



Progress GB Study of Employers' Attitudes to Employing Migrants and Refugees



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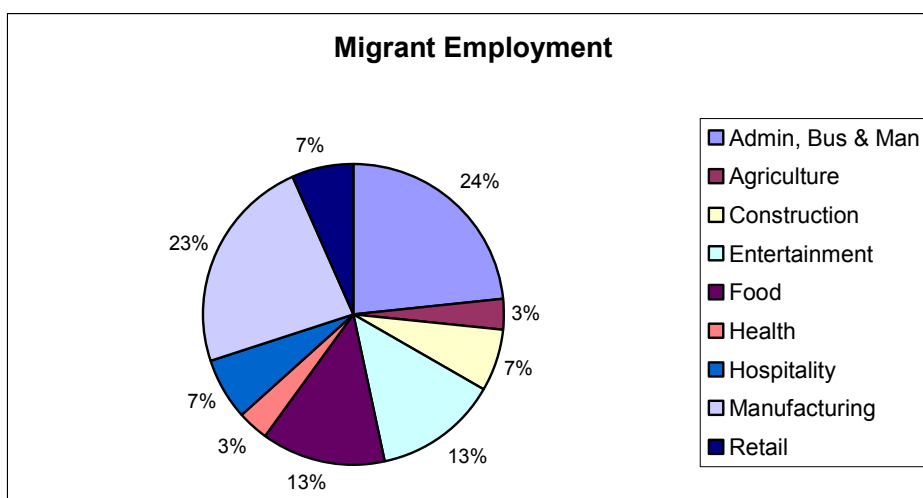
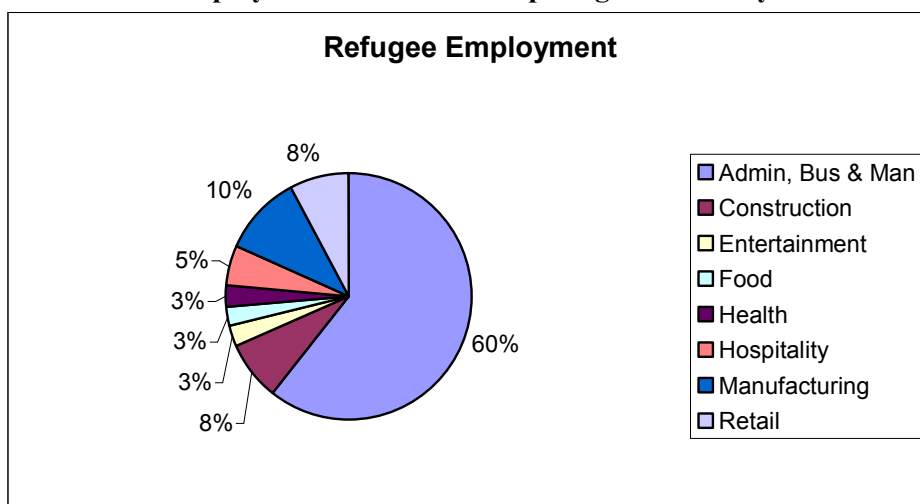
Introduction

Progress GB is an ESF/EQUAL Development Partnership composed of ten partners from a range of organisations based in six English regions. Progress GB aims to address the barriers to appropriate employment faced by migrants and refugees in the UK. As part of this work, six of the partners carried out interviews with employers in their regions to discover the attitudes of employers to the employment of migrants and refugees. Telephone interviews were conducted with employers randomly chosen by the partners themselves. Copies of the questionnaires used can be found in the appendix.

