



A door to the future?: the
consequences for young
migrants of immigration
and welfare policy

A Summary Report

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Introduction

The last decade and a half has seen perhaps the most intense phase of migration in Britain's history with some 2.3 million migrants entering the country. In 1951 the 'foreign born' population of Britain was 4.2% of the total population including some 2.1 million people. By 2001 that figure had increased to 8.3% numbering some 4.9 million people (Rendell and Salt 2005). This migration includes; greater inflows of asylum seekers and refugees, often coming from places such as Afghanistan and Iraq where Britain has fought recent wars; the enlargement of the EU to include Accession 8 (or A8) and subsequently A10 countries from Central and Eastern Europe; and students. In its wake immigration has often been blamed for unemployment, rising welfare costs and terrorism, with an accent placed on how much migrants cost us. Through a discussion of the lives of young migrants participating in the EU Margins project another picture emerges.

The title of our report comes from the words of a young woman from Congo called Ache who was 17 and seeking asylum at the time of our first meeting with her during the course of our study. She took a photograph of the door of her college that she showed to us. We asked her why and she said because, 'going to college is like a door, a door to my future'. On one hand this might seem a strange place to begin our report given that it looks at immigration and welfare, rather than education. However, our research reveals the efforts that young people are making to live independently build lives and educate themselves. This is a far cry from the picture of young migrants as a burden and danger to our country that seems prevalent in debates concerning these young people. Rather than dependency and welfare insecurity, they seek independence and the chance to move forward in their lives as is captured in the illustration by Ache on the front cover.

Our report focuses on the policy recommendations that have emerged from extensive research carried out by an international team of scholars as part of the *EUMARGINS - On the Margins of the European Community research study*. This group consists of researchers from seven European countries who have analysed processes of social inclusion and exclusion amongst young adult immigrants in seven European countries – Norway, Sweden, Spain, France, Italy, Estonia and the United Kingdom. In this report we focus specifically on London, UK with our work being based on detailed case studies with 30 young migrants living in London between the ages of 17-27. It is the depth of these case-studies that is valuable in showing in close and personal detail the consequences for young migrants of immigration and welfare policy. To make the step from welfare dependence to unlocking their potential for the whole of society requires a shift in social policy and a leap of political imagination. We outline these policy recommendations at the end of the report. Further information about the study can be found at www.sv.uio.no/iss/english/research/projects/eumargins/

Students, Work and Education

Juan: 'I was like a convicted criminal or something'

Juan is a 26 year old man from the Philippines who was living in London on a student visa. His case illustrates how immigration policy in education, can lead to material insecurity at the same as limiting how he can contribute to filling shortages in care home nursing. Juan had been on his nursing course five months when he was suddenly excluded. He had been to the college that Monday and everything seemed fine, but when he attended on Thursday it was different: 'when I get there Thursday the Principal told me directly that I'm not allowed anymore to study at the college.'

I was very embarrassed because there were lots of students there and I was like a convicted criminal or something.

Juan was excluded because his college attendance had been poor. He could not always go to college because even though he was only required there twice a week he needed to work to meet his living costs and that sometimes there was not enough time to both work and go to college. His family had incurred debts to finance him coming to the UK through the Philippine 'Earn While You Learn Scheme' under which he was promised a job by immigration intermediaries which never materialized. Student nurse friends of Juan coming to the UK through different intermediaries were coerced into working at certain care homes and threatened with violence if attempting to escape, after paying thousands of pounds through intermediaries to gain their student visas. Under the current UK points based immigration system universities and colleges including their teaching staff are required to monitor the attendance and behaviour of overseas students in case it suggests illegal working or other suspicious activities while exercising the sanction of college exclusion. This can be followed up by immigration officials with deportation. Juan did not object to there being rules about attendance but how it was operationalised:

