding readiness on the part of host communities and public institutions to welcome refugees and meet the needs of a diverse population (UNHCR ExCom 104, 2005).

At the core of UNHCR's definition is the concept of integration as a two-way process and this is premised on "adaptation" of one party and "welcome" by the other. It does not, however, require the refugee to relinquish their cultural identity; integration therefore differs from assimilation.

Furthermore, the two-way process underlies the three specific dimensions that UNHCR emphasizes as being part of the process of refugee integration.

As a legal process, refugees are granted a range of entitlements and rights which are broadly commensurate with those enjoyed by citizens. These include freedom of movement, access to education and the labour market, access to social assistance, including health facilities, and the capacity to travel with valid travel and identity documents. Realization of family unity is another important aspect of integration. Over time the process should lead to permanent residence rights and in some cases the acquisition of citizenship in the country of asylum.

As an economic process, refugees attain a growing degree of self-reliance and become able to pursue sustainable livelihoods, thus contributing to the economic life of the host country.

As a social and cultural process whereby refugees acclimatize, and local communities accommodate refugees to enable them to live amongst or alongside the receiving population without discrimination or exploitation, and contribute actively to the social life of their country of asylum.

It is, in this sense, an interactive process involving both refugees and nationals of the receiving state as well as its institutions. The result should be a society that is both diverse and open, where people can form a community, regardless of differences (UNHCR Global Consultations 2002).

The French concept of integration

The French conception of integration bears similarities to the UNHCR's definition of integration. Subject to numerous controversies and ambiguities since the 1980s (Hessel 1988), the French concept of integration has evolved from a focus on assimilation to an understanding of integration as a two-way process between the state and the migrant wishing to settle in France (Haut Conseil à l'Intégration 2006). Currently, the French government describes integration as follows:

“ One should not view integration as a third way between assimilation and insertion, but as a specific process. This process aims to ensure that varied and differing elements take active part in national society, while still accepting the existence of cultural, social and moral specificities and agreeing that the whole of society benefits from this diversity and its complexity.”¹

The current French concept of integration insists on the rights and obligations of migrants settling into France. For the French state, the notion of contract is at the heart of integration and is embodied in the *Contrat d'Accueil et d'Intégration* (Reception and Integration Contract; CAI). Since 2007, all new migrants acquiring permanent residence permit, including refugees, have had to sign this contract (Haut Conseil à l'Intégration 2004; Costa-Lascoux 2006). The CAI requires migrants to learn the founding principles of the French republic and the values that all citizens have to respect, such as *laïcité* (secularism) and gender equality, in exchange for language courses and integration support.

According to Costa-Lascoux (2006), in addition to the notion of contract, the French integration policy is based on five other pillars, and policy has been developed to address these:

- Compensating for inequalities, such as economic or educational inequalities or inequalities relating to living conditions, through targeted programmes;
- Empowering disadvantaged, vulnerable people or people living in a precarious situation;
- Fighting discrimination;
- Encouraging active citizenship; and
- Accessing French nationality.

A recent move towards measuring integration in France

In recent years, research projects, including several EU-funded studies, have aimed to benchmark and measure integration of migrants across EU countries. Exercises have attempted to define comparable indicators assessing how integration takes place in practice in European countries (Entzinger and Biezeveld 2003; Carrera 2008; Wihtol de Wenden, Bourgoin and Salvioni 2008). In France, the *Haut Conseil à l'Intégration* (High Council for Integration) was set up in 1989 to define and give direction to France's integration policies; and in 2007 it introduced the concept of multidimensional integration, thereby advocating for the definition of socio-economic indicators on integration (Haut Conseil à l'Intégration 2007). This move towards evaluating integration has moved alongside, and been partly influenced by, the EU's decision at the Groningen conference in 2004 to put together indicators aimed

¹ “Il faut concevoir l'intégration non comme une sorte de voie moyenne entre l'assimilation et l'insertion, mais comme un processus spécifique : par ce processus, il s'agit de susciter la participation active à la société nationale d'éléments variés et différents, tout en acceptant la subsistance de spécificités culturelles, sociales et morales et en tenant pour vrai que l'ensemble s'enrichit de cette variété, de cette complexité.”

at evaluating integration policies (Département des Statistiques des Etudes et de la Documentation 2010). In France the most recent effort to monitor integration in a quantifiable manner is two-fold.

First, the French Ministry of Interior was tasked with defining and producing a set of indicators, the *Tableau de bord de l'intégration* (performance indicators), in 2010. This new initiative responds to the European Commission's wish to evaluate integration policies and their results in four main areas – employment, education/schooling, social inclusion and active citizenship – across the 27 EU Member States. The *Tableau de bord de l'intégration* has been developed to monitor migrants' performances over time compared to the non-migrant French population in specific areas² which are perceived as having an influence on integration.

The main policy areas considered by the French Ministry of Interior are as follows:

- Economic integration;
- Housing;
- Education/schooling;
- Access to healthcare and well-being;
- Active citizenship;
- Demographic indicators;
- Acceptance by French society.

Within each of these areas, a set of indicators has been defined in France in order to assess migrants' progress. There are a total of 36 indicators across the seven areas mentioned above (see annex).

The *Tableau de Bord de l'Intégration* (Département des Statistiques des Etudes et de la Documentation 2010) shows that the situation of new migrants is much more difficult than that of French nationals. Migrants fare less well than the non-migrant French population on most indicators, except with regard to access to healthcare. However, the study shows that the migrant's situation improves over time. After five years of living in France, unemployment rates decrease by half, and twice as many migrants live in social housing, as opposed to temporary housing, which is a crucial step in the process of residential integration. However, schooling of migrant children and employment, even of those born in France to migrant families, remain of particular concern over time. While the indicators developed in the *Tableau de bord* provide snapshot information on migrants' degree of integration, they fail to assess refugee-specific performances against other groups of migrants or French-born populations.

The second effort to quantify migrant integration in France relates to the *Enquête Longitudinale sur l'Intégration des Primo-Arrivants* (Longitudinal Survey on the Integration of New Migrants), also known as the ELIPA survey, which started in 2010. Its main aim is to assess integration pathways of migrants³ receiving long-term residency documents and to assess the French reception and integration programmes. A representative sample of 6,000 new migrants was surveyed in 2010 and 2011 and will be surveyed again in 2013. Among the 6,000 surveyed participants, approximately 10 per cent are refugees. The results were presented in several publications (Breem 2011; Garcin 2011; Régnard 2011; Jourdan 2012b, 2012a). This survey, however, only considers migrants' early integration.

² The document refers to housing, employment etc. as areas (*domaines* in French). Within each area precise indicators, such as unemployment rate for instance, have been defined.

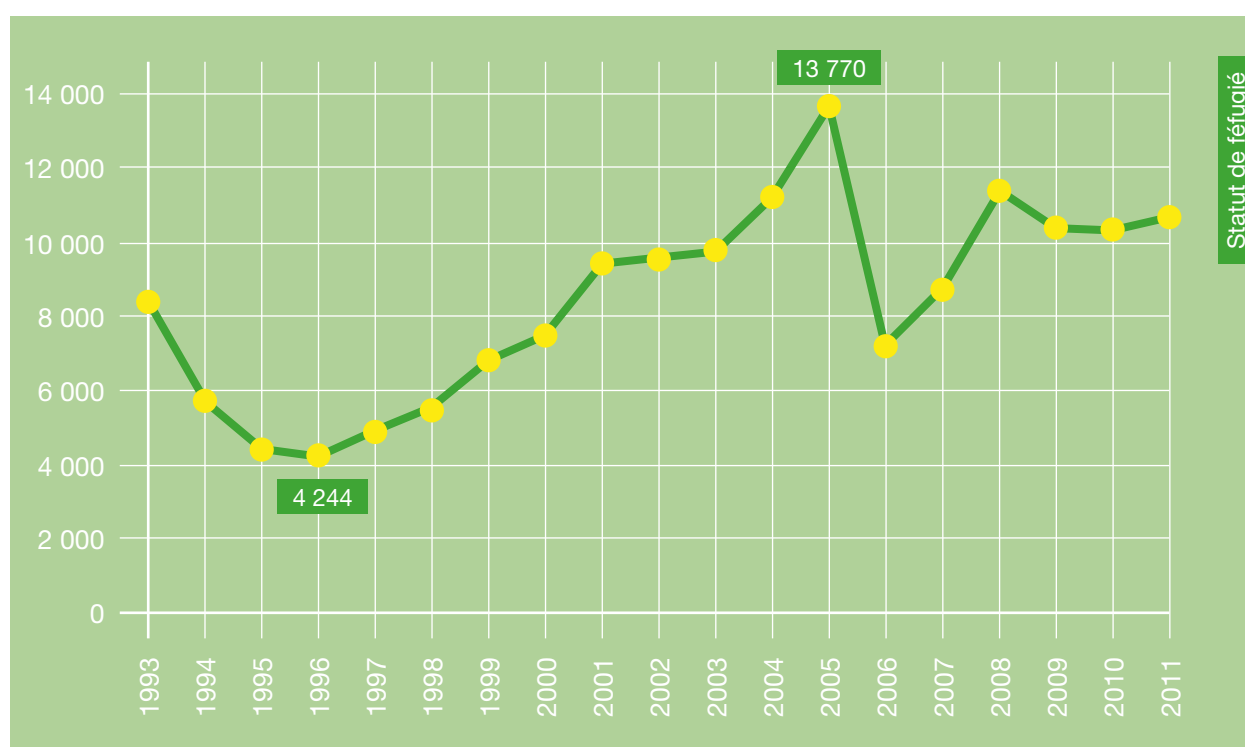
³ The survey only considers migrants who have recently acquired long-term leave to remain.

Migrant and refugee population in France

France is the oldest country of immigration in Europe (De Wenden 2012) and is famous for having welcomed “political” refugees from the 19th century onwards. This history of migration has long been documented in the literature (Blanc-Chaléard 2001; Noiriel 2002, 2004; Lequin 2006).

During the post-Second World War period of reconstruction and labour migration, asylum flows to France remained marginal compared to the high numbers of labour migrants and the families joining them. For example, between 1954 and 1974, over two million labour migrants and one million of their family members were counted by the National Immigration Office, while only a few thousand refugees were recorded (Guillon 1992). It should be noted, however, that until 1974, people in need of protection aiming to leave their country were able to resort to other migration channels, such as labour migration. From 1974 onwards, following the oil crisis, the French government’s zero labour migration policy left protection-eligible persons no other option than applying for asylum. Since the 1980s, asylum claims in France have been oscillating between 20,000 and 53,000 per year. Recognition rates have been varying between 4,000 and 13,000 per year.

Graph 1: Refugee status recognition (including subsidiary protection) per year, 1993/2011



Source: OFPRA annual reports

Refugees constitute a very small subset of the non-French immigrant population in France. According to the *Office Français de Protection des Réfugiés et des Apatrides* (OFPRA 2013), there were approximately 176,900 beneficiaries of international protection in France in 2012, the majority (162,800) were refugees. This figure does not account for deceased, naturalized or departed refugees or those who have renounced their status. In comparison there are 3.7 million EU and non-EU foreigners temporarily or permanently residing in France (INSEE 2012).

In 2010, more than 194,000 migrants obtained a first residence permit in France, and 5.9 per cent of these migrants were beneficiaries of international protection. The table below shows the main categories of migrants having obtained a first residence permit that year:

Table 1: Migrants obtaining a first residence permit by motive in 2010 (INSEE 2012)

Permit by motive	%
Labour migrants	9,3
Family members of French nationals	26,8
Family reunification	8,2
Other family migrants	9,8
Students	30,9
Refugees and stateless persons	5,0
Subsidiary protection	0,9
Other humanitarian grounds	3,3
Other migrants	5,8
Total	100

Statistics on *Contrat d'Accueil et d'Intégration* (CAI) signatories provide further information on the share of refugees among all signatories, which, contrary to the previous statistics, do not include students who are not signatories of the CAI. Beneficiaries of international protection represent between seven and 11 per cent of migrants signing the CAI on a given year (Régnard 2006, 2011) and family migrants remain the main group of signatories, well ahead of labour migrants, which only represented 9 per cent of CAI signatories in 2009 (Régnard 2011), as shown in the table below.

Table 2: Signatories of the CAI in 2009 according to their reason for migration (in percentage)

Permit by motive	%
Family migration including: migrants coming to join their French partner	74 38 of all signatories
Refugees	11
Work migration	9
Regularization	6

The refugee population in France furthermore differs substantially from the migrant population in terms of origin. Most non-European migration to France, both labour migration post-World War II and family members coming through family reunification, has close connections to France's colonial past. The main non-European countries of origin of foreigners in France are Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia: all former French colonies or protectorates. In comparison, the refugee population has fewer links to France's past. As a matter of example, in 2012, the main countries of origin of persons applying for asylum in France were Russia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kosovo and Sri Lanka. It has to be said, however, that a constant and substantial flow of asylum-seekers originate from former French colonies or protectorates, such as Mali, Guinea, Chad, Algeria or Haiti.

In 2012, the five main countries of origin of the 176,900 beneficiaries of protection were Sri Lanka (23,225 refugees), Cambodia (12,666 refugees), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (12,588), Russia (11,438) and Turkey (10,887) (Office Français de Protection des Réfugiés et Apatrides 2013). Besides Cambodia, a former French protectorate, and the DRC, a former Belgian colony, the main countries of origin have no common past with French-speaking countries. Such lack of previous connections to France has implications with regard to knowledge of the French language and culture for beneficiaries of protection. According to OFPRA, 42 per cent of the 176,900 beneficiaries of protection in 2012 were women and the average age was 43.4 years. OFPRA estimates that 50.8 per cent of the overall population of beneficiaries of protection was married (OFPRA 2013).

Integration goals regarding refugees

In France, refugee integration and migrant integration partly overlap, but also substantially differ.

Responsibility for integration comes under the remit of the Ministry of the Interior. The most recent approach to integration in France has at its heart the *Contrat d'Accueil et d'Intégration* (Reception and Integration Contract, CAI) for all new migrants aiming to settle permanently in France, including refugees. Provision and delivery of the CAI is coordinated by the *Office Français de l'Immigration et de l'Intégration* (French Office of Immigration and Integration, OFII). OFII received 11.6 million Euro to deliver the CAI in 2013. Like any other new migrant aiming to permanently settle in France, refugees are expected to sign the CAI, which has been mandatory since 2007 and includes:

- Mandatory training on civic education (six hours);
- Mandatory training on life in France (between one and six hours depending on individual needs);
- A skills assessment carried out by private providers on behalf of OFII (up to three hours); and
- Up to 400 hours of free French language training for new migrants whose level of French is deemed too low, which shall enable beneficiaries to reach the A1 or A2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

In addition, French integration policies specifically aim to tackle difficulties faced by migrants who have long settled in France, in particular female and elderly migrants. To that end, the French state has granted 38.5 million Euro in 2013, mostly to national or local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) working with long-term migrants with the aim to provide language courses, further access to education or employment and specifically help female and elderly migrants. This also funds integration programmes coordinated at the regional level. These programmes are co-funded with the European Integration Fund. Refugees, however, are not directly targeted by the second scheme.

Upon obtaining refugee status, refugees are “mainstreamed into French society.” That is, they benefit from the same entitlements as any other French citizen or permanently residing foreign residents. These include:

- The right to seek employment and social housing;
- Access to the French healthcare system;
- Access to social benefits in the same way as nationals, including the *Revenu de Solidarité Active* (Active Solidarity Income, RSA) which financially supports unemployed or under-employed individuals;
- The right to apply for special family reunification without conditions of income, housing or duration of stay; and
- The right to apply for French nationality without conditions of length of stay.

The three latter entitlements do not apply to other new migrants settling permanently in France. Before applying for family reunification, for instance, other migrants have to respect conditions of length of stay of 18 months and meet income and housing requirements. With regard to social benefits, other new migrants can only apply for the RSA (income support) after five years of residing in France.

The French government has, however, acknowledged the difficulty for refugees to be directly mainstreamed into society. Such recognition has taken shape in the form of a legal provision in 2007. Article L711-2 of the *Code de l'entrée et du séjour des étrangers et du droit d'asile* (CESEDA) states that “any foreigner having obtained refugee status [...] and who signed the *Contrat d'Accueil et d'Intégration* shall benefit from personalized support to access employment and housing.” In practice, the French state provides for specific integration programmes for refugees, which funds temporary housing, as well as, to a lesser extent, employment and housing support for refugees.⁴ These programmes are co-funded with the European Refugee Fund (ERF). Until 2010, integration funds for refugees were attached to programmes focusing on the integration of legally residing foreigners. However, the French government decided to separate those two actions in order to “distinguish classic legal migration from the specific situation of foreigners who risk to be persecuted in their country and come to seek refuge in France” (Bernard-Reymond 2010).

This approach results in a very specific set of rights and entitlements for refugees, which differs from that of other new migrants settling permanently in France. In the above sense, French law offers refugees a somewhat favorable position in comparison to other “new migrants”. This suggests that the French government acknowledges refugees’ specific reasons for entering and remaining in France in a context where their countries of origin are unable or unwilling to protect them.

Structure of the report

Refugee rights are clearly set out by French law and substantially differ from other migrants’ rights. However, as this report will show, it is important to look at refugee experiences of integration in France beyond the legal framework. In particular, the literature and the National Reference Group convened for the purpose of this study identified six main policy areas relevant for refugee integration in France, which largely relate to France’s stated integration policy areas, as developed in the *Tableau de bord de l’Intégration*:

- Housing;
- Employment;
- Access to rights ;
- Health;
- Social connections;
- Family reunification.

This report first looks into the specificities of the refugee population in France based on available statistical data and the literature with regard to those six specific areas. The review of statistical data, previously published literature and reports helps to identify the currently understood key facilitators and barriers to refugee integration, looking more specifically at the identified areas. The empirical part then summarizes stakeholders’ and refugees’ perspectives on barriers and facilitators to refugee integration, and identifies examples of practices relating to each of these six main areas. Finally, based on the findings of the study, the conclusion looks into additional indicators of refugee integration, which, if included in future research, might help shed light on crucial factors impacting refugee integration.

⁴ In 2013, the French state dedicated 14.4 million Euro to integration programmes for refugees. The majority, 12.2 million Euro, was awarded to temporary housing, and the remaining 2.2 million Euro to employment and housing support for refugees.

Methodology

Introduction

This national report forms part of an overall project which itself consisted of two components. One was implemented in four Western European countries (Austria, France, Ireland and Sweden), the other in four Central European countries (Bulgaria, Poland, Romania and Slovakia). The Western Europe study began on 1 September 2012 with consultations taking place in each country until March 2013. The overall duration of the project is from 1 August 2012 to 31 December 2013.

Participating countries

UNHCR has identified challenges to the integration of refugees in all EU Member States. Understanding the particular barriers and opportunities for refugee integration in each of the national contexts is therefore relevant. As such, UNHCR would ideally have provided a comprehensive review of refugee integration in all EU Member States. However, time and resource constraints dictated that a selection of Member States was made to participate in this project. Furthermore, experiences from working with refugees in most EU Member States showed there are sufficient similarities in the barriers and facilitators impacting refugee integration to allow for a more selective approach. The four project countries were selected in order to include countries with different experiences of refugee flows but where commonalities can nevertheless be observed, and where some integration support is already in place and some evaluation has taken place. All four countries have substantial experience receiving asylum-seekers and with integration of refugees recognized in the national asylum systems. Nevertheless differences among the four countries in relation to refugee flows, language, integration strategies and integration support allow for a broader perspective to be presented.