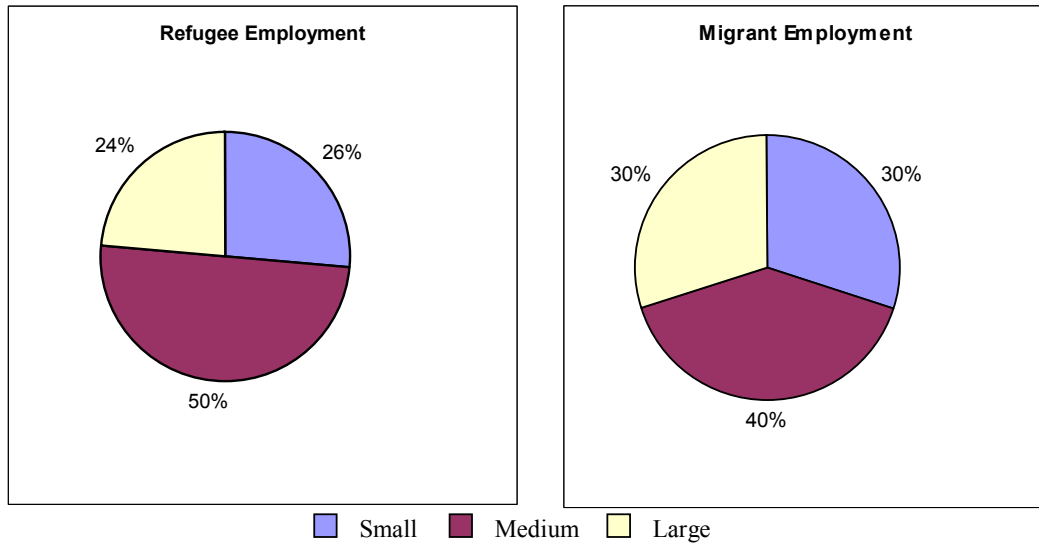
Background to the study

Employers from the private and public sectors (the latter including voluntary organisations) were invited to take part in the study. The regions included were the East Midlands, the East of England, the South West, the North East, the West Midlands, and Yorkshire and Humberside. Altogether 68 employers agreed to participate, 38 of whom gave answers relating to the employment of refugees and the remaining 30 responded about the employment of migrants. The sectors and sizes of the employers that participated are indicated in the pie charts below.

Employment Sectors Participating in the Study



Size of Employers Participating in the Study

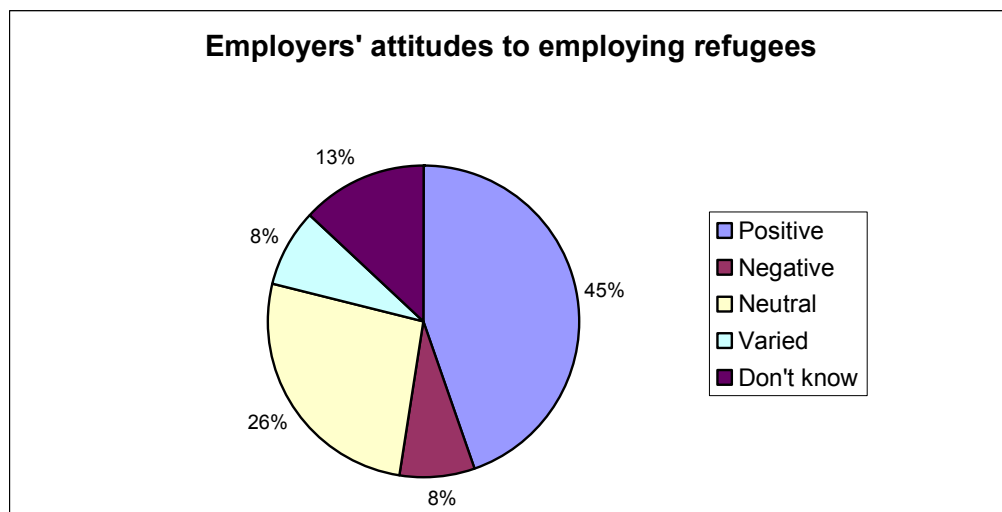


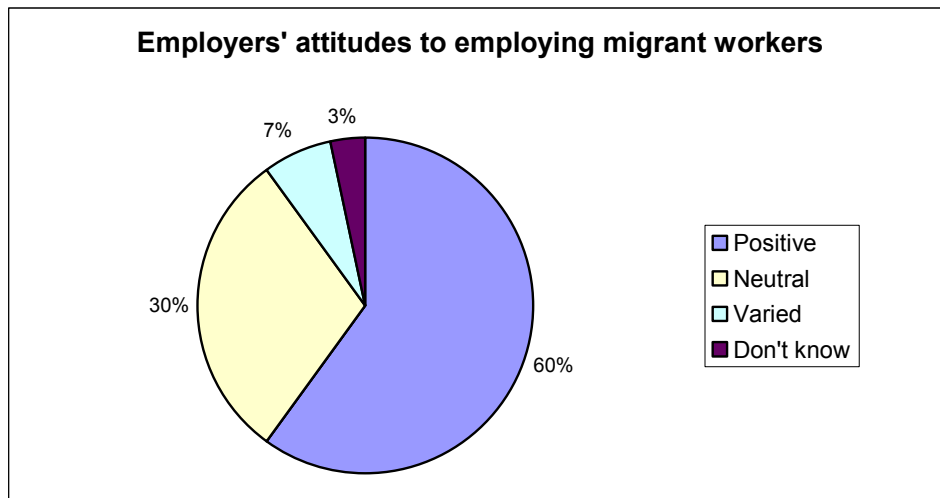
It was discovered that over 60% of the employers participating had some experience of employing refugees (66%) or migrant workers (63%).