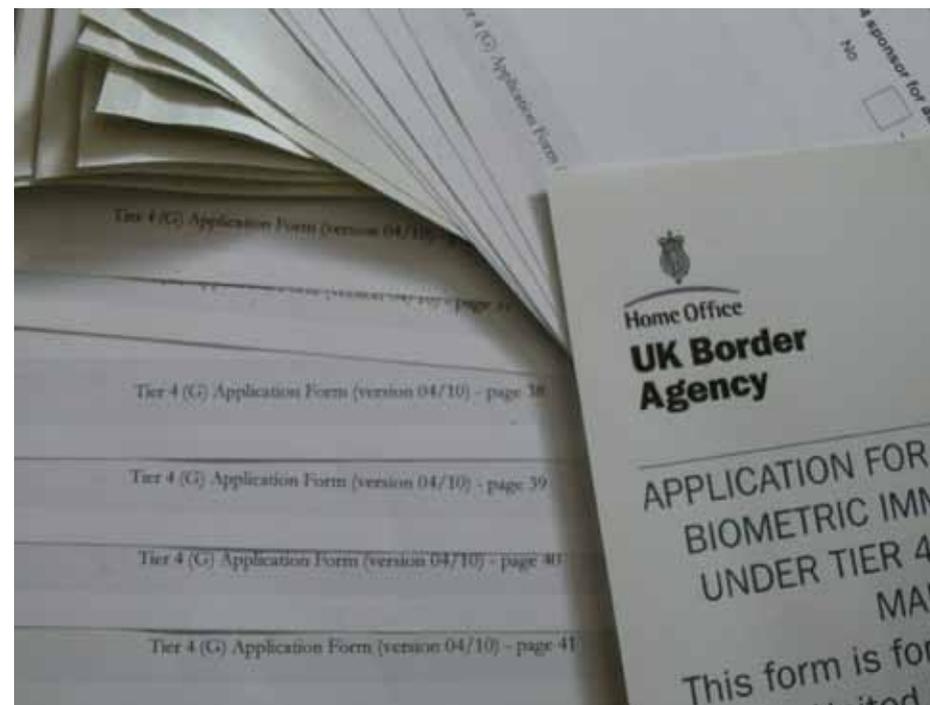
there was no written announcement or no letter from the school saying that if we do not come, we will not say, attend this class, we will deport you, we will dismiss you.

For a period Juan could not work legally because his working rights were tied to studying but had to survive so he entered the informal labour market. Eventually he found an alternative college where he is studying for his HND (Higher National Diploma) but new regulations mean that whereas he had previously been allowed to work 35 hours per week, this has now reduced to 20 hours forcing him to remain partly in the informal labour market to make ends meet, while providing valuable nursing. Labour market restrictions accompanied by the high cost of studying can lead to welfare vulnerabilities, which Juan counter acts by working informally. Adding to this, he has nursing qualifications gained in the Philippines that are not recognised in the UK, meaning that despite nursing shortages, the country cannot benefit from the full range of his skills. At our last meeting Juan was uncertain of his future in the UK because he could see the way legislation was becoming more restrictive. The sense of the UK losing an opportunity to capitalise on his much needed nursing skills was reinforced some months later. In March of this year, he left to return to the Philippines principally because his employer's application to sponsor an extension of his student visa failed. Under Tier 4 of the points-based immigration

system employers have found it increasingly difficult and bureaucratic to successfully sponsor applicants and the care home he was working in experienced labour shortages as a result.

Katrin: 'We have to write our life'

Katrin's experience highlights problems in the administration and bureaucratisation of immigration policy for students leading to uncertainties over residence and potentially expensive legal and application costs, adding to material burdens. It also shows how tighter restrictions on working hours lead to welfare vulnerability. Katrin is from Bolivia and was 23 when we first talked to her for the EUMARGINS study in 2010. She came to the UK in 2006 originally on a tourist visa but then applied successfully for a student visa. Katrin recounted that visas were easier to obtain when she first arrived, but, year on year, have steadily become more difficult to secure. Most of her classmates have had application problems and some have been refused. The application process has also become more demanding – "we have to write our life" she declares. The form took days to fill in and now asks for many more details. It requires rigorous checking to avoid errors. She describes having to fill in a 41 page application form to get a biometric ID card which was required as a condition of her application for a student visa extension (this is shown below).