Gathering data

Information was gathered with two approaches: desk research and consultation. In the consultation phase, the focus was on seeking adult refugee respondents (over eighteen years) who had come through the asylum system. Those with subsidiary protection status were not actively sought, but were included in some interviews and issues specific to this group are set out where relevant. Those who were resettled refugees were not actively sought as participants because of the often very different experience of this group, both in reception and integration phases, compared with those entering through the asylum system. In the desk research phase, literature and statistical data rarely discerned between resettled refugees and those who came through the asylum system, or between refugees and the wider migrant population. Therefore the report specifies this only where it is known. The language of the primary and secondary data was primarily French. Thus for the purpose of the report, stakeholder consultations, interviews but also partly policy documents and academic research have been summarized in English.

National Reference Group

A National Reference Group (NRG) was set up to help guide the study. It was composed of representatives from the three main refugee NGOs (Cimade, Forum Réfugiés and France Terre d'Asile), representatives from the Asylum Service and the Statistics Division, both from the Ministry of Interior, and an academic specialized in migration. Members of the NRG were highly instrumental in identifying the key areas impacting on refugee integration in France and in linking up the national project researcher with researchers, relevant stakeholders, that is actors working in the field of refugee integration or coming across refugees as part of their work, and refugees. For all specific stakeholder meetings and field visits, the project team was able to rely on members' suggestions for contacts to be made with institutions, NGOs and refugee groups.

Desk research

The desk research drew on relevant available literature on integration of refugees to take stock of what has been written on the subject in France and where the potential gaps may lay. Where relevant, and where no refugee specific literature was available, literature on integration of migrants/persons with migration background was reviewed. Materials on the ways in which integration generally is being evaluated and measured were reviewed and included material by academics and civil society, such as reports, studies and articles, policy documents as well as existing data and statistics. Desk research included searches on-line as well as library searches. The desk research provided an overview of existing information, aimed at identifying trends, policy and presence (or not) of refugee specific material. It formed the basis for the subsequent steps of the research.

For the purpose of the study, over 80 sources were reviewed and analyzed with the majority of them explicitly mentioning refugees. This included academic, institutional and programming sources, whether published, available online or obtained through private communication. It has to be said, however, that contrary to the UK, where refugee integration has long constituted a common field of research, academic research on refugee integration is more limited in France (exceptions include Tcholakova (2012) or Ducheny (2008)). In the absence of widespread academic or institutional research, most publications come from NGOs and are therefore programmatic in nature. Compiling all these publications has allowed us to get a clearer picture of refugee integration in France, which individual studies fail to provide.

It should be noted that access to research material on refugee integration can be challenging. A number of studies are unpublished and thus difficult to access by researchers as well as the wider public.

Consultations

This report is based on three types of consultations conducted between October 2012 and February 2013 among the following: NRGs, as explained above, stakeholders, and refugees and members of the receiving society.

For the purpose of the project, consultations took place with over 120 stakeholders and 68 refugees.

STAKEHOLDERS' CONSULTATIONS

Six stakeholder meetings on housing, health, access to rights, employment, family reunification and social connections took place in the UNHCR office in Paris. Between eight and 16 participants took part in every meeting.⁵ Each participant was selected to represent his or her organization for its expertise on the subject matter. A step-by-step approach was taken to select stakeholders. NRG members, UNHCR staff and the literature were key sources of information to identify stakeholders, who were mainly from NGOs. Stakeholders identified for thematic meetings were subsequently asked for input on other relevant stakeholders that should be invited, more specifically less easily identifiable institutional partners.

In all meetings, participants were asked to undertake a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) relating to refugees' access to housing, health, rights, employment, family reunification and social connections, respectively. This was followed by an analysis of good practices and a discussion on recommendations.

While, overall, there was a very high engagement and good support to the study from stakeholders, one limitation of stakeholder meetings related to the absence of generalist institutions, such as the employment agency or the health agency. Representatives were invited from these agencies but declined to attend. This is thought to be due to the relative marginality of beneficiaries of international protection (176,900 in France in 2012) as compared to other precarious populations. However, whenever possible, bilateral conversations took place with these institutions. By comparison, institutions with a special focus on refugees or migrants, such as OFII, the Visa Office or OFPRA took part in meetings.

REFUGEE CONSULTATIONS

The constitution of the cohort of refugee respondents followed a logic of "diversity" rather than aiming to be representative of the whole population of refugees in France. During the interviews, respondents were able to share their positive and negative experiences looking specifically into the six main areas of inquiry, their perspectives on integration in France and recommendations for further action. Such inquiry resulted in qualitatively rich interviews with a diverse cross section of the refugee population.

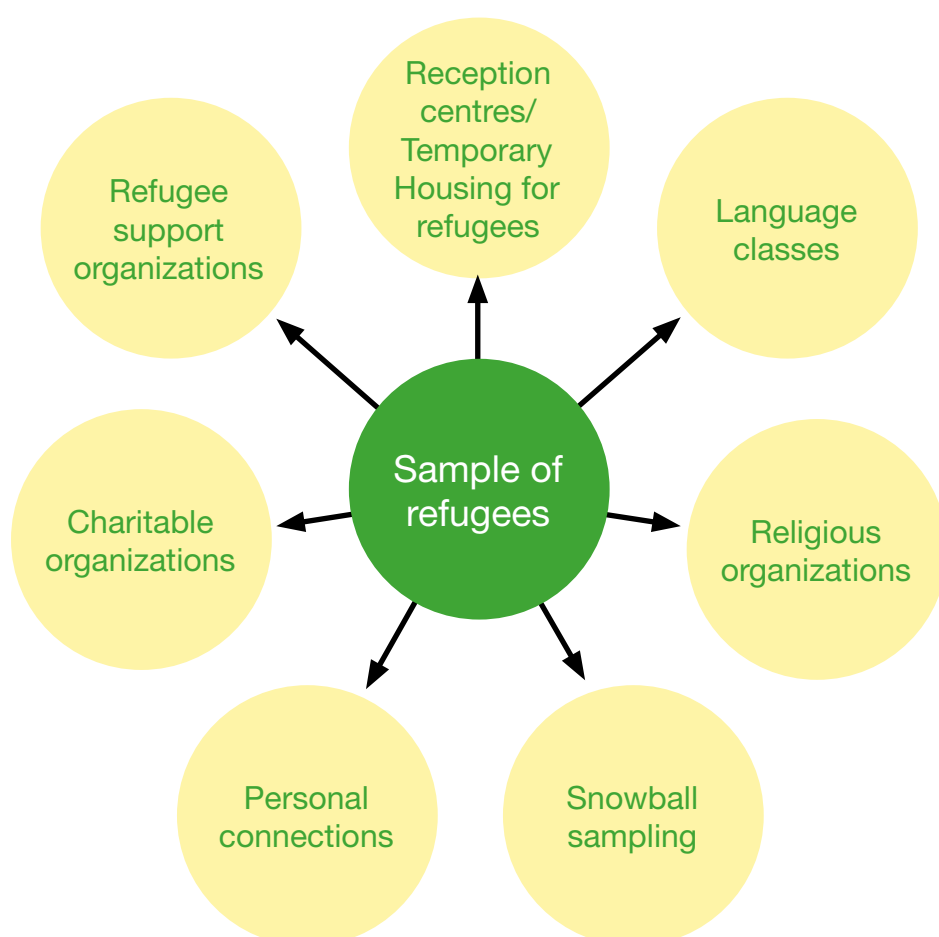
⁵ A list of organizations who took part in the stakeholder meetings is provided in the annex.

The objective was to meet with refugees in different contexts, aiming in particular to incorporate both refugees supported and unsupported by organizations. This required diversifying sources of identification of refugees. By definition refugees become part of French society when they obtain refugee status. In their activities, whether looking for a job, housing or learning French, refugees do not have to mention their status, which results in their general “invisibility”. As a result, the most effective measures to identify participants were found by relying on introductions from refugee-specific organizations in charge of housing and supporting refugees either upon recognition of status or afterwards. Schools or institutes teaching French were also good outreach avenues.

The study also aimed to incorporate refugees living in different geographical contexts, taking into account that the Ile de France region hosts close to 50 per cent of the refugee population in France. As a result most interviews took place in the Ile de France region, with 75 per cent of all respondents based in this region. However, refugees were also interviewed in Ille et Vilaine (Brittany), Rhône (Rhône-Alpes) and Haut-Rhin (Alsace). All three departments are very different structurally, socio-economically and ethnically, and they welcome refugees from different geographic origins. Regarding refugees more specifically, the Rhône-Alpes region has hosted first and foremost refugees from Eastern Europe and the Balkan (Tcholakova, 2012), while the Ile de France region has been hosting comparatively more Asian and African asylum-seekers.

In practice the sample was accessed in the following ways:

Graph 3: Sources of refugee identification



In most instances, contact was made with potential respondents by an organization’s employee or volunteer acting as “broker” between respondents and the researcher by briefly explaining the research aims. If these people consented to be interviewed, the organization sent their contact details to the researcher, who subsequently called each person to further explain the study and arrange a time to meet. At the meeting, informed consent was sought orally from each participant.

In total 68 refugees were met for the purpose of the study, either individually or in groups. Group interviews ranged from two respondents (mostly couples) to eight respondents. Refugees under 18 were not included in the sample.

Table 3: Profile of beneficiaries of international protection interviewed

Refugees interviewed	
GENDER	
Female	23
Male	45
AGE	
Aged 17-34	29
Aged 35-54	38
Aged 55+	1
REGION OF ORIGIN	
Maghreb	5
French-speaking Sub-Saharan Africa	22
Sub-Saharan Africa (Other)	8
Near and Middle East	7
Asia	14
Commonwealth of Independent States (Former Soviet Republics)	10
Latin America	2
LOCATION IN FRANCE	
Paris and Ile de France	51
Rhône (South East)	8
Ille et Vilaine (North West)	4
Haut-Rhin (North East)	4
Moselle (North East)	1
FAMILY SITUATION	
No spouse or children	27
Spouse and/or children outside of France or deceased/disappeared	15
Spouse and/or children in France	26

Bias/limitations

LANGUAGE

Most refugees interviewed were either French speakers or English speakers. Refugees had very different levels of French: while some could provide structured answers, others struggled to build a sentence. In some cases friends of participants or NGO employees acted as interpreters in Singhalese, Arabic, Russian and Dari. Similarly, during group discussions some participants interpreted for others. However, the limited access to interpreters meant that it was more difficult to undertake interviews with those refugees unable to rely on friends or family to translate.

RELATIVE UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF UNSUPPORTED REFUGEES

Since most participants were identified through organizations, the majority confirmed having been supported by NGOs in one way or another at some point during their stay in France. Only three refugees explained having never been helped by an NGO specialized in supporting asylum-seekers or refugees. However, thanks to the diversity of organizations involved in the project (as shown in Graph 2), refugees with very different levels of support were interviewed. Some only received help during their asylum claims; others were housed in reception centres upon recognition of status, while others benefited from one-off support on family reunification issues or access to nationality.

OVER-REPRESENTATION OF REFUGEES BASED IN ILE DE FRANCE

Most of the study took place in the Ile de France region, which results in an over-representation of participants based in that region. This reflects the fact that over 50 per cent of all refugees in France live in the Ile de France region. However, to provide balance and to represent regional differences, three visits took place in the Provinces (Ille et Vilaine, Rhône and Haut-Rhin), during which refugees were interviewed. When a field visit was not possible, interviews took place over the phone.

Analysis

Qualitative research and analysis methods were employed. These consist of a review of the relevant literature, secondary data analysis, and interpretation of the outcomes of consultations with refugees and stakeholder groups. The empirical thematic analysis of refugee consultations and stakeholder meetings was conducted in line with the initial research questions and provided the basis for the report's recommendations. This means that relevant themes or emerging patterns within the material have been identified, examined and reviewed in relation to the research questions.

Ethics

In research involving interviewing refugees it must be borne in mind that ethical considerations are relevant. Not only may experiences of trauma and insecurity have characterized an individual refugee's flight and journey, but such experiences often continue into the settlement context and may influence the individual's ability and desire to integrate. These experiences may also affect refugees' willingness and ability to participate in research.

UNHCR's guidance on ethics in relation to refugee engagement does not relate specifically to research of this kind; however a set of project ethical guidelines were followed by each team in the Western Europe component. The project's ethical guidelines reflected the role of the researcher as one of respect for persons, beneficence, and equity, and followed principles of transparency, confidentiality, voluntariness and avoidance of undue influence. Regarding refugee respondents, original names have not been used and some contexts were changed in order to ensure anonymity.

Finally, it should be noted that this study was not intended to be representative of all EU Member States. Nor was it intended to be a quantitative study providing extensive statistical data. Instead, this is a qualitative study incorporating consultations across a wide spectrum of those involved in determining policy and support for the integration of refugees, those delivering programmes and initiatives, and refugees themselves. The value of this approach lies in bringing together each of these elements in a way that allows each to speak to the other, enabling the conceptualization of a way forward for future research on integration of refugees in the EU. This approach also allows for a crystallization of some of the barriers and facilitators to refugee integration commonly experienced in the EU and to highlight good practices which have worked well to overcome barriers.

Statistics and literature review

Refugee integration is only considered at the margins in most mainstream publications or statistics on migrant integration in France. In the field of asylum research, attention is mostly focused on the asylum process, including the decision-making process, and its aftermath for those whose asylum claim has been rejected. There is, however, little research on those who are successful. As a result, integration of refugees remains largely understudied in French research.

Until recently there was no reliable data on refugees in France. Some studies included refugee surveys (Observatoire de l'Intégration des Réfugiés Statutaires 2006) but without incorporating a representative sample. However, as explained in the introduction, the recently undertaken ELIPA survey has started to fill the gap in statistical data on refugee integration. Launched in 2010, the survey consists of a longitudinal survey on integration of migrants having acquired permanent leave to remain in France, which included 600 refugees, representing approximately 10 per cent of all survey respondents. As a result, the review of statistical data in this chapter is mainly based on the ELIPA survey from 2010 and 2011. However, this survey only considers refugees' early integration and does not look into long-term integration issues. However, some references are also made to other surveys when applicable. In particular, the 2006 *Parcours et Profils de Migrants* (PPM) survey on migrants who had recently obtained a residence permit, including beneficiaries of international protection, is repeatedly mentioned in this section.

Two researchers have devoted their PhD theses to refugee integration matters: Marie Ducheny's thesis focuses on refugee housing (2008) and Albena Tcholakova's thesis focuses on refugees' access to employment and their careers (2012). In their theses, both Ducheny and Tcholakova highlight the lack of research on refugee integration in France and attribute it to researchers' preconceived ideas on the apparently "smooth process" that refugees face upon recognition of status. As argued by Tcholakova (2012) such lack of research on refugee integration in France starkly contrasts with the UK, where refugee integration has long constituted a common field of research (Bloch 2002; Ager and Strang 2004a, 2004b; Bloch 2004; Ager and Strang 2008) and has attracted the UK government's interest, commissioning research to design policies and programmes.

French NGOs are an important source of research on refugee integration matters. France Terre d'Asile (FTDA) in particular has played an important role in monitoring, evaluating and reflecting on their programmes and practices regarding refugees. For instance, the European Refugee Fund granted some funding to FTDA to form a think-tank on refugee integration to document integration programmes and actions and their impact on refugees (Mlati 2004a; Observatoire de l'Intégration des Réfugiés Statutaires 2006, 2008, 2010).

In the following chapter, statistics and the literature will be reviewed in relation to seven main areas on which relevant refugee-specific data was found in the literature:

- Housing;
- Employment;
- Health;
- Family reunification;
- Social integration;
- Language;
- Active citizenship.

Housing

It is agreed upon by both policymakers and NGOs that housing constitutes a critical factor facilitating or forming barriers to refugee integration. As suggested by Ager and Strang (2004, 15), “housing structures much of refugees’ experience of integration.” Statistical data and the literature in France confirm Ager and Strang’s assertion.

Statistical data on housing from the PPM and the ELIPA surveys suggests that refugees often have a more chaotic residential history than other migrants, which is characterized by instability and precariousness (Bèque 2007). Only migrants formerly living in an irregular situation have experienced such similarly chaotic residential history (Bèque 2007). According to Jourdan (2012a), refugees are less likely to access good housing than migrants coming through family reunification. A quarter of the refugees sampled through ELIPA lived in transitory housing – hostels, reception centres or other centres run by associations – compared to only 8 per cent of other sampled migrants. Refugees living in reception centres for asylum-seekers are entitled by law to stay in the centre for six months after recognition of status. The survey shows that less than 50 per cent of refugees lived in independent housing, that is renting or owning a home, which is considerably lower than other sampled migrants (61 per cent overall) (Jourdan 2012a). The other quarter of refugees lived with friends or family. Another publication shows that refugees are more likely to have moved house within the year of the ELIPA survey than any other sampled migrants (Garcin 2011). Similarly, the proportion of refugees in emergency housing in the first year of the ELIPA survey is higher than that of other sampled migrants.

Overall, the ELIPA survey shows that refugees tend to be less satisfied with their housing than other new migrants (57 per cent of refugees are not satisfied with their housing as opposed to 36 per cent for other new migrants) (Bouvier 2011). Drawing upon the *Parcours et Profils de Migrants* survey, Berger (2008) depicts a similarly difficult situation for refugees. In particular, Berger shows that refugees are more likely to experience overcrowded housing than other sampled migrants. The ELIPA survey finds that women are generally better housed than men with identical motives of migrating to France. In the case of refugees, this might be attributed to women’s priority ranking for temporary housing during the asylum claim.

Some factors have been identified as having an influence on refugees' access to housing. Drawing on the *Parcours et Profils de Migrants* survey, Berger argues that the limited network on which refugees can rely to find housing (61 per cent of refugees use networks as opposed to 86 per cent for other new migrants) is one of the main reasons for their poor housing conditions (Berger 2008). According to Berger (2008, 11) another factor influencing access to independent housing relates to the fact that refugees are more likely to stay in reception centres or hostels following recognition of status, commonly considered transitory housing.

The qualitative literature highlights further barriers to housing faced by refugees upon recognition of status.

The main structural problem relates to a context of limited housing opportunities in France. The French housing crisis applies to a very wide group of people residing throughout France. Approximately 3 million people are considered to be "badly housed", which includes a large proportion of migrants. According to the *Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques*, migrant families are three times more likely to live in bad quality housing than French born families (Département des Statistiques des Etudes et de la Documentation 2010). All "badly housed" households are competing to access social housing. Migrant populations in economically precarious situations resolve their own housing crises by accessing segments of the housing markets that are more readily available in "sensitive urban areas" (*Zones Urbaines Sensibles*). This has resulted in a social and ethnic concentration of migrants in poorer and more highly dense areas.

Another structural problem in France relates to the regional discrepancy between densely populated areas, such as Ile de France and regions that are suffering from rural desertification (Sadik and Jourdan 2008). In France, the majority of refugees, approximately 50 per cent, are located in Ile de France, which is also where the largest migrant population is situated (Office Français de Protection des Réfugiés et Apatrides 2012). Such over-representation results from the region's attractiveness in terms of employment, emergency housing, and NGO support (Observatoire de l'Intégration des Réfugiés Statutaires 2008). However, it is also the region that suffers most from a shortage in social housing. In this context, many refugees in Ile de France are often only able to access emergency housing (Mohseni 2001; Mlati 2004a). This is widely viewed as further delaying refugees' stability and hence their integration. A survey undertaken by the *Observatoire de l'Intégration des Réfugiés Statutaires* (2006) has shown that only 7 per cent of refugees supported by *France Terre d'Asile* were able to rent a flat autonomously, while the majority had to rely on emergency housing or personal networks. Yet, refugees favor the Ile de France region for the job opportunities it provides.