Findings

1. To what extent were employers' attitudes to the employment of refugees or migrants positive?

Employers were asked about their experiences of employing people from these backgrounds and for their views on the perceptions held by other employers in their sector to the employment of refugees or migrants.



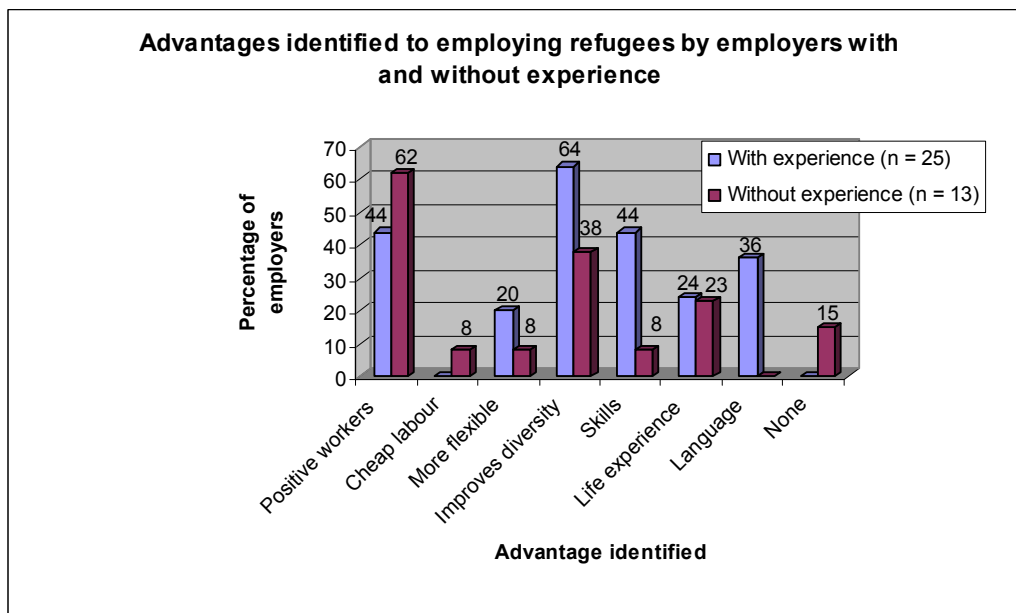


In relation to the employment of refugees, the most positive responses came from:-

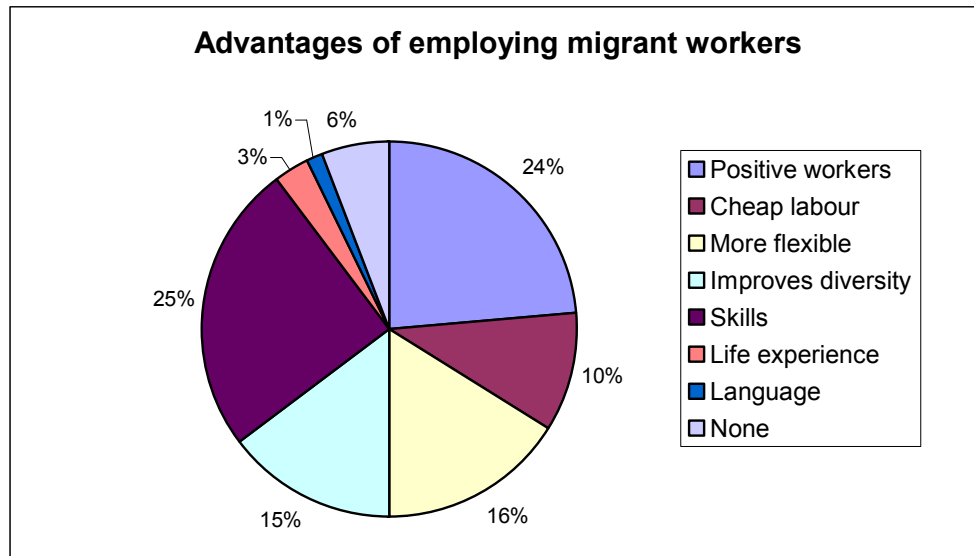
- Those who had direct experience of employing refugees as opposed to those who had not;
- Medium and large employers as opposed to small employers; and
- Public (including voluntary) organisations as opposed to private employers.