According to Katrin, the cost of the application come 2010 was roughly £150 more expensive than four years ago. Applying in person (fee £628) is preferable as the visa can be obtained on the same day, rather than waiting 2-3 months via the postal application, which would cost £357.

Following her visa application, the Home Office summoned her to a hearing because she failed to provide certificates for English and computing courses taken in the UK. Oversights of this nature, she elaborates, would not have incurred a formal hearing four years ago – “No hearing court, no hassle, not anything” she exclaims. Instead she would have been required to merely send in the missing documents. The hearing was originally scheduled 3½ months from the date of the letter, a full 6 months after beginning the visa renewal process in January. The hearing was subsequently shifted by the Home Office to August. During this time the original date of the expiry of her student visa lapsed. She felt as though she was in limbo.

This state of affairs was a cause of significant anxiety and uncertainty; although, she was permitted to continue working and studying until a decision had been reached. If refused, her understanding was that she would have 1-2 months to leave the country. She emphasises that the whole visa extension process, from application to verdict, has become markedly more protracted in recent years. Katrin had 15 days from receiving the Notice of Hearing letter to find a solicitor. As with the biometric ID appointment, she describes the deadline as being absolute, which, if not adhered to, would result in the applicant’s case being dismissed without appeal (she emphasises that the letter is sent by post and raises concerns about not receiving it had she moved flat). Initially, enlisting a solicitor was difficult, requiring a significant amount of investigation and having to call on her social network for advice. She discovered that most solicitors practiced privately, costing around £140 per hour which was beyond her means. Free legal support was available from community centres, but the long waiting lists exceeded the 15 day deadline. This highlights the need for legal support to protect against vulnerability. With only three days to spare she secured free legal advice and representation at the hearing from a legal aid centre in Tower Hamlets (East London), which Katrin gratefully praises as helpful and efficient. She describes the eventual hearing as being a simple 10 minute long process – during which time the solicitor spoke on her behalf for the entirety of the proceedings apart from when she had to give her name. Katrin felt she did not need to be present at all.

By the time we met Katrin for the third time in February 2011, she had successfully received an extension to her student visa granting residence until May 2012. This, however, was not without complication or disappointment. She was informed 2-3 weeks after the hearing that her visa would be extended, yet she did not receive the visa documentation until December 2010, and only as a result of following the matter up by phone and ultimately in writing. The relief of the outcome was also short-lived. The new visa stipulated that she would have to halve the number of employment hours she could work during term time from 20 to 10 hours (although the conditions for working outside of term-time remained unchanged so that she can continue working full-time during holidays). Her reaction to this is expressed with relative sangfroid, but the implications for the future are clear: “...it’s really ridiculous, nobody can survive”.

By contrast, some of her classmates have been able to retain their permission to work 20 hours, leading Katrin to consider appealing the decision. Katrin’s employment is essential for her survival in the UK as a student and she has continually been in employment throughout her education. Since receiving her visa extension she has had to economise and now shares a very small room with another student in a house of six people, costing £200 per month on the Old Kent Road, South London. Asked whether this is cramped she does not complain: ‘it’s ok for a start’. She previously lived in a house of 5, but did not have to share a room; the rental was £280, including all bills, plus £10 a month for an internet connection. To keep in touch with people

from her homeland Katrin uses email, MSN and Skype; she only telephones her parents due to the cost and currently uses a calling card. She also has a contract phone with a tariff of £20 per month, but concedes that she does not fully use her allowance. She estimates a further £250 a month on food, leisure and travel (she chiefly gets around by bus as it is cheaper than the train), and pays £2300 for her current year of study, with no further significant outgoings. She earns just over £7 an hour (about £2 more than the minimum wage) and was previously able to break even when she was still permitted to work 20 hours per week during term time. However the reduction in her hours puts her ability to sustain herself in the UK in serious jeopardy. On being questioned about the effects of the recent credit crunch, Katrin replied that she had not noticed rent prices increase, but that food prices had risen and reiterated the hike in visa fees. Conveniently, she lives close to the low budget supermarket Lidl, but says she could now not afford to eat out if she wanted to.