The literature shows that, while expected to access housing through similar channels as French nationals, refugees' limitations in successfully finding appropriate housing are due to specific disadvantages linked to their condition as refugees: limited knowledge of French and of the sociocultural codes in France, lack of personal networks, and urgency of finding housing upon recognition of status.

The urgency of finding housing coincides with the time refugees are actually permitted to start working (Mlati and Antelme 2009) and refugees' success in accessing housing for the first time suffers first and foremost from the absence of secure employment (Blanco and Barou 2011). This is compounded by their limited social support networks through which to locate housing opportunities.

Given the housing crisis, people aiming to access private accommodation need to prove that they are employed through a *Contrat à Durée Indéterminée* (contract with indeterminate length equivalent to a quasi-permanent position, CDI). In the absence of a CDI they should at least have a steady income (Mateman 1999), be able to provide a six-month deposit and have a warranty (Observatoire de l'Intégration des Réfugiés Statutaires 2006). These conditions are viewed as particularly restrictive for refugees, who, by law, cannot work during their asylum claim. In the absence of stable employment, family and friends become crucial to secure rental payment and act as guarantors. The requirements of the private rental market and the absence of social support networks therefore constitute reasons for refugees' inability to move on to long-term housing (Breem 2011).

Another issue preventing long-term housing acquisition relates to landlords' lack of knowledge and potential preconceptions of the refugee population. Previous research has shown that landlords tend to view refugees as a risky population and, as a result, put stringent conditions on renting flats to

refugees (Mlati 2004a; Blanco and Barou 2011). Perceptions of refugees as a “risky” group mainly relates to landlords’ fear regarding refugees’ inability to pay rent (Blanco and Barou 2011).

Research undertaken by NGOs shows that housing support programmes for refugees help to counterbalance the negative effects of refugees’ lack of knowledge on housing, poor language skills and landlords’ preconceptions (Ebermeyer 2009). In this context, NGOs become “rental mediators” between refugees and landlords (Ducheny 2008). However, studies highlight the risk that external support may prevent refugees from looking for housing autonomously (Bourgeois and Helly 2000; Ebermeyer 2009) with the risk of increasing dependency (Ducheny 2008).

➤ Gaps in the Literature

Difficulties linked to acquiring the French language have not been considered in the literature. Similarly, studies on housing generally do not discuss the issue of family reunification and its impact on accessing housing. Also, few studies consider the link between the experience of flight and refugees’ approach to housing except for Blanco and Barou’s study on the mental health of refugees (2011). Based on the ELIPA survey’s results suggesting that women are comparatively better housed than men, it would be worth investigating further the different challenges faced by different demographic groups. Finally, few studies consider the discrepancy between refugees temporarily housed within the *Dispositif National d’Accueil* (National Reception Scheme) in *Centres Provisoires d’Hébergement* (centres which aims to help refugees find housing and employment) and those not being housed in such centres when looking for housing.

Employment

Studies suggest that employment constitutes one of the biggest issues of concern for refugees (Blanco and Barou 2011), and the one potentially bringing most discontent for refugees (Bourgeois and Helly 2000). Albena Tcholakova’s PhD thesis on refugees’ employment in France represents the only piece of academic research on the issue (Tcholakova 2012). Spire (2004) also looked into refugees and employment during the “*Trente Glorieuses*”, the economically favorable post-war period (1945-1973) in France. Other studies looking into refugees’ integration on the job market in France were mostly carried out by NGOs (Mohseni 2001; Mlati 2004b; Observatoire de l’Intégration des Réfugiés Statutaires 2006, 2008, 2010; Blanco and Barou 2011).

There are, in addition, several statistical studies on migrants’ access to employment, which do not, however, specifically mention refugees (Département des Statistiques des Etudes et de la Documentation 2010; Haut Conseil à l’Intégration 2012). These indicate that migrants are more likely than nationals to be unemployed, be in precarious or unstable employment, and experience downward professional mobility. Migrants are more likely than nationals to experience underemployment, that is, to be employed in part-time positions (Haut Conseil à l’Intégration 2012).

The only surveys specifically mentioning refugees are the 2006 *Parcours et Profils de Migrants* (PPM) survey and the 2010 ELIPA survey. A publication based on the PPM survey shows that only 34 per cent of surveyed refugees were employed (Direction de l’animation de la recherche des études et des statistiques 2011). Only migrants coming through family reunification, principally women, had a lower employment rate (only 17 per cent employed). Proving their desire to work, almost half (48 per cent) of all sampled refugees were looking for a job at the time of the survey. The author suggests that such situation is due to refugees’ less developed social support networks. For instance, only 41 per cent of refugees declared knowing people in France. As a result, refugees are more likely to rely solely on institutional networks. The above statistics shows that refugees face particular constraints in accessing employment and generally fare worse than other migrants, who already face more barriers than French citizens. According to the ELIPA survey, 14 per cent of refugees hold a Further or Higher Education degree. While male refugees have education levels that are close to those of other migrants

surveyed in the ELIPA survey, female refugees are less likely to hold a higher education degree: 11 per cent as opposed to 25 per cent for other female migrants in the ELIPA survey (Domergue 2012).

Statistics and the literature suggest that refugees face two main barriers when applying for work: their level of education and/or recognition of degrees and/or experience, and their limited knowledge of French (Haut Conseil à l'Intégration 2012). The survey of resettled refugees refers to the lack of language skills, the lack of knowledge of the French system and the problem of degree equivalence as central reasons for refugees' limited access to employment (Breem 2011).

Degree recognition is a particular problem for refugees in comparison to work-related migrants, who tend to be recruited before migrating based on their pre-existing degree or who are recruited into non-qualified positions. As a result, refugees often end up being recruited into positions they feel do not match their studies or experience (ECRE 1999), resulting in a downward professional mobility (ECRE 1999; Mohseni 2001; Ebermeyer 2009; Blanco and Barou 2011). It has been suggested that such downgrading of qualifications has a strong impact on refugees' mental health and self-esteem (Tcholakova 2012). Language represents another barrier to accessing employment, as a good knowledge of French is generally required for most positions, including those positions not requiring qualifications (Descolonges and Laurens 2008).

The lack of professional network, refugees' limited knowledge of the French labour market and refugee health represent further barriers towards refugee employment (Descolonges and Laurens 2008; Observatoire de l'Intégration des Réfugiés Statutaires 2006). In particular, the trauma experienced by a refugee in his or her country of origin and during the flight can reduce the ability to apply for a job (Mlati 2004b). The lengthy asylum claim process associated with the inability to work during that period is mentioned as having an aggravating effect on refugees' mental health (Mlati 2004b; Haut Conseil à l'Intégration 2012). Finally, the lack of knowledge of the institutional job search support services further reduces the chances of refugees accessing employment (Mohseni 2001; Mlati 2004b; Observatoire de l'Intégration des Réfugiés Statutaires 2010).

Discrimination and stigmatization by employers have also been mentioned in the literature as obstacles to refugee integration. Some studies highlighted refugees' feeling of being discriminated against, which, in their opinion, acted as a barrier to employment (Ebermeyer 2009; Observatoire de l'Intégration des Réfugiés Statutaires 2006; Observatoire de l'Intégration des Réfugiés 2010). According to Ebermeyer (2009), such discrimination is felt more strongly by refugees with regard to employment than with regard to housing.

Faced with several barriers to employment refugees are often reduced to accepting "any job" (Bourgeois and Helly 2000: 116) in order to bring money home (Blanco and Barou 2011) even though the position bears no relation to previous employment or study (Bourgeois and Helly 2000; Mohseni 2001). Urgency to find employment upon recognition of status is compounded by the sudden pressure to secure long-term housing and the desire to finally earn a living after having been unable to work during their asylum process (Blanco and Barou 2011). To find employment rapidly, refugees might come to rely on ethnic networks (Ebermeyer 2009); however this is not extensively discussed in the literature.

➤ Gaps in the literature

Few publications discuss the extent to which the lack of French language is a handicap to finding employment. Language is generally assumed to be a handicap but this assertion is not directly supported by refugees' opinions or experiences. Few studies discuss ethnic networks and how these help refugees access employment albeit in the informal economy. Similarly, studies generally do not differentiate between different demographic groups when looking at barriers to employment. Finally, few studies consider the differences between refugees temporarily housed within the *Dispositif National d'Accueil* (National Reception Scheme) in *Centres Provisoires d'Hébergement* (whose mission is to help refugees find housing and employment) and those not being housed in such centres when looking for employment.

Health

Most research on health looks at migrants' access to healthcare and their well-being, without considering refugees specifically (Mizrahi and Mizrahi 2000; Patureau and Comiti 2005; Berchet and Jusot 2012).

The ELIPA survey undertaken since 2010 has not yet published results on surveyed migrants' health and well-being. However, some interesting data can be extracted from the surveys carried out by OFII from 2004 until 2009 on the basis of medical visits which take place upon entrance into a reception centre for asylum-seekers or refugees and at the time of exit from the centre (Wluczka et al. 2009). Another dataset derives from the compulsory medical visits for migrants who have recently obtained long-term leave to remain (Wluczka et al. 2009). This second survey is, however, less reliable as data collection is only based on healthcare professionals' goodwill and refugees represent only 3.7 per cent of the sample (Wluczka et al. 2009), which means that refugee answers are not examined in the survey.

The survey on asylum-seekers and refugees staying in reception centres shows that the need for psychological or psychiatric support is high for asylum-seekers and refugees (Wluczka et al. 2009). The survey also shows that geographic origin has an important impact on pathologies observed (Wluczka et al. 2009). While different groups of refugees have higher prevalence of some health problems, common conditions include high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart diseases. The survey suggests furthermore that access to healthcare and health insurance is a particular challenge for some asylum-seekers and refugees in some departments (Wluczka et al. 2009).

The Comède, an NGO aiming to facilitate access to healthcare for migrants, has been at the forefront of activist research on migrant access to health, highlighting barriers and suggesting potential solutions. Specific research on refugee health relates more specifically to victims of torture and trauma (Centre Primo Levi 2012) or to their mental health state (Vignal and Geny-Benkorichi 2012). Some studies specifically look into the impact of migration and of the asylum process on migrants or refugees' well-being (Guillou 2005; Blanco and Barou 2011; Vignal and Geny-Benkorichi 2012).

General barriers shared with French nationals relate to the insufficient availability of General Practitioners (GPs), transport problems and the complexity of accessing healthcare, in particular of securing and maintaining health insurance (Cediey, Jacob and Legba 2012). The housing situation also has an impact on health in two ways. First, inadequate housing can negatively affect one's physical health and mental health. Second, refugees housed in densely populated areas might only have access to oversubscribed healthcare services, a problem commonly experienced by other vulnerable groups.

Migrant-specific barriers to healthcare and preventative care relate to the lack of social network as well as the lack of information on the specificities of the healthcare system and their entitlements (Lamour 1994). Research suggests that specific pathologies such as tuberculosis, HIV, work-related problems and gynecological problems result from the socio-economic situation of migrants rather than resulting from migration experiences (Patureau and Comiti 2005). Language is another problem faced by migrants relating to healthcare (Observatoire de l'Intégration des Réfugiés Statutaires 2010) as migrants often have difficulty communicating with healthcare practitioners and rarely have access to an interpreter.

Refugee-specific issues impacting health, in particular mental health, relate to the hardship that refugees have been through: the violence experienced in their country of origin and/or during flight, the uprooting experience and separation from the family, the length of the asylum procedure associated with the inability to work or access training, the "shock" of receiving a positive reply to their asylum claim and the requirement to find employment and housing quickly upon recognition (Guillou 2005; Le Bris 2012; Vignal and Geny-Benkorichi 2012). The torture experienced by numerous refugees creates anguish and depression which increases refugees' feelings of disorientation and presents challenges to their identity (Lamour 1994). In addition, separation from the family and the process of family reunification can be particularly upsetting for refugees (Rezai and Wihl de Wenden 1998; Blanco and Barou 2011), but refugees' mental health in return improves upon completion of the family reunification process (Blanco and Barou 2011). Another refugee-specific issue relates to administrative hurdles refugees face in accessing healthcare. Delays incurred by OFPRA in providing

refugees with identity documents hamper their access to free healthcare as such documents are required by the state administration to register refugees for a medical cover (Lamour 1994). This is compounded by refugees' lack of knowledge of the healthcare system and of their entitlements (Guillou 2005). Another barrier relates to some GPs and hospitals' illegal refusal to treat migrants and refugees relying on the state medical cover because in some instances GPs and hospitals have had to advance the funds to treat patients who have this type of medical cover (Lamour 1994). In some other cases such refusals are only due to preconceptions relating to lack of punctuality and fears of losing patients. Finally, the literature suggests the sometimes difficult access to specialist medical care to treat certain pathologies, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, or to access specialized reparative surgery in the case of victims of female genital mutilation (Freedman 2009).

With regard to refugee women's access to healthcare, research carried out by the Comède highlights that women are over-represented among patients receiving psychological treatment. (Aïdan and Djordjevic, 2007) A study carried out between 2004 and 2010 confirms that the prevalence rate of trauma was much higher for women than men: 188 for 1000 for women compared to 82 for 1000 for men.

The literature, however, seems to suggest that refugees are generally satisfied with the healthcare system in France (Bourgeois and Helly 2000; Observatoire de l'Intégration des Réfugiés Statutaires 2010). French healthcare practitioners are viewed by refugees as highly competent and access to healthcare is deemed easy (Blanco and Barou 2011).

Social connections

Compared to the UK (Ager and Strang 2004a; Atfield, Brahmbhatt and O'Toole 2007; Dwyer 2008; Losi and Strang 2008; Stewart 2009), relatively little research looks into local integration and social connections of refugees and migrants in France. Some researchers have focused on specific communities and how they integrated locally. Recent surveys provide, however, interesting data on refugee networks and friendships.

The *Parcours et Profils de Migrants* survey from 2006 suggests that refugees rely on a very limited social network (Bèque 2007). Bèque (2007) shows that refugees are much more socially isolated and much less likely to have connections, whether family connections (45 per cent as opposed to minimum 70 per cent for other surveyed migrants), fellow nationals (35 per cent as opposed to at least 48 per cent for other surveyed migrants), or French nationals (12 per cent as opposed to at least 23 per cent for other surveyed migrants). The fact that only 12 per cent of the sampled refugees have connections to French nationals shows that refugees' "social bridges" are very limited (Ager and Strang 2004b).

Results from the ELIPA survey (2010) help explain the reasons for such limited connections. The ELIPA survey similarly shows that refugees are over-represented among surveyed migrants having no friendship networks upon arrival (Domergue 2013). Domergue suggests that such isolation results from refugees not deliberately choosing to settle in France. In addition, asylum-seekers have an erratic residential history in France, resulting in high mobility, which significantly constrains refugees' subsequent abilities to build friendship networks. Domergue suggests that refugees' lack of networks is further compounded by their low employment rate and their limited ability to speak French. However, Domergue indicates that the duration of the asylum process – three years on average – generally enables refugees to develop friendship networks, typically from their community or among those that speak their language. The ELIPA survey also suggests that refugees are less likely than other sampled migrants to marry French nationals (Domergue 2011). Within ELIPA, the specific survey of resettled refugees shows that resettled refugees also rely on very limited networks and face challenges making new friends (Breem 2011).

France Terre d'Asile dedicated a qualitative study to local refugee integration in some French Departments (Observatoire de l'Intégration des Réfugiés Statutaires 2008). The France Terre d'Asile's study is original to the extent that it focuses on refugees' relationships with their national or religious community, with school parents and neighbours. The study suggests that refugees have limited social networks and that their friends or acquaintances originate principally from the time spent in a

reception centre, school or church. In that sense, some particular situations can have a favourable impact on social integration.

Only a minority of asylum-seekers are housed in a reception centre, which enables asylum-seekers first and foremost to have temporary accommodation during the asylum process. Refugees also receive support to prepare documents and submit their asylum claim as well as organize their lives after the asylum procedure. The added advantage of reception centres, as suggested by interviewed refugees (Observatoire de l'Intégration des Réfugiés Statutaires 2008), is that refugees meet asylum-seekers and other refugees from different countries with whom they build connections and through whom they might potentially access housing or employment. Accommodation in reception centres therefore seems to support social integration better than other more precarious accommodation during the asylum procedure.

For families with school-aged children, the school constitutes an added opportunity to meet the local community. This applies more particularly to families with young children who are brought to, and collected from, school as this gives parents an opportunity to meet at the school. In some instances schools enable parents to come and take part in activities at school, which furthers connections. In this way, family unity can be a catalyst for social integration.

The question as to whether national or religious networks have a favourable impact on migrant integration is debated in France at a political level, without relying on clear large-scale research-based evidence. Some studies have looked into specific communities in France, such as Sri Lankan Tamils (Etiemble 2003, 2004; Goreau-Ponceaud 2009), Lebanese (Abdulkarim 1992, 1993, 1995), Chinese (Beaujouan 2005), Vietnamese and Cambodian (Billion 2001; Morillon 2001; Blanc 2006) or Kurdish peoples (Mohseni 2002). These studies insist on the important role played by the refugees' communities of origin in helping refugees to settle locally. This applies especially for large communities or those that are highly concentrated in some specific areas, such as the Tamils in the northern part of Paris (Etiemble 2004; Dequize 2007). Researchers on the Tamil community argue that the Tamils arriving in the 1990s were able to rely on highly organized community organizations providing them with temporary accommodation and support with their asylum claim. Abdulkarim (1992, 1995) similarly argues that Lebanese arriving in France did not have to rely on French institutional networks as they could rely on very strong Lebanese associations responding to their needs.

🏠 Gaps in the literature

Few studies have asked refugees about their friends, family members and community members and who they feel has helped them most to settle in the receiving country. The current project helps to fill that gap as refugee networks have been discussed at length by respondents during individual and group interviews. Few studies look at specific demographic groups and their ability to integrate socially. Finally, few studies consider the discrepancy between refugees temporarily housed within the *Dispositif National d'Accueil* (National Reception Scheme) in *Centres Provisoires d'Accueil* (centres aiming to help refugees find housing and employment) and those not being housed in such centres in terms of making friends.

Family reunification

Studies indicate that family reunification is the first project that refugees undertake upon recognition of status (Rezai and Wihtol de Wenden 1998; Mlati and Duarte 2005; Belaïsch and Petersell 2010; Blanco and Barou 2011).

The literature shows that the approach to family reunification for refugees has changed in recent years. The state administration used to be very reactive for refugees wishing to reunify with their families (Belaïsch and Petersell 2010). According to Belaïsch and Petersell (2010), this changed in 2002, and the process has now significantly slowed down, marked by a context of suspicion towards refugees and their families. The report by Cimade (2010) lists several examples of refugees initially being denied the right to reunite with their families because they were unable to prove family links or such proof was deemed forged by French authorities (Belaïsch and Petersell 2010).