The advantages cited by those with experience of employing refugees are that they are positive and flexible workers, who provide skills, life experience, different languages and diversity in the workplace. The most frequently mentioned advantage was the increased diversity refugees bring to the workplace, which was cited by 64% of employers.

For those without experience, an additional advantage was that refugees could be considered as cheap labour; however this response was given by only 8% of employers. The main advantage cited by employers without experience was that refugees were considered to be positive workers.



In relation to the employment of migrants, over 80% of employers with previous experience held positive attitudes, and over 90% of those identified advantages gained from providing such employment. The main advantages cited are that migrants are positive workers and have a range of skills to offer.



Quotations from Employers

“Refugees are hard workers and highly flexible. They add diversity to our workforce.” HR manager for a large retail organisation in the North East.

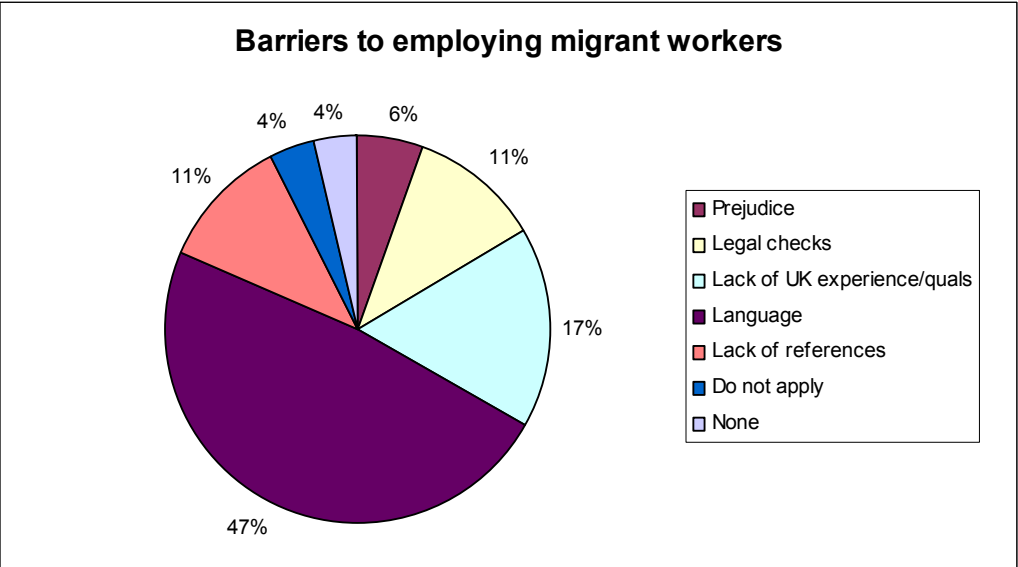
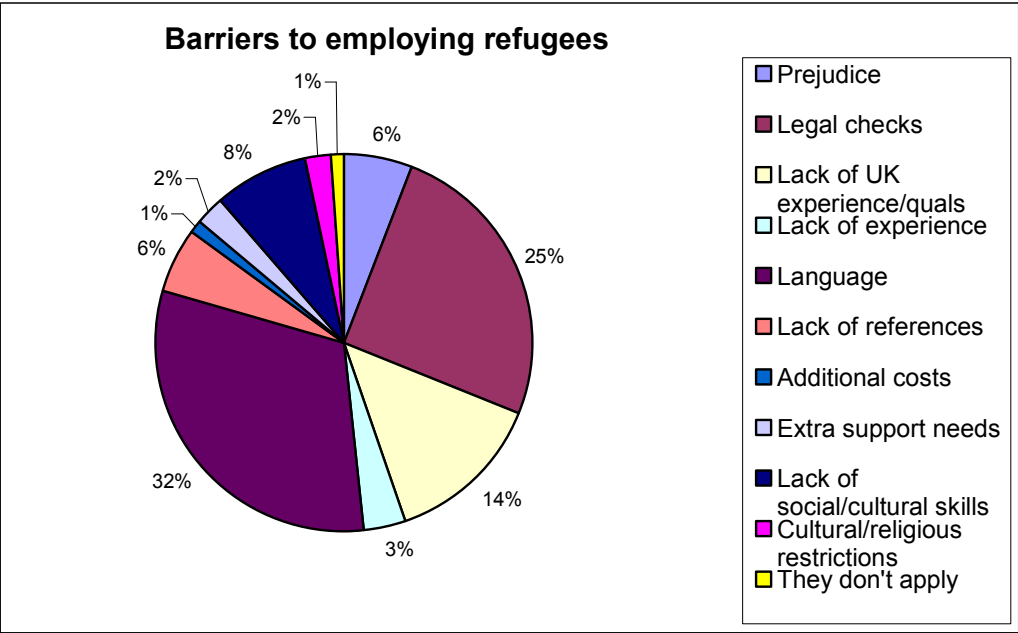
“Refugee employees offer interpreting skills and share similar experiences with our client group, which is a huge advantage to our organisation in enabling us to meet clients’ needs.” Area manager for a housing association in the East Midlands.