Katrin had held her current job at a hotel in South Kensington (central London) for 3 years, having previously been employed as a cleaner, a waitress and also as a worker in a cosmetics factory. She likes her current post, but now worries about having to find a new employer as jobs for 10 hours per week are difficult to come by. This is by requiring students to unofficially work longer hours, while officially paying them for less hours than they have been working taking advantage of the stipulation limiting how many hours overseas students are allowed to work. Tactics such as paying staff per day rather than per hour or by only offering jobs with a set amount of hours pressurises some migrant workers into working extra hours for free so as not to breach the conditions of their visa. Despite the difficulties Katrin experienced in extending her visa, London needs migrants to contribute to employment in the hotel and catering industry where shortages have been reported (Pollert and Wright 2006; Matthews and Ruhs 2007)

Ache: ‘I’m just like stuck, I’m stuck in one place’

Ache is a 17 year old young woman asylum seeker from Congo living under Section 20 of the Children’s Act, which means that college is free for her. She is studying IT. At the time of our first meeting in February of 2010, Ache had temporary leave to remain, pending a Home Office decision and in the meanwhile reported to Electric House in Croydon fortnightly to confirm her presence in the UK. Ache applied for a ‘learning support’ grant in October 2010 to help meet college costs. By February 2011 she still had not received an answer. Fortunately, she found some Third Sector support: ‘I get some help off the charity that my college found for me, the Egham Refugee Centre, so they help me with a small grant of £200, and I bought a second-hand laptop, just a small one, yeah.’ Ache is constantly attempting to save money. One way is by using the bus to go home from college which takes 1 hour and 40 minutes instead of the train, which takes 40 minutes saving her £2.10 although lengthening her journey by an hour. She has to use three buses to make it home. Ache aspires to go to university and make a life for herself. She saw a road sign with a forward arrow and took a photograph of it for our study because:

‘So for many reasons I’m just like stuck, I’m stuck in one place. You have a world and you’re stuck here but you can’t go back.’

She wants to study at university but even if she is given definite leave to remain, unless that becomes indefinite leave to remain she would have to pay foreign student fees to go to university, which she could not afford. Ache also felt excluded from a political process she felt she could not fully participate in because she was not a citizen. This was brought home to her at

the last general election, where she had strong political opinions that she could not exercise fully in debate or through the ballot box. Despite her efforts and enthusiasm, she faced significant obstacles to achieving her ambitions.

In each of these three lives we can see how immigration scrutiny and restricted terms of employment impact on the lives of young migrants. Young migrants have to cope in difficult financial situations while at the same time being scrutinised by educational institutions that have in effect become extensions for the Border Agency. At the same time inadequacies and bureaucratic delays in the immigration service have a profound impact creating marginalisation and vulnerability. For some of our participants like Ache, the uncertainties and financial pressure make it difficult to embrace the opportunities of self-improvement and education creating a situation in which they are stuck in the present unable to move forward or to go back. Earlier this year, happy news arrived for Ache as she was granted indefinite leave to remain.

'Welfare Scroungers,' Barriers to Employment and the Right to Work

While there is a perception in certain articulations of media and public discourse of immigrants as 'welfare scroungers', and as threatening to our economy or being criminal or terrorist, the young migrants in our study challenged this perception. In the case below we see how immigration legislation and the costs of legal help pushed Dorothy at different times into the informal labour market and then welfare dependency because it forbids her to work. Nonetheless, she is attempting to pursue an education in midwifery – an area of labour market shortage, although her immigration status as temporary leave to remain leaves her subject to higher education costs as a foreign student that hinder her from fulfilling her ambition.