Studies furthermore emphasize the detrimental impact of lengthy family reunification procedures on refugee integration and suggest that refugees that are unable to reunify with their families generally have difficulty thinking of their future (Mlati and Duarte 2005). Moreover, studies show the positive impact of family reunification once the family has joined the refugee (Blanco and Barou 2011; Huddleston and Dag Tjaden 2012). The Migration Policy Group survey (2012) suggests that family reunification not only has a positive impact on family life (90 per cent), but also enables migrants and refugees to feel more settled (80 per cent), though it does not particularly help with finding employment. Children in particular further facilitate refugees' integration by building more social bridges (Blanco and Barou 2011).

However, family reunification leads in some instances to changes in family structure and dynamics, which can create tensions (Mlati and Duarte 2005; Rezai and Wihtol de Wenden 1998). These publications argue that, during the phase of separation, each family member takes on a new role, with the mother often taking on greater responsibilities. As a result, family members take time adjusting to the father being back in the family (Mlati and Duarte 2005; Rezai and Wihtol de Wenden 1998). The authors argue that this can result at times in family implosion and that reduced length of family reunification procedures could prevent such intra-family misunderstandings.

Language

Both the ELIPA and the PPM surveys suggest that refugees are the furthest away from mastering the French language from all surveyed migrants (Bèque 2007; Le Quentrec-Creven 2011). Data indicates that language improves with time for migrants in the ELIPA survey. However, the ELIPA survey suggests that it is not the case for refugees, whose level of French generally fails to improve during the three years of the asylum process. Only 59 per cent of refugees self-declared speaking French well or very well compared to 69 per cent for formerly irregular migrants and 86 per cent for other migrants having stayed over 10 years in France. Some of the reasons brought forward by ELIPA researchers to explain differences between migrants sampled in the ELIPA survey include that first, refugees tend to come from non-French-speaking countries and results show that refugees who practiced French during childhood or at school are more likely to speak French well (Le Quentrec-Creven 2011). Another explanation can be found in refugees' generally low level of education (Bouvier 2011), and researchers suggest that this issue should be further investigated. Finally, the ELIPA survey indicates that limited knowledge of French results in limited relationships with French nationals, which in return constrains their ability to improve in French (Domergue 2013). It could be assumed that asylum-seekers' inability to work or access language training during the asylum process could be another reason for refugees' limited knowledge of the French language.

Active citizenship

There is little data on refugees' participation in political activities, voting patterns or participation in associations. A 2008 survey looked into foreigners' access to French nationality (Enel and Gazave 2008). This survey shows that one of the main reasons why refugees want to become French is in recognition of France's support and provision of protection at a time of danger for their lives and livelihoods. Furthermore, by becoming French, refugees can envisage going back to their countries of origin as French nationals, with the security of knowing they can rely on the French consulate or embassy in case of a problem (Enel and Gazave 2008).

Other qualitative studies that focused on refugees' opinions and experiences also mentioned refugees' desire to honor France's support and provision of protection, as well as their subsequent ability to travel back to their country of origin as French nationals (Morillon 2001; Enel and Gazave 2008; Blanco and Barou 2011). Morillon's study points at the paradoxical situation in which refugees find themselves upon becoming French: on the one hand happy to become French, it also represents a difficult time for them as they have to renounce their nationality, which they are particularly attached to (Morillon 2001). Some studies argue that language acts as a barrier to accessing citizenship (Mohseni 2001).

Research shows that refugees' decision to access French nationality provides them with the subsequent ability to access positions reserved for French nationals and to counter discrimination based on nationality (Morillon 2001; Observatoire de l'Intégration des Réfugiés Statutaires 2006). Research suggests that refugees who have become French often still resent being viewed as foreigners by French society (Blanco and Barou 2011).

➤ Gaps in the literature

There are few studies on migrant and refugee interest in French politics, voting patterns and participation in associations.

Conclusion

The literature on refugee integration in France is diverse and originates from different sources (government, NGOs, academia). There are, however, clear gaps in the literature. These raise a few questions such as:

- What is the impact of the French government's reception and housing programme for asylum-seekers and refugees? In particular, what are the differences between those who benefit from temporary housing and support (about 21,400 places for asylum-seekers and close to 1,100 places for refugees) as opposed to those who do not benefit from such support?
- How is the integration process experienced by different groups of refugees, depending on their demographic and socio-economic characteristics?
- What is the role of the national or religious community in the settlement process?
- Which policies or programmes could best help solve some of the main problems faced by refugees?
- More broadly, how do refugees feel about integrating in France?
- Which indicators of integration should be defined to better take into account refugee specific experiences of integration?

This ERF study, by interviewing refugees and professionals, helps answer some of the above-mentioned questions.

Stakeholder and refugee consultations

The following analysis follows a thematic structure. The main areas discussed below – housing, employment, health, access to rights, support networks and family reunification – were identified by the National Reference Group for their influence on refugee integration. Corresponding to these specific areas, six stakeholder meetings took place during the study, coupled with visits of refugee housing and support projects, social enterprises employing refugees and bilateral meetings. Stakeholder meetings provided a forum for discussion based on stakeholders' professional experience. In addition, 68 refugees accepted to be interviewed to share their own experiences of integrating in France. Such interviews gave the unique opportunity to complement stakeholder meetings with lived experiences directly affecting respondents. The following analysis is therefore based on evidence gathered in these stakeholder and refugee meetings.

This chapter begins with refugees' understandings of integration and how they make sense of it with respect to their own experiences. The chapter continues by reporting on the six identified areas of integration with sub-sections exploring what impacts and influences integration – either negatively or positively – within these areas. While it aims to take into account the experiences of different socio-demographic groups of refugees, the general and qualitative nature of the enquiry limits the ability to draw conclusions across groups.

Refugees' understandings of integration

When asked about their understanding of integration, refugees generally differentiated between what integration is and what facilitates integration for them.

In many cases, respondents articulated a theoretical understanding of integration. A number of respondents considered that respecting and abiding by French laws and values were key to integration in France. In some instances, respondents linked their own definition of integration to the one developed as part of the French *Contrat d'Accueil et d'Intégration* (CAI) that all new long-term migrants have had to sign since 2007, suggesting the Contrat has had some impact on their own thinking.

“What is important towards integration is to know French laws and respect them. That's what we learnt at the CAI training.”

T., female Congolese refugee

For respondents, knowing and obeying French laws was based on the prerequisite of full equality of rights between French citizens and refugees. Furthermore, knowing French laws and their entitlements was viewed by refugees as a shield against potential discretionary decisions by French institutions.



“ I don’t know yet all the rights and laws in France. As a foreigner, you need to learn the laws and rights to be protected, otherwise it’s difficult. If you need something, you can explain your rights, that’s integration.”

I., male Chechen refugee

However, respondents were aware that respecting French laws and values did not in itself lead to their integration. They felt that some key integration facilitators were required to ensure a successful integration process. This included mastering the French language, having a job and proper housing and feeling at home with family and friends. Both stakeholders and respondents emphasized the close connections, or interdependency, between the different areas furthering integration, in particular employment, housing and health. All participants indicated that, depending on experiences, this interdependency could turn into either a virtuous or a vicious circle, if integration in one of these areas failed.

“ They tell me ‘you’ll get housing if you find work’ but it’s very hard to find work.”

X., female Ethiopian refugee

Respondents were also aware of the time required to integrate.

“ I feel integrated but not 100 per cent, but hopefully it will come. I will be able to say that I have integrated when I have found work and can feel good.”

R., male Rwandese refugee

It is significant to note that the great majority of respondents, as the person above, did not feel 100 per cent integrated in France, regardless of the time they had spent in France. This was often due to an absence of one of the key aspects listed in the figure above. Respondents were generally very demanding of themselves, suggesting they could only feel integrated if they were able to do as well as a “fully integrated French person” with a job, housing, a family.

As compared to housing or employment, French nationality was rarely mentioned as a direct facilitator for integration and respondents who had naturalized did not suggest that it had helped them integrate. In some cases, however, respondents in the process of naturalizing hoped that it would help them integrate professionally, by enabling them to set up a company or to access positions that are reserved for French nationals. In other cases, respondents wanted to naturalize in order to go back to their country of origin safely. For others, it was one way to protect themselves against potential arbitrary decisions on residence permits’ renewals by the French state.

“ I feel integrated in France, yes and no. I will feel really integrated when I have French nationality. I will be fully French. Here my papers are French; I have a birth certificate by OFPRA, but that's not yet enough.”

M., male Togolese refugee

For this respondent, French nationality was the only way to make sure he could not become the “victim” of a change of mind of the French government compromising his ability to renew his 10-year residence permit.

The duration of the asylum process acted in many ways against integration in respondents' opinions, and had all the more impact the longer the asylum process lasted.

“ I don't want to be dramatic, I haven't experienced integration, but I have experienced disintegration. As an asylum-seeker, I have been made to understand that I don't have the right to work, cannot move, don't have money. I have been made aware that I was nothing.”

A., male Algerian refugee

The long-lasting impact of the near-destitution experienced during the asylum process generally took time to fade away. Also, the period following the recognition of status in many ways preconditioned respondents' approaches to their future lives, in particular with regard to access to housing and employment. This phase was, according to respondents, full of ambivalence. On the one hand, being granted refugee status was often described as a “rebirth” after what had been a very uncertain period during the asylum process and other respondents expressed the relief they felt at being granted refugee status.

“ I got my status in 2011. It's like you are imprisoned and at once you are liberated. For me, it was a rebirth. First thing I thought of was, I want to keep studying, to go forward and not look backwards.”

Z., male Algerian refugee

However, the period of relief post-recognition of status could quickly recede into disorientation and at times frustration when confronted with several hurdles in accessing rights, employment or housing.

“ I don't feel integrated at all in France. Yes, I view France as a country of asylum, but I feel rejected. It's very difficult to integrate into society and why are we not supported into finding housing, employment or to learn French?”

I., male Palestinian refugee

Numerous refugees compared the phase post-recognition of status with the start of a never-ending obstacle course that prevented them from ever settling down and focusing on integrating.

“ Before, when I didn't have papers, I had plenty of problems, but actually since my status, problems have doubled. Morally and physically, it's harder. In your mind, you are appeased, but everything takes place at the same time.”

F., male Afghan refugee

In some cases, stakeholders reported witnessing a process of “psychic decompensation” post-recognition of status resulting at times in refugees' inability to project or build a plan for the future. Several stakeholders described a feeling of apathy and a lack of desire following the status, which they attributed to the traumatizing effect of the asylum claim.

“ For people who are in CADA, they have waited so long that they are having a hard time projecting into the future and 'we don't know what to do.' The delay of the asylum claim is a barrier to integration.”

Social worker, CADA Rennes

These different aspects will be further discussed in the thematic analysis.

Housing

- 25 per cent of refugees sampled in the ELIPA survey live in transitory housing (hostels, reception centres).
- Less than 50 per cent of refugees live in independent housing (compared to 61 per cent for all sampled migrants).
- Refugees are more likely to have changed housing within the year between the first and second ELIPA wave than any other new migrant.
- Refugees are generally less satisfied with their housing than other new migrants.

The fact that refugees obtain a 10-year residence permit was generally perceived by housing stakeholders as an integration facilitator, as it ascertains refugees' stability vis-à-vis landlords and housing associations. Thanks to their newly acquired status, refugees were able to access the mainstream housing system available to nationals. By comparison, the one-year leave to remain awarded to subsidiary protection beneficiaries was viewed as more of a handicap in securing housing.

Despite this apparent advantage, statistics suggest that comparatively fewer beneficiaries of international protection are able to access independent housing in the year or two post-recognition of status than other new migrants. There is no data comparing refugees to those with subsidiary protection, however. The evidence gathered in this study shows this is due to a mix of issues relating to the limited opportunities to find housing as a result of both difficult access to private housing and shortage of social housing, the urgency refugees are confronted with post-recognition of status, and their lack of secure income. This causes particular instability for all refugees unable to find independent housing.

When asked about the main problems they faced post-recognition of status, respondents overwhelmingly reported issues relating to securing housing and employment. Unable to meet the requirements for private renting, such as an indefinite work contract and a deposit, refugees rely heavily on the availability of social housing. However, due to over-demand, applicants are often not provided with social housing for long periods of time even when they meet all relevant criteria. In this context, respondents expressed particular distress at being powerless in securing housing.

“The main problem is housing. I will soon get work, I know my own ability and I will find a proper job soon. But for housing I can't do anything, it's different from work.”

D., male Tibetan refugee

Like any other applicants for social housing, refugees have to fulfill certain requirements of income. This further emphasizes the close connections between housing and employment. While it is commonly agreed among stakeholders that a steady income will contribute to securing appropriate and stable housing, refugees are generally confronted with a vicious circle: a steady income can secure housing but finding employment without a permanent residence is difficult. The urgency to find housing experienced by refugees forces refugees to accept any position providing a regular income, notwithstanding their own qualifications or experience, so as to accelerate the process of finding housing.

Practice example

NGOs have noted the above barriers to refugee housing and in some departments this has led to improved practices. As such some local authorities (departments) have included refugees in the priority group to access housing. In the Maine et Loire, Reloref (FTDA) has secured an agreement with the prefecture, keeping 80 flats per year for refugees. In the Rhône department, refugees supported by Accelair are able to access housing within nine months (compared to 44 months for social housing applicants). Disparities among departments remain a challenge.

It should be noted that the strong focus on housing issues in this study was largely conditioned by the over-representation in the sample of refugees based in the Ile de France region (75 per cent of all respondents), where the housing shortage is particularly pronounced. By comparison, Blanco and Barou's report (2011) on the Rhône-Alpes region suggests that housing is less of a concern than employment for refugees. Similarly, respondents from the region in this study were generally satisfied with their housing situation and the stability it gave them to find employment.

Refugees' housing situation was also largely influenced by how long after recognition of status the interview took place. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the closer to the recognition of status, the more likely refugees were to be in reception centres or emergency shelters, temporary housing, substandard housing or staying with family or friends. By comparison, respondents were more likely to have obtained social housing if their status dated back a few years. The situation was different outside of the Ile de France region, however, where refugees were generally able to access social housing within a year of recognition of status.

Whether or not refugees were supported in finding housing had a strong impact on their housing experience. Disparities were highly pronounced between recognized refugees housed in reception centres during or after their asylum process and those not benefiting from such support. Overall there are approximately 21,400 places in asylum-seekers' reception centres and 1,083 places in refugee reception centres.⁶ By comparison, there were over 57,000 asylum-seekers in 2011, and 10,700 applicants were recognized as refugees. A shortfall of around 44,000 places therefore exists on a given year, leaving approximately two-thirds without a place in a centre. For the approximately 30 per cent of asylum-seekers housed in reception centres, the time spent there enables them to rest and to focus on the asylum claim, as explained by a Cada worker in Rennes.

“ In the CADA, it's different from being outside. Residents don't have to worry about emergency housing. It gives them the opportunity to calm down and to find shelter. They have the opportunity to focus on the asylum claim. It gives them some moral comfort, and they can work on their claim.”

Social worker, Cada Rennes

Not only do asylum-seekers housed in reception centres get a place to stay, they also benefit from individual support with their asylum-claim provided by social workers, which refugees outside reception centres cannot rely on to a similar extent. Figures show that asylum-seekers housed in reception centres are twice more likely to obtain refugee status than asylum-seekers outside of reception centres (France Terre d'Asile 2013).

⁶ The French government recently announced the creation of an additional 4,000 slots in asylum-seekers' reception centres to reduce the pressure.

Practice example

The gap between refugees in reception centres and those outside reception centres is high, as refugees housed in reception centres have a place to stay and benefit from support with the asylum claim. However, some exceptions do prevail in specific departments where all refugees are being supported upon recognition of status, notwithstanding their housing conditions. In the Rhône department, *Accélair*, a program coordinated by *Forum Réfugiés*, supports all refugees living in or outside reception centres with finding housing. This requires close partnership with local institutions and NGOs to ensure full coverage of all recognized refugees.

Refugees in reception centres are required to leave within six months post-recognition of status. Such urgency often prevents securing of appropriate long-term stable housing. Social workers thus tend to favor transitory housing that still ensures quick departure from the reception centres, such as France Terre d'Asile's *Dispositif Provisoire d'Hébergement des Réfugiés Statutaires* (DPHRS), Forum Réfugiés' Cada-IR or relay-housing, while enabling refugees to work on securing employment. In other cases, no solution is found and refugees have to find substandard accommodation paid for with their benefits.

The six-month deadline for leaving the reception centres or temporary housing is a source of intense stress for refugees, and it constrains their ability to focus on finding employment and project themselves into the future:

“ Here with the CAAR, I'm entitled to six months, renewable, once. And I keep asking myself, '...what if I haven't found housing by then?' ”

A., male Congolese refugee

Practice example

Different organizations have focused on developing temporary housing for refugees in order to ensure a better rotation system in reception centres and provide some temporary relief for refugees without housing support.

Some examples:

- France Terre d'Asile's DPHRS offers refugees the opportunity to live in shared accommodation with other refugee families for a duration of six months, renewable. This is coupled with social and housing support to find long-term housing. In 2011, 424 persons benefited from such support.
- The *Comité d'Aide aux Réfugiés* (CAAR) in Bois-Colombes offers nine refugee families the opportunity to stay in transitory housing for six months provided that they contribute to paying rent (20 per cent of their income).
- The *Groupe Accueil et Solidarité* (GAS) in Villejuif offers 20 temporary flats for refugee families for a duration of one year, renewable.

Support in the process of securing stable housing has several advantages. First, as explained by stakeholders, service providers are able to act as mediators between landlords and refugees. Stakeholders described such mediation as enabling refugees to better understand the reality of the housing market in France, while landlords get to know refugees' profiles and lose some of the fears relating to refugees' inability to pay rent. Such support was strongly acknowledged by refugees.

“ At the CPH, what is good is that they help you to find housing. If you find work, they work with the landlord to help you find housing.”

D., male Rwandese refugee

Practice example

The two largest refugee organizations in France, Forum Réfugiés and France Terre d'Asile, have both set up large-scale programmes with the aim to sensitize landlords to refugee issues. [Accélair](#) (More info on [Accélair](#)) organizes four meetings per year with landlords and housing associations in the Rhône department. Reloref (More info on [Reloref](#)) a France Terre d'Asile project, aims to sensitize private landlords to ensure refugees have better access to the private renting market.

Solibail, launched in 2008 in Ile de France, aims to ensure that landlords receive a monthly rent even when renting to socially disadvantaged households. The flat is rented to an NGO rather than an individual. The tenant pays the NGO 25 per cent of his/her income, excluding benefits. The rest is paid through donation from the government. (More info on www.solibail.fr)

Several organizations resort to a system of *bail glissant*, which can be translated as “rolling lease.” The objective is to enable disadvantaged households to initially become subtenants of a flat with the aim of later rolling the lease so they become tenants. The NGO first signs the lease with the landlord but also signs a sublease with a refugee family. This programme is based on the NGO, which is in a position to pay rent on a monthly basis, trusting the household to become financially autonomous.

Service Locatif Plus: France Terre d'Asile's Reloref project takes care of the insurance to cover renting risks on behalf of refugees for a year, while sensitizing them to rights and responsibilities as tenants.

By contrast, unsupported refugees – that is, refugees neither housed in reception centres nor supported by specialized social workers – generally felt hopeless and isolated and strongly resented such lack of support.

“ The biggest problem is housing. There are many reception centres around Paris, but I stand no chance because I'm not being helped by an organization.”