“They are dedicated, motivated and not afraid of hard work, and are less likely to have time off and more likely to work overtime than UK workers.” Manager of a large national construction company in the UK referring to migrant workers.

“Our migrant workers, from consultants to cleaners, bring skills, diversity, motivation and experience to feed our health service.” Head of an NHS Primary Care Trust in Eastern England.

2. What barriers did employers identify to the employment of refugees and migrants?

Employers were asked their views on the main barriers to the employment of refugees and migrants. Ninety-nine per cent of participants were able to identify one or more barriers. A summary of the barriers identified is provided in the charts below.



In relation to refugees, employers often cited problems experienced or anticipated with checking and understanding the necessary documentation required to establish a refugee's right to work, and the problems encountered when a job is subject to Criminal Records Bureau checks. Difficulties in translating overseas qualifications into their UK equivalents were also frequently cited.

However, in relation to both refugees and migrant workers, the most frequently identified barrier was language - and the need to speak and understand English at a level which is necessary for the particular job and which enables the worker to communicate in the workplace and understand health and safety requirements.

Quotations from Employers

“The documentation which proves that refugees are entitled to work is very complicated and if CRB checks are required this can take months and these things put some employers off.” The finance director of an East Midlands college.

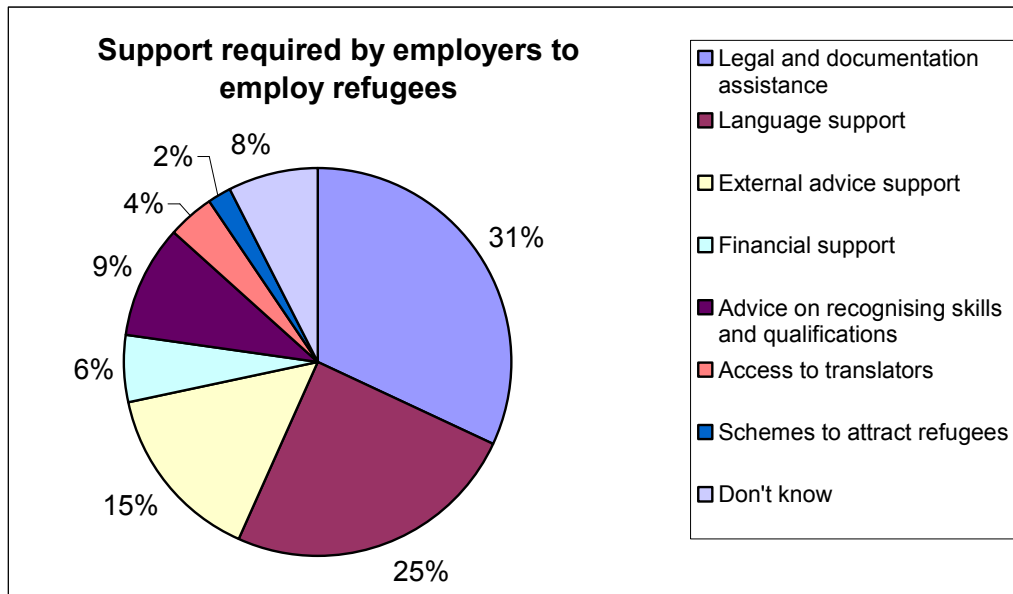
“There is concern about whether refugees and migrants will be able to understand health and safety issues and if they can speak English well enough.” The director of an employment agency in the South West.