Dorothy: 'how amazing it is to deliver someone's baby'

Dorothy is from Ghana. When we first met her in March of 2010 she was 19. She came to the UK when she was 16 on a tourist visa. Dorothy was the birth partner of the woman in the photograph.



After her mum found out Dorothy was pregnant Dorothy told us 'She abandoned me and God knows where she is, I don't know whether she's dead or alive.'

Her Grandma was her only relative in Ghana that she had contact with or even knew the whereabouts of and she had died. Of this she comments:

'Yeah, it's going to be hard for me because I never got to get closer to my mum, I was closer to my grandma'.

Dorothy stayed with extended family in London. Realising her visa was coming to an end and that there was no-one for her and her British-born son to go to in Ghana she engaged a solicitor to fight to stay in the country. Because of legal costs she needed to work 'Because I was trying to get a job and pay off some money to my solicitor. Because I did make half payment to my solicitor because he was charging me £1,007.' However, Dorothy was not legally allowed to work and was arrested when the police were called to the shop that Dorothy was applying for a job in because the shop workers were suspicious of her application. She was using false national insurance card and false passport. The shop was at Euston station. Dorothy had to do community service, and now has to report to the immigration authorities near where she lives every two weeks. Her legal status means that she is according to the home office letter 'liable to be detained' any time in preparation for deportation to Ghana, a country her child has never been to. Compounding this situation the solicitor had not lodged a legal case for her and had not aided her in any way in her fight to stay despite the money Dorothy had given him. She mentions the last conversation she had with him: "Because the last time I spoke to him concerning about the issue to do a ... he was like 'Oh, I can't do anything at the moment until they are deporting you...'. I said okay then, you have to refund my money back to me. But he doesn't want to do it, so like now the police are dealing with him." This was in March 2010. In June of 2010, Dorothy went back to see him and this time he gave her £140 of the money he owed her. He gave her the money back after the police sent him a letter. Dorothy does not think the police tried to get the rest of the money.

Talking in July 2010, Dorothy said she is nervous about the future because of the uncertainty of her status, and remembers the past when her grandma was alive. Some of the possibilities that the present holds for others such as the right to work do not exist for her. She is sometimes depressed and thinks about the past, partly because of the difficulties of the present life she has and future she struggles to reach. If you can only think about a past that is gone because you cannot work or live in the present, and a good life in the future seems difficult or impossible to reach you might seek a way out. She related that some people can feel suicidal in such circumstances. Dorothy says she can also understand why women in her position sometimes turn to prostitution:

Like someone who isn't that strong...going to prostitution or something because this thing is really hard

Interviewer: You have to get the money somehow isn't it?

Yeah, especially with a child.

Dorothy's long-term ambition is to be a midwife because her grandma was one: 'I was more closer to her so I just want to take over what she did and make her proud.' She continues: 'Yeah, she talked a lot about - when I was young I wanted to be a journalist but when I was growing she normally talked about how amazing it is to deliver someone's baby and when I was having Richard, the way my midwife was with me, like it did encourage me a lot to go into that field.'

Her four year old boy has started at nursery where he played Joseph in the school play last Christmas. Dorothy said that all the girls fancy him. Her uncle has helped her out with funding to study a Level 2 National Diploma in Health Sciences course. It would have cost her £30 but because she is not classified as a home student the course costs £850, of which the uncle has contributed £540, which she will have to pay back if she fails. He has said he would also pay for her Level 3 course as well, which has increased in cost to £1200. A voluntary sector organisation has linked her in to a solicitor who will fight her case for free because she receives Legal Aid. However, her solicitors have told her that the whole process may last years. Nonetheless, she still has what is termed 'no recourse to public funds' and is not entitled to state support. Dorothy is making friends with people to the extent she was the birthing partner of the woman in the photo.