I., male Palestinian refugee

Several refugees turned to generalist social workers employed by cities or departments to help them with housing. However, respondents reported several negative encounters, which both respondents and stakeholders attributed to generalist social workers' lack of knowledge on refugee entitlements.

Individual refugees without a family were the most at risk to experience an erratic residential history as they are not considered a priority group for reception centres. For some respondents, this resulted in extreme instability.

“ I'm here since the end of August, but before that from January to August. I have just been going from shelter to shelter.”

A., male Congolese refugee

Unsupported respondents reported having experienced homelessness, slept in emergency shelters or relied on third persons to host them after being recognized as refugees. Such instability strongly impacted refugees' early integration post-recognition of status. One traumatizing experience for several respondents related to having to stay in emergency shelters among highly marginalized people, with whom they felt they had nothing in common.

“ It's not easy because there are drunk people, beggars, it's not easy to stay there, it doesn't smell good. I don't want to go back there.”

D., male Guinean refugee

Several single respondents highlighted the cycle of dependency and the lack of autonomy imposed by their housing situation. Having to rely on family, friends or third persons, respondents reported feeling a burden for their hosts and highlighted the situation of instability in which they had been placed.

“ It will change everything when I have housing. I will be independent and autonomous. It's not the same when you are at friends'. I have been at a friend's place for six months, it's too much, really, I don't feel comfortable.”

S., male Algerian refugee

“ I'm not staying at my friend's place anymore because his wife is coming back so there is no more room. So he introduced me to a friend, where I can stay until the end of January and I need to pay 150 Euro. But the problem is that the man is coming back every evening at one in the morning and I need to wait for him outside until he comes back.”

D., male Guinean refugee

Some respondents also reported having experienced abuse at the hand of their hosts, encompassing notable harassment, having to pay large amounts of money for rent or hosts withholding important correspondence. To get out of such ad hoc housing arrangements, some respondents felt that the only solution, in the absence of support, was to resort to fraud to secure housing, as explained by this refugee.

“ And the problem is that when you don't have work, you don't have housing. You have to prove that you earn three times the amount of the rent. It's minimum 600 Euro. So I went round the system because I was forced to. I have a friend who has a company and he produced a fake contract with the perfect salary and a salary sheet!”

Families in hostels represented another area of concern. Many families with children do not manage to get a place in a CADA even though CADA technically accept by way of prioritizing families with children, together with single mothers with children, formerly unaccompanied minors, and medical cases. The *Coordination de l'accueil des familles demandeuses d'asile* - CAFDA – has worked since 2000 towards remedying the shortcomings of the French National Reception Scheme (*dispositif national d'accueil*) for asylum-seekers, which leaves several thousand asylum-seekers without accommodation. The CAFDA offers families with children the opportunity to be supported and have accommodation, generally in hostels. As a result, these families remain in hostels for the whole duration of the asylum process and several months, at times years, post-recognition of status. Generally unable to stay in the same hostel throughout, respondents reported having to move from hostel to hostel during the months or years after obtaining status, as exemplified by the following quotes. Respondents emphasized the barrier to integration created by their housing situation and the extra impact it had on their family.

“ It's difficult to integrate when you keep on changing hostels. We have done 12 hostels in four years [post-recognition of status], that's definitely not stabilizing. It's too difficult for children at school. They calm down when we are in a new place and then straight after we need to move again.”

I., male Chechen refugee with three children

Respondents and stakeholders alike emphasized the detrimental impact of constant moving after having obtained status on children's schooling and on their psychological stability. In one instance, a refugee family decided to maintain their daughter in a school where she had settled well following a hostel change, even though this required them to travel for two and a half hours per day.

“ For my daughter who has integration problems, I don't want to have to constantly change housing. In the new hostel, she started having problems again; she started hiding and closed herself to others, when she didn't have problems anymore. The housing instability has brought her back as before.”

R., male Chechen refugee

The impact on parental role was mentioned by some respondents who felt their role as parents was being undermined in hostels or reception centres. They felt that their children showed less respect and that their authority was at times questioned by social workers.

Moving away from the capital

Stakeholders' suggested solution for refugees to access housing was to move away from the Ile de France region to the province with the aim of taking advantage of a large pool of social housing available in less densely populated areas. Several respondents indicated that they knew of other refugees who had moved to the province and had subsequently succeeded in finding proper housing.

“ I have friends who have left Paris who went to Nantes. They have told me, ‘here it’s not like in Paris, if you look for housing, they are very nice, it works out; it’s not the same as in Paris.’”

D., male Iranian refugee

Practice example

Set up in 2007, France Terre d’Asile’s CAP’I Mobilité program aims to help refugees integrate through geographic mobility. Based on the observation that 50 per cent of refugees live in the Ile de France region and experience housing instability, CAP’I Mobilité aims to take advantage of the pool of social housing available in less densely populated regions. In 2011, 280 people moved to another French region.

According to respondents, the main barrier to moving to the province related to the lack of employment opportunities.

“ We always said that it would be good to go to the country side. For our daughter, it would be good and calm, but there is the work issue. It’s not easy to find work there.”

N., female Sri Lankan refugee

The duration of the asylum process also played a role in refugees’ readiness to move to the province. The longer refugees had spent in the Ile de France region, the less likely they were to accept moving. Some respondents feared losing the already small network they had managed to build.

“ And I don’t want to leave Paris because all my Tibetan friends live in Paris. We follow each other.”

D., male Tibetan refugee

The prospect of moving, whether to the province or to another city, constituted a source of stress for several respondents. Stakeholders explained that it is not rare for refugees to refuse to move to a new place. Stakeholders attributed it to refugees’ experience of flight, together with the lengthy asylum procedure, and misconceptions as to the reality of the French housing market. Having settled for a few months or years in a particular structure, some refugees become fearful of uprooting once more. The fear of the unknown, coupled with the prospect of having to create a new social life, can be upsetting for some. An additional fear relates to the prospect of losing the support from very present social workers, which would mark the start of an autonomous life.

“ I stayed in CADA for five months, and when I got status, I was transferred to another place. I got a bit unsettled to have to change like that, but I held it together.”

S., female Algerian refugee

In other cases, refugees were scared to move to socially disadvantaged areas, where the majority of social housing opportunities are located. According to stakeholders, this related to the discrepancy between the reality refugees were confronted with and their expectations, in particular relating to regaining the status they had in their country of origin. Stakeholders indicated that refugees tended to have distorted understandings of the general housing market in France.

“ Families often have a hard time to understand that they are not the only ones to experience housing problems. They say ‘I want Paris,’ and when we tell them it’s going to be hard, we try to tell them that the problem is not due to them being foreigners.”

Social worker, CASP

Practice example

The Service d’Insertion Réfugiés in the Haut-Rhin department helps approximately 45 households access housing on the public or private market. One set up consists of collective workshops to present families with the reality of the housing market. Families are asked about their expectations, which social workers relate and compare to the offer of available housing. Such workshops help reduce fears, disappointments and ultimate refusal of independent housing by some refugees.

Employment

- 34 per cent of refugees were employed in 2006 (*Parcours et Profils de Migrants*, PPM, survey).
- 48 per cent of refugees were looking for employment at the time of the PPM survey.
- Limited access to employment is linked to limited social networks: only 41 per cent of surveyed refugees knew persons in France.

Employment and training are, alongside housing, of central concern to refugee respondents. The majority of respondents referred to the instability they suffered with regard to employment, oscillating between brief periods of declared or undeclared employment, unemployment, underemployment (few hours per week or month) and longer-term employment periods.

“ After two weeks, I found short-term employment as a warehouseman for three weeks at Monoprix. Then I worked in another shop for six months as a warehouseman for six months. In between these two jobs, I went through a period of inactivity for three and a half months.”

M., male Sudanese refugee

The pressure to find housing and to provide for the family forced refugees to prioritize earning an income as quickly as possible. As a result, both stakeholders and respondents confirmed that refugees were ready to accept any job to earn a living, even though the position may have no relation to previous employment or study. Some respondents viewed it as a strategy, animated by the hope that they might in the end obtain work that corresponds to their qualification.

“ We don’t have much of a choice here because we go for the sector where there is work so we can earn money. I would like to work with children but it’s not easy to find work.”

R., female Rwandese refugee

For respondents, getting a position quickly was not only crucial to earn money, but was also experienced as a way to make up for the ‘wasted period of the asylum claim’ (R., male Palestinian refugee), during which they were prevented from working. Several respondents explained having particularly suffered from the inability to work during the asylum claim: finally able to show their skills and motivation, they were often keen to start working as soon as possible in whatever position so as to distract from their past inactivity and help solve disorientation problems.

“ I then started to look left and right. I was so happy. I was staying on the Pôle Emploi’s website for hours because I thought I was going to find work that way. At the moment I was ready to do anything; I just wanted to work, frankly anything...”

R., male Palestinian refugee

Respondents’ desire to work was confirmed as a strength by stakeholders, who emphasized refugees’ resilience, sense of initiative and polyvalence, and set refugees amongst the more motivated jobseekers. These were viewed as real assets for future employment.

“ It’s a group which has obtained something and which wants to rebuild their life with their own intellectual resources. They are bringing lots of resources, motivation and polyvalence, and they are also highly resilient.”

Social worker, France Terre d’Asile

Several respondents expressed a wish to start their own business in the future, where they felt they would be able to make use of their sense of initiative and desire to work. However, none of them had actually been able to start the process of setting up a business.

Practice suggestion

Stakeholders suggested capitalizing on refugees’ specific competencies and polyvalence by looking into opportunities in the industry sector. This has the added advantage that most heavy industries are based outside of the Ile de France region where housing is a problem.

Despite their desire to work, respondents quickly faced particular challenges that prevented them from obtaining the desired position. Overall, several respondents expressed distress at the constant refusals they were getting despite their strong motivation and desire to work. While not a general feeling amongst refugees, only two out of the 68 respondents reported this might be due to discrimination against foreigners. The lack of feedback on their applications, common practice in France, was resented by respondents as they felt it prevented them from improving.

“ I always get refusals without any feedback. Why? Because I’m not right for the job? Because I don’t have the qualifications? They never give me an answer so I don’t know how to improve.”

S., female Algerian refugee

Respondents were outraged to hear comments relating to them not wanting to work and depending financially on the state. Unemployed respondents all indicated that they would rather be employed and earn money in their own right. In relation to this, numerous respondents shared the inherent paradox they faced: they finally felt free and safe in France, a feeling they had lost in their country of origin, but were now destitute and jobless.

“ Despite myself, I’m being assisted! There is a saying ‘rather than give fish to someone, teach him to fish,’ I agree.”

A., male Algerian refugee

“ France is different from Eritrea: in Eritrea I had no right, no freedom, but in France I have no work, money is not good.”

R., male Eritrean refugee

Hard-to-fill positions and downward professional mobility

In a difficult economic context, stakeholders reported that the majority of refugees tended to be pushed towards four main employment sectors: the care sector, cleaning, catering and construction. The storage and distribution sector and the security sector were also common employment opportunities. In rural regions, refugees were also oriented towards slaughterhouses, agriculture or forestry. These positions all have in common the generally low level of skills required and the tough conditions of work, and therefore tend to be considered hard-to-fill positions. It is significant to note from interviews with respondents that refugees' level of qualifications or experience before coming to France generally did not influence the positions they were offered, as expressed by an IT specialist and an artist. Both stakeholders and refugees confirmed that refugees were generally oriented towards standard hard-to-fill positions by the employment agency.

“ At Pôle Emploi, they always offer jobs in the construction sector. Straight away, the advisor offered me a job in the construction sector because “that’s what works”. And even if I say that I’m not very good with my hands, he told me with fatalism that there is no other choice.”

Z., male Algerian refugee

“ At Pôle Emploi, they offer work in construction, painting or catering. And if you don’t want to do it, it’s the same; you’re forced to do it.”

D., male Rwandese refugee

Two main profiles were brought forward by stakeholders during meetings: qualified refugees and less qualified refugees. Stakeholders noted that for qualified refugees, the downward professional mobility they experienced was particularly difficult to cope with. By comparison, less qualified refugees, with more limited expectations, were generally satisfied with their position even if it required them to commute several hours per day and to work night shifts. Depending on their age and perception of the French job market, respondents experiencing downward professional mobility either hoped to reacquire such status or decided to focus on their children's future instead.

“ My future is the future of my children. I always think of my children. I would like my children to go to university to learn well.”

N, female Afghan refugee

“ Now it’s my children’s future that counts; it’s OK if I just work as a driver.”

R., male Chechen refugee

Some of the main barriers to employment presented by stakeholders and refugees related to the French language, the lack of recognition of previous experience or degrees, mobility issues, lack of networks, childcare and administrative problems. These are explored below in turn.

Language

“ *Language is the first barrier to finding work. Many people don't speak French well enough. And that's a problem when you want to work in the construction business.*”

I, male Chechen refugee

Mastering French constitutes an important stepping stone into employment. Several stakeholders that met for the purpose of the study reported that applicants are often expected by employers to speak and write French, even for unskilled positions that do not technically require written French. Respondents themselves complained about the lack of support provided to help bridge the language gap in the job market. The six-month language course provided as part of the Contrat d'Accueil et d'Intégration (CAI) often comes between six months and a year after recognition of status and only enable migrants to reach the A1 or A2 level on the European Common Reference Framework. Importantly, teachers of French as a Foreign Language reported that the CAI language training was not preparing migrants for job market integration, as it did not tackle some of the key requirements for work.

Furthermore, several respondents reported being faced with a paradox: when inquiring at Pôle Emploi about French training, they were told their French was good enough to look for low-skilled employment. However, when applying for positions, they were told their French had to improve.

“ *That's a problem at Pôle Emploi because they tell us 'go and work' when we actually need to learn the language.*”

I., male Chechen refugee

Respondents generally felt that not hiring someone because of his or her limited French skills represented an unfair way to select applicants and several respondents and stakeholders went further and underscored that unemployment was often what prevented refugees from further learning the language. Employment thus represented both a motivator to improve language proficiency and a facilitator of language acquisition. A Chechen refugee insisted that his French skills had considerably improved since being employed in a social enterprise as he had to interact with colleagues and follow instructions in French.

“ *I had courses before I started working but it wasn't working because I didn't have many opportunities to speak. Now I speak better. I used to mispronounce words in the shop like 'un euro' and people didn't understand. So my colleagues helped me with pronunciation and now it's OK.*”

N., female Sri Lankan refugee

“ *If refugees start working, they will speak French quickly. I'm ready to start work, but I get told that I need to learn, even though I'm sure I could improve at work.*”

Ru., Chechen refugee

Practice example

Forum Réfugiés agreed with some social enterprises to organize French as a Second Language classes on the workplace if the social enterprise accepted to hire some refugees. The curriculum focuses on specific work-based instructions, work-related vocabulary and norms to be respected on the work place, such as punctuality or dress code. They also started French alphabetization classes with the Gattegno method and French classes through theatre.

Tisseco Solidaire, an association working towards helping long-term unemployed rejoin the workforce, hired a part-time basis as a French as a Second Language teacher for the refugee staff they hired. Classes revolve around norms on the work place and other key components, and take place during working hours.

In some cases, respondents were able to secure a position with a limited level of French through contacts, demonstrating that the language barrier could be overcome through employment.

“ My husband talked to my boss and the boss said, ‘we’ll try to get her here,’ but I didn’t speak so it was hard. Then I worked hard and he kept me and now it’s OK. And now my boss is very happy to have kept me.”

N., female Sri Lankan refugee

Based on interviews in this study, the language barrier seems to have a stronger impact on qualified refugees than unskilled refugees. Difficulties in mastering the French language prevented several respondents from pursuing the career they had started in their own country of origin. Teacher, medical practitioner, secretary, journalist and university professor are positions requiring fluency in French. Refugees seeking qualified positions became quickly aware that their hopes of working in their former line of work were misplaced.

“ I used to be a dental surgeon in my country. I applied for internships here, but it’s not easy. I had to pay to be trained. I got to meet another dentist who helped me with the test to be authorized to work here as a dentist. But the main obstacle is that I need the B2 level, but it’s expensive to study. I only had 180 hours of French, A2 level, but it’s not enough to be authorized to work.”

J., female Iraqi refugee

Some refugees argued that language represented less of a barrier during the asylum process. For asylum-seekers, undeclared jobs were the only way to secure an income and some asylum-seekers took the risk to work irregularly to provide for their family.

“ For some jobs, you don’t need to speak the language; when you work undeclared, you don’t need to speak French.”

R., male Afghan refugee

Similarly, for refugees working in ethnic businesses, the need to master French appeared to be less pronounced. However, stakeholders were generally wary of such an approach as it runs the risk of constraining refugees to often semi-declared precarious positions, in which they never get to learn the language.

Lack of recognition of degree or experience/ lack of experience in France

“ At the time, I went to the temporary employment agency. First thing they asked me: ‘do you have experience in France?’ ‘No.’ Second thing: ‘Do you have a French degree?’ ‘No.’”

R., male Palestinian refugee

The above-cited quote summarizes well the complaints made by respondents with regard to experience and degrees. According to stakeholders and respondents, not having a French degree or being unable to provide proof of work experience in France considerably constrained access to employment. When applying for temporary employment in interim agencies, employers systematically inquired about refugees’ experiences in France.

“ The main problem when I apply for work is that people ask if I have already worked in France. When I say no, it’s over.”

F., male Afghan refugee

Regarding the lack of work experience in France, respondents felt that it was an unfair reproach given they had been prevented from working during the entire duration of their asylum process.

An asylum-seeker in France can technically be authorized to work while his/her asylum claim is being processed. This currently applies to asylum-seekers who have been waiting for an answer for at least a year (to be reduced to nine months). To that end, he/she needs to provide an official job offer. However, the prefecture can oppose conditions on the French job market to refuse the application, such as oversupply of labour.

Respondents felt their previous careers and degrees were largely overlooked. This issue applied especially to qualified refugees, such as health professionals, lawyers, journalists, teachers or university professors. Other qualified refugees, such as architects or surveyors, were systematically rejected when applying for positions due to the discrepancy between their country of origin's training and the expectations on the French job market, in particular relating to digital skills. In the face of such barriers, refugees wishing to continue with their existing career were compelled to undertake further training in France. However, this was generally only possible for French speakers with a sufficient network to support them financially.

“ In Rwanda, I was a teacher. Here I started to work as an assistant in a leisure centre and they put it down as ‘unskilled employment,’ as if I didn’t have a degree. They told me, ‘we don’t know your degree,’ so I stopped working and now I’m undertaking some training to have a French degree because for now I don’t have the same rights as persons who have a French degree.”

M., female Rwandese refugee

“ My brother was an engineer in geophysics. He already had a Master’s degree but he had to start a new Master’s programme in France, for two years. It wasn’t easy but it was either that or menial jobs.”

(G., male Iranian refugee)

Practice example

In France, the ENIC-NARIC centre is the French information centre on professional and academic recognition of degrees. It establishes attestations for degrees, studies and training programmes undertaken abroad. These do not constitute, however, equivalence of degrees enabling them to automatically pursue their studies. Based on figures communicated by the ENIC-NARIC centre, 668 attestations were delivered in 2011 and 304 in 2012 to either asylum-seekers or beneficiaries of international protection.

Several respondents explained that they had received an attestation through ENIC-NARIC for the degree obtained in their country of origin. However, such attestation had not facilitated access to employment as employers generally failed to take into account previous qualifications.