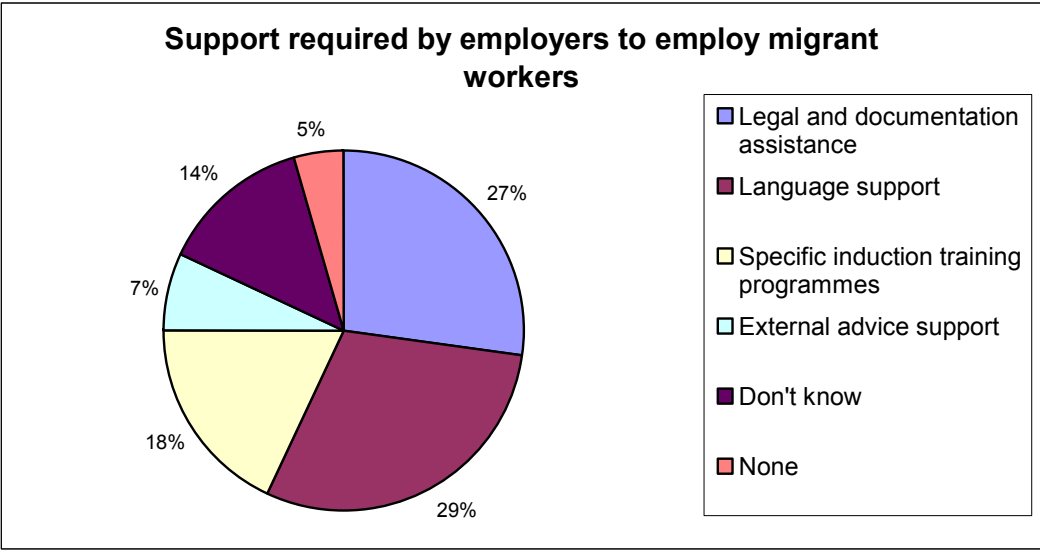
“The main issue, we believe, is the language and communication barrier. Migrant workers sometimes come to jobs with very little English and this can frustrate the other workers”. The co-ordinator of a charity in the Eastern Region.

3. What support do employers and refugee and migrant workers need in order to improve levels of employment?

Employers were asked what support they required to enable them to employ refugees or migrant workers and what support they felt refugee and migrant workers needed to work effectively and gain promotion in their sectors.

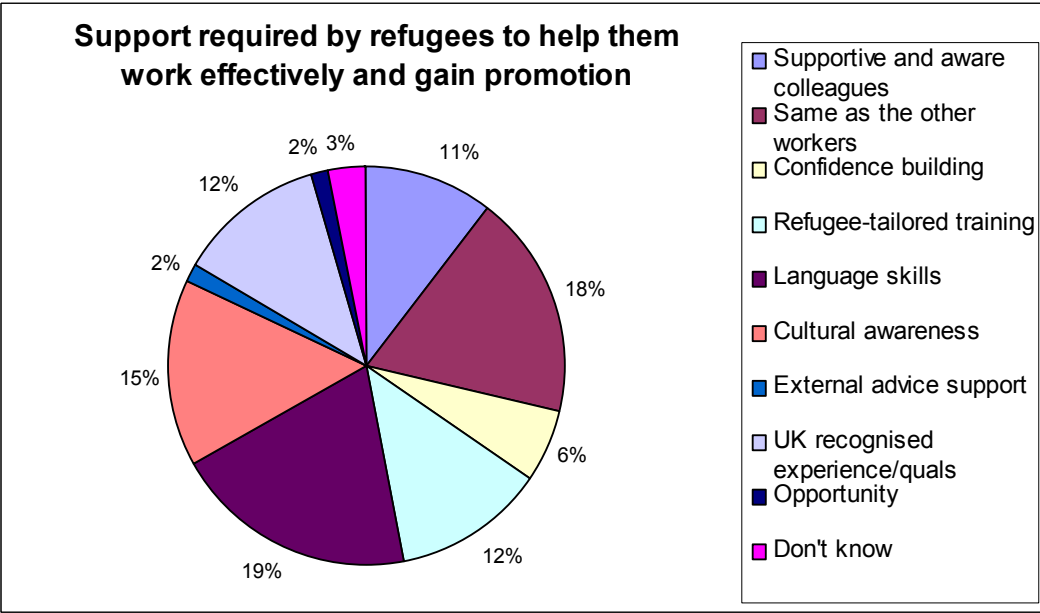
A summary of the responses is set out in the pie charts below.