She commented on 'how amazing it is to deliver someone's baby'. Dorothy is studying now to hopefully in the future become a midwife. We could think of Dorothy as somehow deviant or criminal - young single mum, living in council accommodation, arrested for applying for a job, illegal immigrant and so on - but this reduces her life to a mere and misconceived list of factors outside of who she was, is and could be.

Those such as Dorothy are prohibited from working by the terms of their immigration status. They have to wait for the claims to be processed which sometimes takes up to six years. The result is that they are imprisoned in the present and this produces anxiety frustration and a profound sense of social exclusion. In this situation young migrants are also prone to exploitation by unscrupulous legal representatives. The young migrants who participated in the study demonstrated a strong commitment to making a contribution to the life of the city, to work and to be involved in their neighbourhoods and communities.

Labour Market, Networks, Welfare Vulnerability

Mohammed: £1,000 short

Mohammed is a 25 year old man. His case-study shows how while on one side the immigration system bars him from working legally, immigration support systems and networks did not help when he tried to regularise his status. He is seeking avenues to regularise his status and is attempting to gain legal help. Meanwhile, he is forced into working informally to survive. He has found networks to help him find entrepreneurial and labour opportunities

Mohammed is 25. He fled to Syria from Iraq in 1992 when he was 12. His family supported Saddam Hussein and so he felt he could not stay in Iraq. His brother and father had already died in the Iraq war of that year, and he was separated from his sister whom he has not seen since although he has tried tracing her. Mohammed had no means of survival in Syria and decided to go to Europe when he was 15. He paid money to Kurdish traffickers to take him to Sicily in southern Italy. Mohammed found work in a vineyard for six months and describes the work

there as requiring long working hours and being very physical. Initially, the employer said that he could only work there for a shorter period of time. However, he worked so well that he was allowed to stay six months. Mohammed knew that his lack of official status and working rights was the reason he was paid less than other workers. In what was already low paid work, he would get paid for two/three days for each 5 days worked.

Mohammed wanted to apply for citizenship in Italy but was told because he was 18 he was too old and that he ought to have applied for papers before he reached adulthood. An Iraqi friend said he could apply for papers in the UK because it would be easier there than the rest of Europe and a Somali friend gave him tips on how to enter the UK without detection and a phone number to contact him by in the UK. Arriving in Cornwall, south west England Mohammed wanted to find his contact in London. He journeyed there but was arrested by a policeman because he could not pay his fare. Mohammed was incarcerated by the police for three days. The police wanted to keep track of him and told him to report weekly. They also told him the address details of a place to go to apply for papers. However, he did not have any money to travel to this place, nor did he know how to get there. Neither could he find his friend because the phone number did not work, or the police station where he was originally incarcerated. Consequently, he slept rough.

This was in 2004. From then until now Mohammed makes a living working at markets in London because he is not asked for papers. He travels round the city and sometimes outside searching for wares to sell at the market. Sometimes he goes door to door. Between then and now he was once caught by the police for possessing a false ID, and taken to court. Once again, while criminalised by the immigration system, he was given scant help to remedy his situation. He had to serve 180 hours community service because of his offence. The probation officer gave him a number that he could ring to apply for papers. He rang the number but the man was on holiday. Mohammed tried ringing back but the administrative person again said he was not in. He tried a few times without success but the woman did not even refer him to someone else either and was in fact rude to him.

Mohammed supplements his income by providing a dog walking service nowadays. He has had a girlfriend for the last few years who is a Chinese student. She helps him out materially where she can because her parents are quite wealthy. He also gets help from his network of Moroccan and Jamaican friends in finding work. These friends live in the neighbourhood where he himself has been staying for four years now. Mohammed's girlfriend has 1 year left on her student visa but she thinks that after 8 years continuous stay she can apply for indefinite leave to remain. She thinks that if she finds a job she can extend her stay with a one year visa after the student visa expires to take her up to the 8 year limit although there are restrictions on post study work visas. Mohammed holds out some hope that perhaps this might eventually be a route into him getting papers. He knows he needs a solicitor but does not know where to get one who will not 'scam him' and which will be affordable. At the moment he needs £1,000 that he does not have.