“ The problem to find employment is getting your degree and experience recognized. My degree was recognized as a Master’s-level degree. But I have been looking for two years and I have never had an interview. I must have sent over 170 CVs!”

Ru., male Chechen refugee

For many respondents, however, the need to earn a living from the point of recognition of status delayed training opportunities, in particular long-term training programmes involving studying for a vocational or university degree. Respondents, both skilled and unskilled, preferred to look for employment, including unskilled positions, rather than invest in training which could potentially help them access better earning positions.

“ I would love to study but I don't have the time. We are five people at home; I need to bring a salary to help the family.”

A., male Afghan refugee

“ Training is not my priority, work is what matters. I want to get stable through work and then I can think of training.”

A., male Algerian refugee

Practice example

The *Entraide Universitaire Française* (EUF) offers scholarships to more than 130 recognized refugees yearly to help them pursue their studies in France. Since 1945, it has granted close to 15,000 scholarships. Scholarships and small grants are offered to refugees aiming to study in different fields. It mainly aims to support refugees over the age of 28, who are over the age limit to benefit from scholarships from the *Centre Régional des Oeuvres Universitaires et Scolaires* (CROUS). Refugees under the age of 28 are entitled to CROUS need-based scholarships without conditions of minimum duration of stay in France.

The *Association d'Accueil aux Médecins et Personnels de Santé Réfugiés en France* (APSR) supports healthcare professionals trained in their country of origin to integrate into the French healthcare system as professionals.

Mobility and driving license

Mobility was a particular issue facing refugees, and migrants generally, in rural and remote areas, less so in the Ile de France region or other big cities. According to stakeholders, the ability to drive tends to be a precondition to accessing employment in rural areas. This requires either the ability to exchange the country of origin's driving license or to pass a driving test. In both cases refugees face particular challenges, some they share with other migrants and others more refugee-specific. A first step to passing the test is to pass the theoretical component. In this context, language often constitutes a problem for refugees and migrants. However, for both stakeholders and respondents, the most problematic issue related to some prefectures' refusal to exchange driving licenses from other countries on the suspicion that the driving license was forged. Some prefectures even required refugees to contact their country of origin's consulate to authenticate the license, even though, contrary to other migrants, refugees cannot contact their country of origin.

“ The driving license is a real issue. The prefecture said it was a fake. I appealed but I didn't get an answer. The prefecture told me that I need to bring an attestation from the embassy, but I can't go there, I'm a refugee!”

S., male Afghan refugee

In some cases respondents did not obtain a position because they were not allowed to drive despite having passed a test in their own country.

“ A Mongol friend told me there was work in a slaughterhouse 40 kilometers away from here. But since they took my license away, it's impossible.”

D., male Mongol refugee

The lack of recognition of refugees' driving licenses was compounded by their inability to contact their country of origin's authorities as beneficiaries of protection. Compared to other migrants, this constituted an additional barrier.

Practice example

Some organizations, including Forum Réfugiés, offer French classes focusing on the theoretical part of the driving test to help refugees acquire the key vocabulary required to pass the test.

Lack of networks

As shown in the statistical review, refugees' social and work networks are generally more limited than those of other new migrants, and this was mentioned by both respondents and stakeholders as a barrier to employment. New to France, refugees lacked personal and work contacts and networks to facilitate access to the job market, that is, to receive advice, to be introduced to an employer or to be co-opted into a position. Thus, they had to rely on institutional channels, such as the French unemployment agency, Pôle Emploi, which caters to the needs of over 3 million unemployed persons. Respondents' opinions of Pôle Emploi were negative, and respondents reported not understanding what Pôle Emploi's role actually was. Respondents were hoping Pôle Emploi would help them find a position but this rarely happened in practice.

“ At Pôle Emploi, they know nothing. They are just here to blabber: ‘Hi, how are you? Do you want us to look at the website?’ ‘Thanks but I already know it by heart.’ Once I told the advisor, ‘I actually don’t understand Pôle Emploi. You have thousand of employees but you never call to offer me a position.’ ”

R., male Palestinian refugee

The problem of limited work-based networks applied especially to qualified refugees working in cultural sectors, such as art or journalism.

“ I’m a journalist. But in this field, what matters most is the network. Here it’s dead, I can’t work in journalism.”

A., male Chadian refugee

The lack of effective employment support provided by the French administration or by NGOs was particularly noted by refugee respondents having benefited from the available support when looking for housing. While unskilled positions in ethnic businesses tended to be more easily accessible for refugees through personal contacts, as explained above by stakeholders, these positions were generally precarious and often undeclared and could not replace structured employment support.

Childcare in single headed households

Female respondents and stakeholders alike repeatedly mentioned the issue of childcare as a barrier to employment or training. This was particularly the case for single women. Forced to earn a living, these women often had very limited networks and, compared to other single women, could not rely on family members or friends to look after their child.

“ I have three children, two in primary school and one small one. The toddler should go to the crèche. I had to take him to an interview because I didn’t have childcare and it didn’t work out. She told me, ‘sorry but you can’t come to an interview like you go on a walk.’ ”

T., female Congolese refugee

Administrative problems

As will be discussed in a subsequent section, refugees face several administrative barriers upon recognition of status which impact employment. The delays in obtaining the 10-year leave to remain results in the delivery of multiple three-month temporary leave to remains (*récépissé*) during the first year after receiving refugee status. This can at times compromise access to employment. Stakeholders and respondents alike thus brought forward cases where some refugees were refused a work contract because they only had a three-month *récépissé*.

“ When I still didn’t have my leave to remain, I only had my *récépissé*, and even though it was written that I was allowed to work, my [job] application was refused for that reason. I feel like I lost an opportunity. The person in charge of HR told me that she couldn’t be sure because she had already been confronted with forged *récépissés*. ”

M., male Sudanese refugee

Beneficiaries of subsidiary protection were also more at risk of refusal when presenting a one-year residence permit rather than the more stable 10-year leave to remain.

Practice example

When refugees are supported by organizations, social workers are able to intervene on behalf of refugees where problems arise.

Instability of housing

According to stakeholders, housing conditions constitute another barrier to employment and training. Several respondents expressed that it was hard to concentrate on finding employment when they did not know where they would end up spending the night.

“ How could I attend a training course given that I didn’t have housing? I was in such a precarious state that I didn’t manage to concentrate on the training programme. ”

A., male Chechen refugee

“ How can you have a work contract if you’re not stable? For sure not having housing has an impact on work. I need a place to stay to feel stable and self-confident. ”

A., male Algerian refugee

This brings once more the issue of support for refugees post-status recognition. Refugees either housed in a reception centre or benefiting from support with regard to housing were able to concentrate more on looking for employment.

Health

- High need for psychological or psychiatric support among asylum-seekers and refugees
- Access to healthcare at times difficult for asylum-seekers and refugees

There was a generally high level of satisfaction with the French healthcare system among respondents, which confirms results from previous studies (Guillou 2005). Among the broad range of problems and issues respondents wanted to report on, health rarely featured as an area of concern. In their opinion, the ease with which they were able to access the healthcare system significantly contrasted with the difficulties experienced in securing housing, employment or welfare benefits.

Respondents reported health-related problems, such as diabetes, tumors, surgery needs and disabilities, which were taken care of within the French healthcare system. Overall, respondents felt that the services provided were of much higher quality than in their country of origin.

“ In Chechnya (Russian Federation), many people can't be operated. Here it's a really good system.”

Ru., Chechen refugee

“ This form of equality is wonderful. At home if you're poor, you won't even be seen by a doctor. Here it's amazing; you get to be seen with your child at hospital.”

C. female Congolese refugee

However, NGO representatives at the health stakeholder meeting reported several issues of concern. One particular problem related to the refusal of some healthcare practitioners' to treat patients under the state medical insurance which is provided for individuals on low income (couverture médicale universelle (CMU)). This was attributed to some practitioners' fears of belated reimbursement of costs or of changes in their client base. When refugee respondents were probed about these instances, some confirmed such problems occurred, in particular in pharmacies.

“ I have the CMU. Some pharmacists don't like the CMU. Three times I got a refusal. In such a case I just go to another pharmacy.”

R. male Rwandese refugee

Delayed access to state medical cover constituted another problem raised by stakeholders. Such problems were more strongly experienced by asylum-seekers, in particular when identified as asylum-seekers under the Dublin II Regulation, and could at times continue once recognized as refugees. In some cases, refugees faced difficulties in adding their family, once reunified, to their medical coverage, which incurred important costs.

“ For families who have come through family reunification, it's difficult. I have experienced that. My family has been here for seven months and we don't manage to get them on my health insurance card. They are really making trouble, sending back the files, it happened six times.”

M., male Somali refugee

Practice example

To prevent delays in accessing healthcare entitlements, some organizations, such as the CPH run by the Cimade in Massy, carried out regular training session in the *Caisse Primaire d'Assurance Maladie* (agency in charge of access to healthcare) to raise awareness of refugee entitlements.

The Cimade and the Comède jointly set up an *Espace Santé/Droits* where migrants and refugees can be informed on their entitlements with regard to healthcare.

Surprisingly, language-related barriers in accessing healthcare were rarely reported among respondents, including for non-French-speaking respondents. An exception to this was that some respondents in need of mental health support suggested they preferred discussing their problems in their own language, leading them to solicit the help of psychiatrists from their country of origin or to seek an interpreter. Language as a barrier to accessing healthcare was however identified as an area of concern by stakeholders.

Practice example

The *Réseau Ville Hôpital*, based in Brittany, supports vulnerable migrants and refugees in accessing healthcare. It also focuses on reducing barriers linked to the language by resorting to interpreters in more than 80 per cent of first medical consultations. It further offers, together with *Langues et Communication*, a French as a Second Language school, French classes for non-French speaking pregnant mothers free of charge.

Inter Services Migrants (ISM) Interprétariat offers translation services in hospitals, which contract ISM for specific activities.

Not only does housing impact employment as discussed above, but it also impacts health. Respondents' interviews and stakeholder meetings highlighted the impact that housing conditions have on refugees' physical health, in particular on children. Overcrowding, bad housing conditions such as humidity or cold, and bad sanitary conditions caused several health problems, further convincing refugees of the need to move elsewhere.

“The flat was too small and very humid. My daughter was always sick and had lots of ear infections. That's why it was important to find a good flat.”

N., female Sri Lankan refugee

The scope of this study does not extend to reporting in-depth on refugees' well-being and health level. However, stakeholders in reception centres overwhelmingly reported a recent increase in serious pathologies among asylum-seekers and refugees, requiring regular medical check-ups and treatment. In addition, the majority of respondents reported some level of mental health issues, which they attributed to a combination of different factors: the period of the asylum process, the experience in their country of origin, housing and employment instability, and family separation. These factors are explored below.

Duration of the asylum process and obtaining status

According to stakeholders, the mental suffering experienced by refugees during the asylum process and the harsh conditions they experienced (for example, delays, suspicions, reception conditions) cause severe psychological distress. In their opinion, asylum-seekers' suffering had increased since the abrogation of the right to work for asylum-seekers in 1991.

“Before the status, we had lots of problems. You can't move, can't work, you don't have money, you simply can't do anything. It was really difficult. It's like a disease, you always think of that. It becomes a psychological problem.”

R., male Palestinian refugee

Stakeholders described the period following obtaining status as a time of “psychic decompensation”, which marked the end of a psychologically difficult phase of uncertainty and urgency and announced a new beginning and new problems. Having “bottled up” several problems, including trauma, in order to face the period of the asylum process, some refugees suddenly experienced particular psychological problems after gaining status. Being confronted with the start of a new life, marking the end of the link to the country of origin, refugees were in sudden need of psychological support.

Experience in the country of origin and experience of torture

Refugees' experience in their country of origin was one common cause of mental health problems. In particular, the frequency of experiencing violence increased the likelihood to seek mental health treatment or counselling.

“ I used to always see policemen in France like the policemen in Rwanda. Because policemen in Rwanda are really nasty. When I was turning off the lights, I saw policemen coming to arrest me and I was scared. My psychologist told me to forget about the past and look forward. She really helped me.”

R., male Rwandese refugee

Stakeholders explained that refugees' memories of their past persecution were often pushed to the background during the asylum process only to resurface at times many years later, which required mental health support as experienced by the Rwandese respondent. However, they expressed concerns at the saturation and lack of capacity of general mental health facilities not specialized in treating victims of torture. Several stakeholders reported that generalist psychologists and psychiatrists often felt inadequate to treat victims of torture, who required specific assistance.

“ I think that some General Practitioners or psychologists are fearful of what they are going to hear, like ‘what will I do?’”

Psychologist, Centre Essor

Stakeholders furthermore complained about the limited number of structures specialized in dealing with torture survivors.

Practice example

The Ile de France region benefits from several specialized centres for torture survivors and victims of trauma: Primo Levi, Centre Françoise Minkowska, Parcours d'Exil, Centre d'Ecoute et de Soins (Médecins sans Frontières). In the Rhône, the Centre Essor (Forum Réfugiés) carries out similar activities.

The *Cellule de Médiation, d'Accueil et d'Orientation* (Mediacor) of the Centre Françoise Minkowska aims to guide migrants and refugees in need of mental health support in order to facilitate access to mental health facilities in due course.

Instability of housing and employment

Living conditions were another source of particular distress for refugees which impact health. According to stakeholders, psychological problems and refugees' fragility are reinforced by the harsh conditions they live in. Stakeholders explained having recently started to see refugees coming hungry to their healthcare facilities, which they had not seen in their previous years of practice. To stakeholders, this highlighted the increased precarious situations, which refugees are experiencing.

“ We used to see much less precarity. For instance the issue of housing was much less present. And now we see collateral damage linked to that: prostitution, favors to stay at someone's place and other sordid stories.”

Psychologist, Centre Essor

Stakeholders reported facing increased difficulty to improve a refugee's mental health state when the person does not have a place to stay: despite apparent psychological needs, some respondents felt so overwhelmed by the competing obligations they face post-recognition of status that they could not concentrate on their counselling, as explained by a respondent.

“ I used to have a psychologist but there are just too many problems. I’m too concerned by everything I have to do to go and see him. I don’t sleep. I don’t have a roof, I’m wandering purposelessly.”

I. male Palestinian refugee

Separation from the family

Separation from the family can be very unsettling for refugees. Here, we look at the specific impact on health of family separation.

The family reunification process only applies to spouses and children; separated parents insisted on the considerable psychological impact of being separated from their spouse and/or children. However, respondents reported more widely the distress experienced at being separated from their own parents and their wider family. One explanation is that obtaining refugee status is equated with the inability to return to one’s country of origin as going back would result in them losing their status. In addition, several respondents mentioned being scared of going back, even after having naturalized, for fear of reprisal. These two reasons considerably reduce the likelihood of seeing one’s family soon, if at all. Not being able to attend a funeral or to support ageing parents for example was a source of great distress for several respondents.

“ Finally my mother fell sick and she passed away in 2009 in Sri Lanka, and I couldn’t go to the funeral so that was very hard for me.”

M., male Sri Lankan refugee

The multifaceted impact of family separation on mental health emerged repeatedly during stakeholders’ and refugee meetings. During interviews with refugees, it was a common necessity to interrupt briefly the interview because respondents were overcome with emotions. A female refugee confessed having to take medication to cope with the separation from her family.

“ I’m really depressed and feeling sad because of my family. I have spoken to a psychologist who gave me medicine to sleep and not be sad. When my family is here, I won’t need to take medicine anymore.”

N., female Afghan refugee

As noted earlier, respondents were satisfied with their access to medical care for physical ailments. However the impact on mental health of a complex range of challenges constitutes barriers to refugees projecting themselves into the future and planning for their life, which negatively impacts their pathway to integration.

Access to rights

“ What I want to say is that from the point where we get an answer from OFPRA, the person is left to his/her own devices. You’re abandoned. Sure you have your status, but nothing else. You have to fend for yourself.”

A., Chadian refugee

This comment from a respondent reflects refugees’ experiences regarding access to rights within the mainstream system in France. Such difficulties were, however, less present for refugees supported in reception centres or through other specialist programmes because social workers generally helped refugees take care of issues relating to securing their entitlements to benefits, healthcare and access to residence permits. However, according to stakeholders and refugees, access to entitlements for unsupported refugees quickly became an ‘obstacle course’, with refugees being required to return several times to bring one document.

“ I hate all the bureaucracy. You have to do things a thousand times and it never works. I’m unemployed but actually dealing with administration is almost like a full time job!”

R., male Palestinian refugee

Such a stance was shared by several respondents. One refugee artist explained having written a song about the length process of accessing rights, which he entitled “Les papiers” (‘documents’).

INSTABILITY DUE TO THE RÉCÉPISSÉ

According to stakeholders, a key problem, as noted above, related to obtaining the *récépissé*, a three-month renewable temporary leave to remain. Refugees are supposed to obtain their first *récépissé* within eight days following notification of the decision as set out in French law (CESEDA art. R 742-5 and R 742-6). However, in reality, prefectures often fail to provide it within the required period, which prevents refugees from accessing welfare benefits and entering the job market. This is followed by a second three-month *récépissé* once OFPRA, the French administration in charge of processing asylum claims and administering refugees’ birth certificates, delivers the birth certificate. At that point, the *récépissé* acknowledges that the refugee has applied for the 10-year residence permit. However delays in prefectures often prevent refugees from obtaining their 10-year residence permit within the three months duration of the *récépissé*.

The repeated renewal of *récépissé* had clear negative repercussions for refugees. The most problematic repercussion related to the quasi-systematic discontinuity of *récépissés* in overwhelmed prefectures, as prefectures are unable to renew the *récépissé* in time before it expires. This had devastating consequences for refugees: in the absence of the regular residence permit, refugees were not able to access employment and faced at times being struck off by the employment, health or benefit agency, which resulted in further precarity as exemplified by the following quotes.

“ People end up having to go to the Restos du Cœur [Food bank] because their benefits have been cut because of the *récépissé*. ”

Social worker, CPH Massy

“ I have problems with the Caisse d’Allocations Familiales [benefits agency]. When you wait for the new *récépissé*, it cuts your benefits. ”

X., Ethiopian refugee

There are close connections between discontinuity of entitlements and housing instability and gaining employment as previous sections above have explored. Refugees having to move across departments can experience long periods without *récépissé* as prefectures do not take into account other prefectures’ practices, which further prevents access to employment and, thus, to stable housing.

GENERALIST ADMINISTRATIONS’ LACK OF KNOWLEDGE ON REFUGEE ENTITLEMENTS

Another refugee-specific problem relates to both local and national administrations’ lack of knowledge on refugee rights and entitlements. Stakeholders and refugees alike pointed to some prefectures’ and other administrations’ practices potentially putting beneficiaries of protection at risk, such as asking refugees to get in touch with their country of origin’s authorities to obtain birth certificates or confirmation of driving license. At all stakeholder meetings, concern was expressed at the lack of specialist knowledge that generalist administrations have on refugees. This reinforces the need to encourage specific training on refugee entitlements.

LANGUAGE

Language is an additional problem during interactions between refugees and the administration. As explained in the introduction to this report, most refugees come from non-French-speaking countries of origin, while the majority of other migrants originate from French speaking countries. Language is therefore a more common problem for refugees. Respondents explained panicking at the sight of a new letter from the administration, which they knew they would not fully understand. Respondents furthermore reported incidences of agents refusing to speak to them in the absence of an interpreter, whose attendance refugees were expected to arrange.