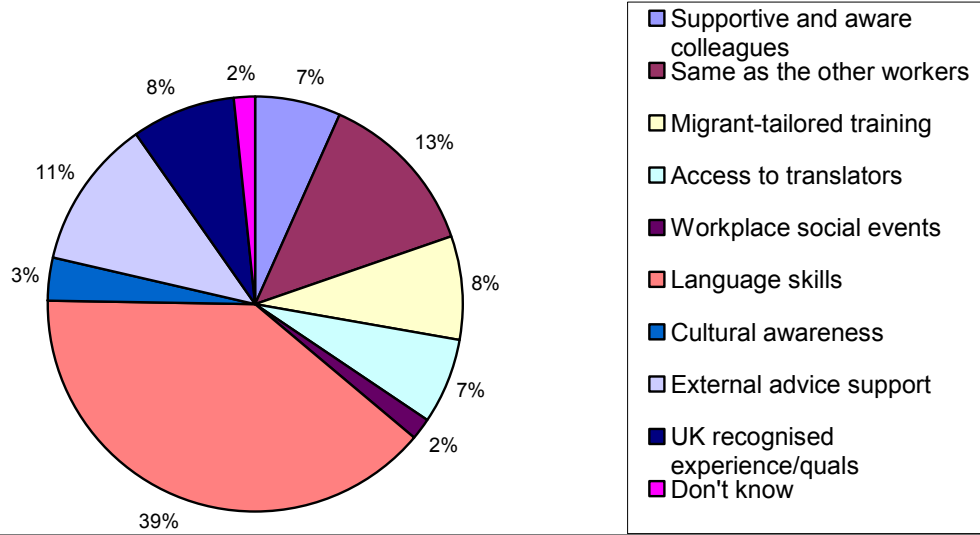


With regard to the employment of refugees, there were few differences between the support needs identified by employers in the public and private sectors. The need most cited was for more assistance in dealing with issues relating to documentation and legal requirements; secondly, employers were looking for more help in providing English language learning opportunities for employees. For the employment of migrants, help with providing English language classes relevant to the area of employment was the need cited most often by employers, followed by assistance with documentation.

When asked about the support needed by refugee or migrant workers themselves, the employers' responses indicated a somewhat different pattern. In the case of migrant workers, 39% of the suggestions made by employers related to support in the development of English language skills, but, for refugees, only 19% of employers' suggestions related to language skills. Cultural awareness, on the other hand, was cited in only 3% of suggestions relating to migrants, but in 15% of suggestions relating to refugees.



Support required for migrant workers to help them to work effectively and gain promotion



Quotations from Employers

“We provide ESOL classes for our workers as it is important that they speak a basic level of English and we translate written material. However what we struggle with and need help with is Home Office documentation. It is frustrating and difficult to keep up with the constant changes regarding permission to work to ensure that we are employing people legally.” The personnel manager of a large bakery in the South West, which employs refugees and migrant workers.

“Employers and employees need advice on qualifications so we know if they are comparable to those in the UK - and quicker CRB checks.” Director of an East Midlands charity that employs refugees.

“Refugees and migrants need appropriate English language classes and other training opportunities, and information, advice and guidance about a wide range of issues including workplace culture, healthcare and ways to integrate.” The recruitment officer for a large agricultural business in the Eastern Region.

Conclusions

The number of employers participating in this study was relatively small, but the 68 respondents included employers of varying sizes and from different regions and different sectors, and therefore the findings help to identify the common concerns and experiences of a diverse range of employers.

The majority of the employers (over 60%) had some experience of employing refugees or migrant workers. Direct experience of employing refugees resulted in employers having more positive attitudes to their employment and a greater ability to identify the particular advantages of doing so. Nonetheless, only 45% of employers expressed positive attitudes towards the employment of refugees.

Employers with experience of employing migrant workers held more positive attitudes towards their employment and several employers without experience shared these views. In total, 60% expressed positive attitudes towards the employment of migrant workers. In part this can be explained by the concentration of migrant workers in some sectors where the employers stated that their businesses would collapse without the contribution of migrant workers. These sectors included agriculture, construction and hospitality.

The advantages identified to employing refugees and migrants were very similar. Employers described the attributes of hard, flexible workers bringing skills and diversity to the workplace. In relation to refugees, their life experiences and language skills were valued by organisations with diverse client groups, and in relation to migrants their skills were valued in areas with skills shortages.

Of the barriers to employment cited, the main ones were seen as:-

- Lack of appropriate English language skills (migrants 47%, refugees 32%);
- Problems relating to documentation and legal checks (refugees 25%, migrants 11%);
- Other barriers mentioned included prejudice, lack of UK experience or qualifications, and the lack of references. Some employers also cited refugees' lack of social or cultural skills.

Employers were able to identify the support employers in their sectors needed to enable them to employ refugees and migrants. The main support needs were seen as:-

- Assistance with documentation and legal checks (refugees 31%, migrants 27%);
- Assistance in English language support (migrants 29%, refugees 25%);
- Other support needs identified included advice on recognising skills and qualifications, induction training courses, and an external advice service.

Employers also identified the support that refugee and migrant workers needed to be effective and progress in the work place. The main needs were seen as:-

- Improving English language skills (migrants 39%, refugees 19%);
- Greater cultural awareness (refugees 15%, migrants 3%);
- Tailored training (refugees 12%, migrants 8%);
- The recognition of skills and qualifications (refugees 12%, migrants 8%);
- Supportive and aware colleagues (refugees 11%, migrants 7%).