“ At the prefecture and sometime at Pôle Emploi, when you ask for an appointment, they want an interpreter, even if you understand a little bit. But they don't have interpreters. So we have to find someone, but it's difficult because people are busy.”

I., Somali refugee

Stakeholders reported that such reliance on fellow nationals to interpret was not necessarily free of charge and may potentially put refugees at risk of going into debt.

A further problem in accessing entitlements relates to family members of a refugee. Stakeholders reported that problems increased exponentially according to the number of family members having to access entitlements. Problems occurred in particular due to the delays incurred by OFPRA in communicating family records to generalist administrations so that family members can access entitlements. Such delays resulted in the belated payment of family benefits.

“ Since our daughter doesn't have a birth certificate, the CAF blocks the process to get family benefits.”

H., male refugee from Azerbaïdjan

In the case of family members having arrived in France through family reunification, similar problems were experienced, as the story of the Somali respondent, unable to add his family to his medical cover, showed earlier in the health section.

Practice example

The OFPRA hands out a guide for newly recognized refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection with information on their entitlements. At the moment, OFPRA only publishes guides in French but it is planning to publish guides in other languages.

Several organizations offer collective workshops on access to rights. While this is common in CADA or CPH (reception centres), unsupported refugees are more at risk of lacking information. This is the reason why France Terre d'Asile offers the CAP'I *Accompagnement* programme aimed at unsupported refugees. It organizes information sessions as soon as possible after recognition of status for refugees has been acquired in order to have a proper introduction into some of their main entitlements and obligations and how they can fulfill them.

In some administrations, referent workers have been assigned to specific groups of beneficiaries, including refugees. According to several stakeholders, such systems facilitate contacts with the administration and ensure that these referent workers are familiar with refugee issues.

Support networks

- Refugees are generally more socially isolated and less likely to have connections.
- Asylum-seekers lack friendship networks upon arrival (ELIPA).

Among respondents, some already had friends or family members in France. As a result they were able to rely on their help to find their way through the system. However, the majority of respondents did not have any preliminary contact in France. This resulted in a common feeling of isolation and helplessness upon arrival.

“ When I arrived in France, it was winter and I didn't know anybody. I called a charity, which helped me.”

D., male Rwandese refugee

“ Here, it's not like in Sri Lanka. There we knew people well, if we needed something, we knew who to talk to.”

N., female Sri Lankan refugee

Often thanks to chance encounters, refugees were oriented towards emergency shelter services or asylum charities. These chance encounters were generally based on refugees overhearing someone speak their language or identifying them as fellow nationals.

“ That's where I met a Tibetan guy who told me: 'you can ask for asylum in this place and they will provide food, shelter and money.'”

D., male Tibetan refugee

In the absence of established networks, asylum-seekers ended up having to rely heavily on institutions and charities when applying for asylum and looking for a shelter. Such dependency on organizations generally created expectations that were not always fulfilled. As a result, refugees had mixed impressions of asylum charities in France depending on their own experience of the level of support received.

Several respondents acknowledged and welcomed the support provided by charities and social workers. However, several respondents were also critical of the limited support available and the constraints these organizations were facing, such as the high number of asylum-seekers compared to the number of social workers ratio or the length of time required to find temporary housing. In other cases, respondents criticized the lack of choice available to them, in particular in terms of housing, feeling that they were expected to comply with anything suggested by their social worker. Service providers themselves reported being aware of the risk of 'omnipotence' of the social worker.

The few respondents able to stay in a reception centre showed general satisfaction with these structures. It is worth emphasizing that only 25 to 30 per cent of asylum-seekers are able to benefit from such centres. In addition to providing some stability, reception centres were viewed as good opportunities to develop friendship and solidarity networks. Some respondents credited fellow residents for enabling them to learn French, get a first job, or look after their children when needed.

“ My mother was spending her whole time in the CADA. She was 50. But she adapted well because she had lots of French-speaking friends who helped her, people who were with us in the CADA, especially Congolese and Rwandans. We can't forget them because we have lived through intense times together.”

G., male Iranian refugee

Reception centres also enabled asylum-seekers and refugees to break with the isolation experienced upon arrival in France. Stakeholders thus reported several instances of refugees refusing to, or being at first scared to, leave a centre because of the social life they had developed in the centre and its surroundings. However, some respondents also reported that reception centres could be the source of tensions and others insisted they preferred to stay away from other residents.

Stakeholders and respondents alike confirmed that relationships with fellow nationals and community members largely depended on individual refugees' nationality, their experience in their country of origin, and their location in France. Stakeholders reported that Chechen, Sri Lankan and Turkish refugees in the Ile de France region generally relied on their own national networks to find housing, employment or to get advice on the asylum procedure. Overall, respondents were generally thankful to be in touch with fellow nationals as it helped them break with isolation and was the source of advice and financial support.

“ I have quite a few Algerian friends. It helped me a lot. Having spent 14 months without work or my family, I only survived thanks to my friends and what I had from Algeria.”

S., male Algerian refugee

Community members mattered especially for destitute asylum-seekers under the Dublin II Regulation who could not receive financial support from the French state.⁷

“ For almost a year and a half, we had not money because we were under the Dublin regulation. That's where we were helped by family and friends.”

R., male Chechen refugee

Both stakeholders' and respondents' comments on relationships with fellow nationals highlighted the ambivalence of relying on such networks. Largely influenced by their experience in their country of origin, some respondents expressed some distrust in fellow nationals and preferred to stay away from the community.

“ We don't help each other in the community; they are just looking for trouble. They say we did things we didn't do.”

T., female Congolese refugee

For several refugees, religion and religious activities provided the opportunity to recreate a support network and a feeling of community.

“ I really feel at ease in the Catholic church I go to. I meet with Jesuit fathers. They know what I went through, they have welcomed me. I really feel liberated.”

S., female Afghan refugee

A common thread across interviews with respondents related to the limited contacts with French nationals that refugees had. The main opportunities to meet with French nationals were the work place, the school, places of worships and for young refugees through friends, in bars or in public transport. However, few respondents reported having French friends. According to some respondents, this was a sign that they were still not fully integrated in France.

“ We don't associate much with French people. We live in France, we should associate with French people, but not quite yet.”

N., female Sri Lankan refugee

⁷ Following a decision by the Conseil d'Etat on 17 April 2013, asylum-seekers under the Dublin procedure are to be granted the same reception conditions as any other asylum-seekers and shall therefore be granted financial support and be eligible for a place in a reception centre pending effective transfer.

The work place, when mixed, was a place of choice for interactions with French nationals and for improving refugees' level of French. Respondents reported that their colleagues were often a good source of orientation and support.

Refugees living in areas with few fellow nationals emphasized the positive aspects of being separated from their 'natural' network as they did not have a choice as to who they were to interact with.

“ I have French friends. We became friends with people in Pas-de-Calais. Sometime they help me with my papers. We have now been in Paris for eight months and there are only Afghan people, it's not good for my French.”

R., male Afghan refugee

Practice example

L'Association de Parrainage Républicain des Demandeurs d'Asile et de Protection (APARDAP), based in Grenoble, offers asylum-seekers the opportunity to be sponsored by French families to help them settle in France and support them in their asylum claims. The support is provided both at the human and administrative levels. This is a way for French nationals and asylum-seekers/refugees to get to know each other.

JRS set up the “Welcome network” in 2010 for homeless asylum-seekers who are unable to get a place in a reception centre or a hostel. Overall, 15 asylum-seekers are hosted by individual families volunteering to welcome them for approximately two months.

At the CADA run by ADOMA in Gargenville, discussion groups have been organized between female asylum-seekers and refugees and other women living in the neighborhood. This was a way for these women to get to know each other.

Service providers in reception centres and social workers reported that access to culture or sport as a means to build networks was not a priority for refugees. In a context of constant “running around” after housing, employment or specific entitlements, respondents felt they had little time to relax or undertake additional activities, such as sport or music, as their entire time was dedicated to solving problems.

“ I used to practice a lot of sport, both boxing and football. But I don't feel comfortable to practice sport, I think too much of my future. My mind is too busy.”

F., male Afghan refugee

Volunteering was more commonly mentioned by respondents as an additional activity undertaken, in particular when it came to supporting fellow asylum-seekers or refugees. To some, it offered the opportunity to stop thinking about their own problems. To others, more settled respondents, it provided an opportunity to repay the support they had received.

“ For me, volunteering is a way to project my disarray towards others. When I help people, it's like someone is helping me.”

A., male Algerian refugee

Practice example

The *Association Pierre Claver* offers asylum-seekers and refugees the opportunity to attend free French classes taught by volunteers, including at times by former students. In addition, it offers a range of activities from running to drama groups, where both students and French volunteers are mixed.

The *Secours Catholique* in Val de Marne has put together a football team composed of asylum-seekers and refugees. It has played against other teams from the organization and aims to compete with other clubs, while raising awareness on asylum issues.

Family reunification

Unresolved family reunification issues applied to 15 out of 68 respondents; however, 25 respondents had previously dealt with family reunification issues. As previously explained, for refugees attempting to reunify with their family, securing the family's arrival rapidly becomes the number one priority. A refugee working nights and having to commute three hours per day insisted that his work was “*no problem. The problem is only my family.*” E., Eritrean refugee.

The right of beneficiaries of international protection to family reunification is explicitly recognized in French law (article L.313-11 10°, L. 313-13 and L. 314-11 8° - 9° and 10° of the CESEDA), including for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection. As explained in the introduction to this report, French legislation differentiates between refugees and migrants with regard to family reunification. Refugees do not have to fulfill requirements of income or housing or wait before starting the procedure. Despite such a differentiated approach in favor of refugees, this study shows that family reunification bears costs for refugees, both financial and psychological, putting pressure on family structures already weakened by exile and separation. Stakeholders and respondents alike highlighted the negative repercussions a lengthy reunification process can have on refugee integration.

A COMPLEX AND LENGTHY FAMILY REUNIFICATION PROCEDURE

Both stakeholders and refugees pointed to the complexity of the family reunification procedure and regretted the lack of detailed information available to facilitate the process. In some cases refugees attempted to undertake the process individually. However, difficulties encountered along the way often compelled refugees to seek outside support.

According to stakeholders, consulates generally failed to provide regular information on the status of the procedure, which left refugees without answers:

“ My family goes to the embassy. They say, ‘we’ll call you’ and they never call.”

C. Ivorian refugee

In other cases, consulates made requests that were impossible to fulfill. This applied especially to situations where children were to join their father/mother but where the other parent had died, been imprisoned or disappeared without it being recorded. Yet, some consulates required proof that the missing person was not able to care for the child. M., a female refugee from Rwanda whose husband disappeared, explained it clearly.

“ Family reunification has been very difficult for me. During my asylum claim I said that my husband had disappeared. They knew it but they kept on asking me papers proving it. But I just couldn’t, and I couldn’t go back to my country to ask for the documents.”

M., Rwandese refugee

NGOs furthermore reported large disparities between French Consulates, including some being seemingly unaware of changes in legislation. One respondent confirmed that his son had been told to bring a document that was not required anymore.

As explained by the *Bureau des Familles de Réfugiés*, the most difficult part of the process is to ascertain filiation between the refugee and his/her family. However, charities and refugees alike argued that birth certificates can be difficult to provide when refugees come from failed states, places without birth certificates or civil registry, or where it is risky to approach the authorities. K., an Ivorian refugee, experienced a stringent check of state records by the consulate, which resulted in his 10-year old daughter being left behind while the rest of the family travelled to France. In his case, a common transcription mistake, together with limited information on the procedure, separated a young girl from the rest of her family.

“ But the biggest problem is that my last daughter hasn’t been able to join us. There was a difference of one letter between her name on the register and the birth certificate so the embassy refused.”

K., male Ivorian refugee

Practice example

NGO representatives welcomed the generally constructive attitude of the *Bureau des Familles de Réfugiés* (Ministry of Interior), which guides refugees during the procedure. The leaflet on family reunification of refugees produced by the administration was also welcomed. However, NGO representatives suggested including more detailed information on the different steps of the procedure.

As a result of the stakeholder meeting for the purpose of this study, OFPRA set up a link to the leaflet on family reunification on the same page as the OFPRA guide for newly recognized refugees.

FAMILY REUNIFICATION'S IMPACT ON INTEGRATION

NGO stakeholders working on family reunification and respondents highlighted the financial costs relating to family separation. In many instances respondents had to send some of their income back home to support their family with rent costs, school fees for children or the costs of going back and forth to the French Consulate for the procedure. Sending these remittances resulted in limited funding available to secure stable housing or prepare for the family to settle in France upon arrival.

“ I’m sending all my money there, for the school, for the house because they moved. I’m sending everything I’m earning, I always overdraw my account.”

C., Ivorian refugee

Furthermore, in the absence of financial support to pay for airfare, refugees often had to rely on family members or acquaintances to secure the required amount of money. Also respondents explained having to rely on third persons to arrange appointments and secure proper documents, which incurred additional costs. This led at times to difficult situations, where intermediaries took advantage financially.

“ Every month, my cousin was asking for 120 Euro for my daughter’s papers, but actually he didn’t do anything. I ended up paying a lot of money for nothing.”

K., male Ivorian refugee

Both stakeholders and respondents argued that the length of the asylum process represented another cost for several refugees having lost the chance to be reunited with their older children, because they had exceeded the age limit during this time. Respondents criticized the negative impact of lengthy asylum procedures, highlighting the devastating effects on their children.

“ For my children who are over the age limit, it’s not easy. It took me a long time to get status. If I had had my status earlier, they could have come. Now they are beyond the age limit, it’s over.”

R, male Rwandese refugee

Another challenge related to some refugees’ inability to secure stable and convenient housing during the family reunification procedure. Stakeholders reported several instances of refugees being refused a large flat needed to welcome their family, while still being refused a small flat on the basis they had recorded they had a large family. In such cases, respondents were reduced to finding housing on the private market.

“ Housing for me is complicated. They say I’m alone and that I can’t get a big flat like the one I asked for when my family joins me, so I rent privately.”

C., male Ivorian refugee

During interviews, respondents reported that the family reunification procedure was putting their family at risk while waiting in the country of origin or of first asylum. In some cases, respondents were aware that their children were on their own as their own spouse had passed away or that they were deliberately targeted. In other cases, families had to move to the capital city or to the nearest city with a French Consulate to facilitate communication. As a result, families were uprooted and potentially more at risk. An Eritrean refugee explained how this was affecting his family who had to move from Eritrea to Addis Ababa to be closer to the French consulate.

“ My family has been in Addis Ababa for one year. Life there is difficult, my children don’t go to school, they don’t speak the language. They don’t do anything, they are just waiting there with my wife. Before they were in a small village, now in a big city.”

E. Eritrean refugee

With little information on their family’s safety, respondents reported a high stress rate and the resulting difficulties to integrate in France. Respondents and stakeholders alike highlighted the handicap that separation from the family and the family reunification procedure represented in terms of refugee integration.

“ To integrate, you need your family, your children, besides you. You can’t spend your life waiting and always thinking of your past in your country.”

C., male Ivorian refugee

Respondents felt they could not concentrate properly on their own integration as long as they could not be sure that they would be joined by their family. Whether handicapped in learning the language, seeking employment or concentrating at work, refugees felt that their integration would be more successful if their family was there.

“ I’m really stressed thinking of my children, which is preventing me from looking for work.”

M., female Congolese refugee

Conversely, several respondents insisted that it was important for them to settle, get a flat and secure employment before the arrival of their family. They did not want their family to come to live in the same precarious conditions they were experiencing.

“ I have a child in Togo who is two and he should be next to me. But as long I don't have a place to stay, who will take care of him? I want to be sure he won't be disturbed.”

T., male Togolese refugee

Stakeholders reported that family reunification could at times create further problems after the family had reunified. Social workers explained having witnessed families imploding shortly after reunifying, which they attributed to husbands resenting changes in family structure, in particular with regard to the freedom acquired by their wife during the time of separation. Stakeholders reported that some husbands also felt they had lost authority over their children. In some instances, this resulted in physical violence or threats within the family. Respondents did not elaborate on the issue of family implosion post family reunification, but one respondent reported that some families were imploding because of the separation and this was having an impact on his own family.

“ Some families are being torn apart. Children grow up without seeing their father. The family loses trust. Sometimes my wife tells me, ‘you're not trying to help, maybe you have a wife in France.’ Even if I say it's not true, it has created some distance between us.”

C., male Ivorian refugee

Finally, both stakeholders and respondents reported that some refugees were refused French nationality on the basis that they still had family ties in their country of origin. Respondents highlighted the irony of the situation, which was not of their own accord, as they themselves just wanted to be joined by their family.

Conclusion

Integration has been at the core of French political debates for over 30 years. French integration policy has repeatedly been revised to compensate for inequalities and to better encompass the idea of integration as a two-way process between the French state and migrants, including refugees, wishing to settle in France. Its most recent evolution consists of the *Contrat d'Accueil et d'Intégration* (Reception and Integration Contract - CAI), targeted at all migrants aiming to settle permanently in France since 2007. However, following the publication in February 2013 of a critical report by Mr. Thierry Tuot, State Counselor, on the state of integration, the French Minister of the Interior, Mr. Valls, announced his intention to reform the CAI in order to facilitate migrants and refugees' integration process. The Minister also announced a large reform of the asylum system geared towards the efficiency of the asylum system altogether. Both announced reforms emphasize the importance conveyed by the French government to improving reception and integration conditions for migrants, including refugees. This direction reinforces the timeliness and contribution of this study on refugee integration in France. It is hoped that this study and its recommendations will contribute to informing the reform.

This study has reviewed trends in development of integration indicators and considered the methods of integration evaluation and the inclusion of refugee specific data. It has also explored specific barriers or facilitators to refugee integration in France. By doing so, it has highlighted some of the key factors influencing refugee integration in France. This conclusion will focus on this study's main results and will put forward suggestions for future research on refugee integration and recommendations.

The statistical and literature review undertaken shed light on previous and current research and data relating to refugee integration and the main outcomes and recommendations of these studies. Compared to other countries, France has shown an interest in measuring integration in a quantitative manner. To that end, a broad set of indicators was developed to assess migrant integration, the *Tableau de bord de l'intégration*. The data available does not, however, provide specific information on refugee integration. The *Etude Longitudinale sur l'Intégration des Primo-Arrivants* (ELIPA) partially fills the gap as it aims to assess early integration pathways of migrants having acquired long-term leave to remain over a three year period. In this study, which started in 2010, a representative sample of over 6,000 migrants was surveyed, including approximately 10 per cent of refugees. The ELIPA survey provides important information on early integration pathways of refugees and other migrants having recently settled in France. Intermediary results already provide interesting information according to surveyed migrants' status. The review of the diverse literature available in France on refugee integration, whether academic, institutional or NGO-based studies, has shown that these studies, though rarely aiming to measure integration, provide an in-depth picture of the integration barriers faced by refugees in the integration process.

Overall, close to 200 stakeholders and refugees were met for the purpose of the study. Through dialogue with stakeholders and directly with refugees the study have explored barriers and facilitators of integration which impact refugees. The main areas of inquiry were housing, employment, access to rights, health, social connections, and family reunification. They stemmed from the review of the literature and were decided upon in direct consultation with members of the national reference group, a group of experts from academia, the government and the main refugee NGOs selected for their expertise on refugee integration in France. These areas largely relate to the integration policy areas stated in the *Tableau de bord de l'intégration*, encompassing a set of indicators developed by the French government. Consultation with stakeholders and refugees alike provided a clear insight into some of the key integration barriers and facilitators, as well as some of the practices developed to support refugees in the integration process.

Identified gaps, challenges and recommendations

Summarized below are the main conclusions derived from this study, against the backdrop of a system characterized by all interested parties as afflicted by a state of crisis. This includes notably the length of procedures and the non-availability of dedicated housing for a significant segment of asylum-seekers. First presented are general findings, followed by findings by integration areas.

The study emphasizes the interdependency of the main areas influencing refugee integration in France: housing, employment, health, access to rights, social connections and family reunification. Both stakeholders and refugees insisted on the cross-cutting impact of each of these areas on the others. In particular, the study shows that housing and employment are very tightly interconnected. In addition, access to rights, social connections and family reunification constitute further cross-cutting issues that impact every area. Barriers faced in all these areas furthermore have a strong impact on refugee health. Refugee health itself, in particular mental health, also strongly affects the overall integration experience. In contrast, most other studies reviewed in the literature review investigated one specific area influencing refugee integration. The strength of this study resides in its research of the main areas impacting integration, therefore emphasizing their interconnectedness.

Furthermore the study foregrounds the specificity of refugees in the integration process, aside from other migrants.

What comes out strongly is the importance of being ‘supported’ during the asylum claim and the early integration process. Support goes beyond pure financial support, which is awarded to all asylum-seekers. This study shows that the kind of support that matters to refugees is the help of an “empowering” agent facilitating settlement and integration into society. This support comes in two main ways: personal support through an individual’s social network or, more importantly, institutional support through the National Reception Scheme for asylum-seekers and/or refugee-specific programmes provided by NGOs. As shown in the empirical chapter, housing support in particular, or the lack thereof, considerably affects refugees’ integration pathways. Refugees housed in reception centres or supported by external NGOs are able to focus on other matters, such as finding employment or accessing entitlements, rather than focusing solely on finding housing. Refugees that are not supported by NGOs, in particular with regard to housing, experience strong instability that negatively impacts all aspects of their lives. While a minority of asylum-seekers chooses not to utilize the French National Reception Scheme, others suffer from the inequity of rights between those allowed to stay in reception centres and those who are not.

- With regard to measuring refugee integration, it would be of interest to develop indicators relating to support during the asylum claim to see how the asylum period affects refugee integration.

This study, furthermore, emphasizes the impact that the average length of the asylum claim can have on refugee integration. The study has shown the disintegration effect on refugees of a long period waiting for an answer to their asylum claim. The uncertainty and vulnerability that asylum-seekers are confronted with has longstanding implications on their mental health. In some very specific cases the asylum process had some positive effects, enabling asylum-seekers to develop social networks for instance.

- A focus by the French government on limiting the length of the asylum claim to one year (including appeal) would limit the negative effect that the asylum claim has on many applicants.
- In forthcoming quantitative studies on refugee integration the inclusion of indicators relating to the period of the asylum claim would increase knowledge of its impact on refugees’ subsequent integration.

Another aspect coming to the fore in this research relates to the difficulty of integrating into a mainstream French system that does not cater for specific diverse needs. Overall there are 160,000 refugees in France. Each year, approximately 10,000 asylum-seekers are recognized as refugees. Generally unable to access social housing or employment beforehand, most of the new adult refugees join the pool of jobseekers and applicants for social housing. However, these institutions already have to cater to the needs of millions of individuals including nationals. As a result special consideration for refugees’ entitlements remains limited within the French administration. The result is that when dealing with refugees, generalist administrations tend not to differentiate between refugees and other migrants. Such lack of differentiation becomes a further issue when administrators require refugees to provide birth certificates and other identity documents or to obtain specific documents from their country of origin’s authorities. Demands of the kind come in direct contravention of the 1951 Refugee Convention and put refugees in inextricable situations.

- There is a particular need to inform and train generalist administrations on specific refugee entitlements. UNHCR strongly recommends a process to sensitize, inform and train institutional actors so as to ensure special consideration of refugee needs and entitlements.

Lack of information also constitutes a problem for refugees. What came through strongly was the complexity of accessing entitlements for refugees. During meetings, stakeholders confessed facing particular difficulties keeping up with changes in legislation and jurisprudence and working out how they might affect refugees. They emphasized the added difficulty faced by unsupported refugees when aiming to cope with the complexity of the French system in a context where refugees do not speak the language and have no specialist knowledge. Refugees hosted in reception centres have the added advantage of being supported in the process by social workers specialized in securing entitlements. However, only a minority of refugees benefits from such support. This further emphasizes the lack of equality between refugees based on whether they get specialized support or not.

- All refugees to be given proper orientation and support upon acquiring refugee status in order to facilitate integration.

This study has shown that current integration indicators developed by the French government, though wide-ranging, do not necessarily take into account the specificities of refugee integration.

- To better measure refugee integration, development of a new set of indicators in addition to the currently existing set of indicators included in the French Tableau de bord de l'intégration would better take into account integration facilitators and barriers that are specific to refugees. This could include the length of the asylum claim, the amount of support received during the asylum claim, in particular with regard to accommodation, or the amount of specialist training on refugee entitlements received by employees in the main generalist institutions.

The ELIPA survey is a promising step towards establishing baseline data on the profile of recognized refugees and the barriers they face in the integration process. However, this survey is still limited to the first three to four years post-recognition of status for refugees.

- After the third wave of this longitudinal survey scheduled for 2013, it will be helpful for the Ministry of the Interior to organize expert meetings to examine results specifically relating to refugees and how these might influence integration programmes.
- UNHCR recommends that quantitative research on refugees be carried out over a longer period of time in order to understand some of the key turning points in their lives. Ideally the sample of refugees should be large enough to look at the impact of key indicators for refugees, such as the length of the asylum claim or having benefited from regular external support in the early stages of the integration process, in particular with regard to housing and employment.

HOUSING

What is most striking in the field of housing is the strong discrepancy between the Ile de France region and the rest of France with regard to availability of housing. Furthermore, the prospect of finding housing considerably improves through the provision of regular support with housing search. Stakeholders and respondents insisted on the close connections between housing and employment and the disproportionate impact that housing instability has on refugee integration in the other areas.

- Starting with the asylum claim, UNHCR recommends that the French government provides accommodation for all asylum-seekers requiring such support as part of the National Reception Scheme.
- Specific support into finding housing upon recognition of status for all refugees obtaining refugee status, as stated in the CESEDA's specific legal provision adopted in 2007 on individualized support for refugees.

EMPLOYMENT

Migrants have higher unemployment rates than do French nationals. This study shows the added difficulties refugees are confronted with. The specific difficulties faced by refugees relate in particular to language issues and the lack of recognition of the qualifications and experiences acquired in the country of origin. Refugees' specific administrative situations also have a strong impact on their early experience seeking employment. Relying on a temporary *récépissé* sometimes for several months until they obtain leave to remain, refugees can have a hard time convincing potential employers that they are sure to obtain a 10-year leave to remain.

- UNHCR recommends that, as stated in the 2007 adopted CESEDA article quoted above, all refugees obtaining refugee status be specifically supported into finding employment upon recognition of status.

- UNHCR recommends that OFPRA draws up a statistical repertory of socio-professional data with a view to identifying key tendencies and mapping patterns of professional activities exercised by refugees.
- UNHCR recommends that the list of professions currently reserved to French nationals be reviewed with the aim of opening up employment opportunities, including for refugees.
- This study has highlighted the problems faced by refugees to provide proof of the qualifications and experience they acquired in their country of origin, thereby increasing the risk of experiencing downward professional mobility. UNHCR recommends early mapping of refugees' qualifications and capabilities be promoted and on-the-job initiatives for recognition of skills and competencies be adopted.

HEALTH

Respondents interviewed for the purpose of the project expressed their overall satisfaction with the French healthcare system. However, stakeholders and respondents alike emphasized the need for psychological support felt by several refugees as a result of experiencing torture, fleeing their country of origin, leaving their family behind and importantly due to the suffering experienced during the asylum claim. This study also highlights some of the administrative hurdles faced by refugees in accessing healthcare, relating in particular to delays in access to free healthcare insurance.

- UNHCR recommends that the French healthcare system takes into account the specific health needs, including mental health support for vulnerable refugees, in particular victims of torture, post-traumatic stress disorder sufferers, or victims of female genital mutilation and more widely of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).
- UNHCR recommends regular training of healthcare practitioners and employees working for the French health agency on refugee entitlements to healthcare and the specific situations of refugees.

ACCESS TO RIGHTS

The study shows that refugees' access to their entitlements – access to identity documents, healthcare, unemployment or family benefits, driving license – can be particularly difficult in the first few months post recognition of status. This is largely due to the instability created by the three-month *récépissé* which needs to be renewed for as long as they have not received their 10-year leave to remain. In addition, generalist administrations' lack of specific knowledge on refugee entitlements and refugees' difficulty to communicate as a result of poor language skills constitute other particular barriers to accessing rights.

- Upon recognition of status, it is essential to ensure speedy delivery of 10-year residence permit. UNHCR recommends that, pending its delivery, a *récépissé* with a validity of one year instead of currently three months be given to refugees. This would prevent interruptions of rights due to multiple renewals of *récépissé*, which has particular impact on access to employment or benefits.
- UNHCR recommends that OFPRA produces a document stating refugees' specific entitlements, which refugees could hand to generalist administrations when aiming to access their entitlements. Such document could help prevent misunderstandings and requirements set by administrations which might contravene the 1951 Refugee Convention.
- It would be of benefit for officers working in institutions, such as the employments agency, the health agency, prefectures or consulates, to have regular access to sensitization training programmes relating to refugee entitlements. This is especially important as French legislation on the matter changes repeatedly and generalist officers have difficulties keeping track with changes.

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

This study looked at refugees' relationships with institutions and NGOs, friends, fellow nationals and French nationals. What comes strongly through is the isolation experienced by respondents. In the absence of pre-established connections when arriving in France, refugees have no choice but to rely on the main institutions and chance encounters for support. Reception centres provide the opportunity to build friendships with fellow residents and benefit from strong support by social workers. Refugees emphasized the ambivalent role of the national community: on the one hand, fellow community member could provide strong support, especially material. On the other hand, some respondents expressed distrust in their national community and wanted to keep away from it. Language appears to be of particular importance in building up friendships and social networks.

- UNHCR recommends that language classes be offered to refugees early after recognition of status so as to facilitate the development of social network and reduce their isolation.

FAMILY REUNIFICATION

The study highlighted both the positive aspects of the family reunification procedure for refugees, which does not impose conditions on housing, income or duration of stay, and some of the main difficulties that refugees face in the family reunification process. Overall what came out strongly is the financial and psychological cost that separation from the rest of the family, together with the lengthy and difficult process, has for refugees. This study highlights the financial investment required to be reunited with the family, the mental health implications that separation has on refugees and the overall difficulty to concentrate on one's own integration due to the separation from the family.

- Respondents and stakeholders have insisted on the detrimental impact for refugees of being separated from their family. One key problem highlighted related to the lack of information available to refugees aiming to be reunited with their family. UNHCR therefore recommends that the leaflet produced by the Bureau des familles de réfugiés be amended to provide further information on each step of the procedure. In particular, it should insist on the need to prove links of filiation and make reference to the full spectrum of suitable evidentiary documentation to provide such proof.
- Respondents reported spending months without receiving information as to the status of their applications. UNHCR recommends that applicants for family reunification therefore be kept informed of their application status throughout the entire process.

LANGUAGE

The report highlights the detrimental impact that poor language skills have on refugee integration in areas such as employment, access to rights, health or social connections. Several respondents complained about the lack of opportunity to bridge the language gap that prevented them from accessing a position or taking full advantage of their entitlements.

- Language is key to securing a proper integration process. In that sense, the plan to translate the "introductory booklets for beneficiaries of protection," (Livrets d'accueil pour les personnes protégées) published by OFPRA since 2012 in the main languages spoken by beneficiaries of international protection is a welcome evolution.
- Courses on Life in France and civic education offered through the French Contrat d'Accueil et d'Intégration (CAI) are recommended by UNHCR to be taught in the main languages spoken by beneficiaries of protection or, at least, translation opportunities to be offered in all cases.
- The Minister of the Interior has announced his intention to reform the CAI. UNHCR recommends that the reform focuses on language acquisition as a priority. Refugees to be given the ability to bridge the language gap between the A1 to A2 level acquired during the CAI training and the B1 or B2 level generally required to work or study. Integration programmes in other countries could be used as models.

- UNHCR recommends that the French administration uses, as appropriate, interpreters during meetings in the early stages of refugees' integration process to prevent misunderstandings and errors and speed up the process of accessing entitlements.
- More research is needed on language acquisition and in particular on whether learning French at work might be a more effective alternative than attending French classes to find work. Such research could help influence future policies on language acquisition. For instance, if proven that language can be learnt in the work place, a system of internship and work placement could be put together for all newly recognized refugees interested in such programmes.

Finally, while this research did not set out to evaluate refugee integration or the services provided for refugees, some areas of practice emerged as working particularly well. Acting as mediators between refugees and "French society," NGOs play a key role as facilitators of refugee integration. All NGOs met for the purpose of the study made sure to play a dual role of facilitating refugees' understandings of the French society and of raising awareness on the situation and the profile of refugees in France. Of particular value are programmes that bridge the gap between refugees housed in reception centres and those not benefiting from such support.

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Annexes

Annex 1: List of indicators in the Tableau de bord de l'intégration per area

I. ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

I.1. Labour market integration

- Activity rate according to geographic origin, gender and age
- Employment rate according to geographic origin, gender, age and level of qualification
- Unemployment rate according to geographic origin, gender, age and level of qualification
- Unemployment rate according to geographic origin, gender, age and duration of stay in France
- Share of active population by socio-professional category according to geographic origin, gender, age and level of qualification
- Share of foreigners among entrepreneurs
- Duration to access first stable employment

I.2. Employment conditions

- Share of active individuals underemployed according to their origin and gender
- Share of the active population with a short-term contract according to their origin and age
- Rate of individuals experiencing downward mobility according to their origin and gender

I.3. Income

- Rate of individuals belonging to a household whose income is lower than the poverty rate
- Median standard of living

II. HOUSING

II.1 Concentration indicators

- Percentage of households living in Zones urbaines sensibles (sensitive urban areas)
- Origin of people living in Zones urbaines sensibles (sensitive urban areas)
- Percentage of people living in social housing

II.2 Indicators on housing conditions

- Percentage of home owners
- Percentage of people living in bad quality housing
- Percentage of people living in overcrowded housing

III. EDUCATION/SCHOOLING

III.1 Indicators on attendance

- Percentage of students attending a secondary school in a ZEP (area targeted for special help in education)
- Origin of students attending a secondary school in a ZEP (area targeted for special help in education)
- Percentage of students attending a secondary school part of a high priority education network
- Origin of students attending a secondary school part of a high priority education network

III.2 Indicators on school achievement

- Percentage of students held back at school compared to their age when entering secondary school
- Percentage of students oriented towards vocational training in the fifth year of secondary school
- Percentage of students having reached the final year of secondary school without repeating a year
- Percentage of students having left secondary school without a secondary school degree
- Share of the population according to the level of qualification

IV. ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE AND WELL BEING

IV.1 Access to healthcare

- Rate of complementary health insurance
- Attendance rate at the General Practitioner

IV.2 Well-being (not yet analyzed)

V. ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

V.1 Access to French nationality

- Percentage of migrants having acquired French nationality
- Length of stay in France of people having acquired French nationality

V.2 Participation in political life and social activities (not yet analyzed)

VI. DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

- Fertility rate according to nationality and birth place
- Percentage of mixed marriages
- Average age when getting married
- Percentage of single people

VII. ACCEPTANCE BY FRENCH SOCIETY

- Percentage of the population expressing distrust towards foreigners or migrants

Annex 2: Members of the National Reference Group in France

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Service de l'asile, Ministère de l'Intérieur

Yves Breem

Département des statistiques, des études et de la documentation, Ministère de l'Intérieur

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Catherine Wihtol de Wenden

Directrice de recherche, Sciences Po/CNRS

Virginia Mamede

Directrice du Centre Provisoire d'Hébergement de Massy, Cimade

Stefan Maier

Administrateur chargé de la protection, HCR

Annex 3: List of stakeholder meetings

Stakeholder meeting on housing 10/12/2012	• Adoma (state organization) • Coallia (association largely funded by the state) • CAP'I Mobilité, France Terre d'Asile • Reloref, France Terre d'Asile • SIAO 75 (state organization)	• GAS • FNARS • Accelair, Forum Refugies • ADEF
Stakeholder meeting on access to health 19/12/2012	• Primo Levi • Centre Françoise Minkowska • Parcours d'Exil • OFII	• Cimade • Adoma • ISM • Comède
Stakeholder meeting on access to rights 14/01/2013	• Adoma • France Terre d'Asile • CAP'I Accompagnement, France Terre d'Asile	• Cimade • CASP • Pôle Insertion, France Terre d'Asile • Université Lyon 2
Stakeholder meeting on employment 31/01/2013	• APSR • Epicerie Solidaires • Pôle Insertion Créteil, France Terre d'Asile • Tisseco Solidaire • FNARS • Cimade • Entraide Universitaire Française	• Adoma • Centre ENIC-NARIC • Forum Réfugiés • Reloref, France Terre d'Asile • Association Passerelle • Chantiers Ecole • Université Lyon 2
Stakeholder meeting on family reunification 07/02/2013	• Permanence pour les familles réfugiés, Cimade • OFPRA • ACAT • Secours Catholique • Centre Provisoire d'Hébergement, Cimade	• Bureau des familles de réfugiés, Ministère de l'Intérieur • Association Passerelle • France Terre d'Asile • CAAR • Université Lyon 2 • UNHCR
Stakeholder meeting on social connections 21/03/2013	• Adoma • Cimade • APARDAP • JRS	• Comité des avocats Pierre Claver • Secours Catholique • Cèdre, Secours catholique

Annex 4: Field visits undertaken

GAS, Villejuif

Pôle Insertion Créteil, France Terre d'Asile

Cimade, Massy

Forum Réfugiés, Lyon

CPH Forum Réfugiés, Lyon

Centre Essor, Forum Réfugiés, Lyon

CADA Coallia, Rennes,

CPH Coallia, Rennes

Association Accueillir et Partager, Rennes

Association Langues et com', Rennes

Tisseco Solidaire, social enterprise,
Le Plessis Tréville

CASP, Paris

CAP'I Accompagnement,
Paris, France Terre d'Asile

Service d'Insertion Réfugiés, Mulhouse

Annex 5 : Profiles of interviewed refugees

Refugees interviewed	
GENDER	
Female	23
Male	45
AGE	
Aged 17-34	29
Aged 35-54	38
Aged 55+	1
REGION OF ORIGIN	
Maghreb	5
French-speaking Sub-Saharan Africa	22
Sub-Saharan Africa (Other)	8
Near and Middle East	7
Asia	14
Commonwealth of Independent States (Former Soviet Republics)	10
Latin America	2
LOCATION IN FRANCE	
Paris and Ile de France	51
Rhône (South East)	8
Ille et Vilaine (North West)	4
Haut-Rhin (North East)	4
Moselle (North East)	1
FAMILY SITUATION	
No spouse or children	27
Spouse and/or children outside of France or deceased/disappeared	15
Spouse and/or children in France	26



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Fund of the European
Commission



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Fonds européen pour les réfugiés de la Commission européenne.

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