Recommendations

This study is part of a wider project, which is testing new approaches to overcoming the barriers to appropriate employment experienced by refugees and migrants in the UK. The findings from this study will be added to the lessons learned by the wider project. However the study itself suggests some outline recommendations, which are summarised below. These require further exploration with employers and other stakeholders.

1. Raise awareness of the advantages that refugees can bring to the workplace by providing and publicising examples of the benefits to the labour market of using the skills, experience and motivation of these groups of workers.
2. Address the barriers to employment by:-
 - streamlining and simplifying the documentation needed by refugees, migrants and employers to establish the right to work;
 - improving the provision of ESOL to meet vocational needs.
3. Provide employers with support in:-
 - dealing with legal and documentation requirements;
 - setting up appropriate workplace English language learning and induction opportunities to meet sectoral needs.
4. Undertake further research with refugees and migrant workers to explore their needs for support that will help them work effectively and gain promotion in the workplace. This additional research could provide more information about the areas of need identified by employers in this study.

Sue Waddington

National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (England and Wales)

April 2007

Appendix 1

Questionnaire Relating to Refugees

Please begin by introducing yourself and explaining that despite low levels of unemployment in the UK, refugees, including those with qualifications and experience, tend to have very high levels of unemployment and that we are seeking to understand employers' perceptions of this.

N.B. Please advise the interviewee that the interview is confidential and that no details of the employers taking part will be published or distributed.

Interview Conducted by _____

Of Progress GB Project _____

Date _____

Please record:

▪ Sector	
▪ Size of enterprise	
▪ Position of interviewee	
▪ Region of the UK	

Q1 Do you have any experience of employing refugees? If 'yes', what was your experience?

Q2 What perception do you think employers in your sector have of refugees? – positive/negative/neutral – record issues raised.

Q3 What might be the main barriers to employing refugees?

Issues raised could include the following:-

- Language barriers;
- Documentation problems;
- Lack of qualifications or relevant skills;
- Lack of references;
- Lack of appropriate social skills;
- They don't apply;
- Other employees would not like it;
- Other reasons (please record all reasons given).

Q4 Can you think of any advantages of employing refugees?

Reasons given might include the following:-

- Hard workers;
- Adds diversity;
- Fills skills gaps;
- Other reasons (please record all reasons given).

Q5 What support do you think employers in your sector might require to employ refugees?

Answers given might include the following:-

- Easy to understand documentation re. right to work;
- Induction training;
- Language classes for refugees relating to the area of employment;
- Other reasons (please record all reasons given).

Q6 What support do you think that refugees need to work effectively and gain promotion in your sector?

Q7 Have you experienced any difficulty recruiting for particular posts? If 'yes', which posts?

End by thanking the interviewee for taking part.

Appendix 2

Questionnaire Relating to Migrants

Please begin by introducing yourself and explaining that there has been a growth in the number of migrants coming to the UK looking for work and that we are seeking to understand employers' perceptions of this.

N.B. Please advise the interviewee that the interview is confidential and that no details of the employers taking part will be published or distributed.

Interview Conducted by _____

Of Progress GB Project _____

Date _____

Please record:

▪ Sector	
▪ Size of enterprise	
▪ Position of interviewee	
▪ Region of the UK	

Q1 Do you have any experience of employing migrants? If 'yes', what was your experience?

Q2 What perceptions do you think employers in your sector have of migrants? – positive/negative/neutral – record issues raised.

Q3 Can you think of any advantages of employing migrants?

Reasons given might include the following:-

- Hard workers;
- Adds diversity;
- Do jobs that others don't want;
- Fills skills gaps;
- Other reasons (please record all reasons given).

Q4 What might be the main barriers to employing migrants?

Issues raised could include the following:-

- Language barriers;
- Documentation problems;
- Lack of qualifications or relevant skills;
- Lack of references;
- Lack of appropriate social skills;
- They don't apply;
- Other employees would not like it;
- Other reasons (please record all reasons given).

Q5 What support do you think employers in your sector who employ migrants might require?

Answers given might include the following:-

- Easy to understand documentation re. right to work;
- Health and safety information
- Other reasons (please record all reasons given).

Q6 What support do you think that migrant workers need to work effectively and gain promotion in your sector?

Reasons given might include:

- language classes;
- induction courses
- recognition of qualifications;
- other reasons - please record.

Q7 Have you experienced any difficulty recruiting for particular posts? If 'yes', which posts?

End by thanking the interviewee for taking part.