Emmanuel: Volunteering at Tesco's

Emmanuel is a 24 year old Eritrean young man. His case study illustrates how important the presence or absence of supportive networks is in determining whether a young person becomes vulnerable, or can use their skills for the benefit of the economy. Emmanuel originally

applied for asylum when in Liverpool and was granted it in fifteen days. He moved to Oldham, a town in northern England, but could not get a job, and so moved to London. In London he became homeless. He was homeless for 3 months and staying in shelters until the community organisation *Praxis* managed to help him secure accommodation in North London. He moved in on April the 28th 2009. He originally came to London because there were other Eritreans whom he hoped would help him find employment. He was in Oldham for six months without a job and also could not access education there (he is now studying English and has gained a qualification in Maths). His accommodation problems started with the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) because after he got his papers they arranged for his accommodation with Oldham Council. There were no jobs in Oldham. He tried to move to Manchester but without success. Once NASS have housed a young migrant he reported they provide no further help with relocation. As a result Emmanuel moved to London without any support and ended up homeless. In London he has found occasional work through agencies, as a cleaner, but this is not regular work. Now he works at the Tesco supermarket for two days a week on work placement. He does this labour for free. Emmanuel is staying in voluntary sector provided housing - supported by Refugee Support and hopes to be moved into housing association accommodation at some point.

What Mohammed and Emmanuel's case-studies show is the importance of facilitative networks to avoid young migrants becoming marginalised. The bureaucracies they encounter fragment their lives and do not always provide the support that is needed with the result - as in the two cases mentioned here - in homelessness and marginalisation. This foreground the failings in the system but also the importance of the work that migrant support groups like Praxis do in offering support to young people where state provision fails them.

Networks, Civic Participation and Social Inclusion

Mardoche: 'Building Home'

Despite the vulnerabilities produced through the structural position of young migrants our study has also shown how young people draw on culturally diverse and complex social networks to make London a hospitable home. Mardoche did not face the same immigration uncertainties as others mentioned previously but faced many different difficulties. By dint of his own efforts, friends, community and youth workers he was able to rebuild his life and make a home in London. This illustrates how when the right to stay is given and welfare support granted, young migrants can achieve and build lives even in the most difficult of circumstances.

Born in Kinshasa, Congo, Mardoche migrated to London as a refugee at the age of 8. He is now 18. Mardoche does not remember much about the immigration process as he was young then but he does have UK citizen status now. We first met in a 'greasy spoon' about 10 minutes from Angel tube station. A 'greasy spoon' is a café/restaurant known for serving fried and grilled food at relatively cheap prices. We order chips and the Turkish speaking staff are looking ready to close up for the night. As we talk I learn that upon arriving in the UK Mardoche lived with his aunt and uncle in a hostel in Finsbury Park. He quickly made friends at school and was popular. Before I learn much more the café closes and we are asked to leave. I suggest we take a walk around the local streets and continue our conversation. Mardoche says he is very well known in the area. Almost on cue, we turn the corner of a street near his youth club and a boy aged about

8 years old comes up to him to greet and engage him in friendly conversation. He is not the last person to talk to him while we are walking together. It is a dark and cold night and we walk round the local high rise council estate blocks. Often seen as places of danger, while walking with him, his neighbourhood seems friendly.

Whilst making friends seemed easy and school was good, Mardoche says life at home was hard. Consequently he used to spend a lot of time on the streets. A big treat for Mardoche was eating chicken and chips. To get the money for the meal he used to collect Morrisons (a UK supermarket chain) shopping trolleys. He would walk down the street, dock one trolley into another, collect the money and spend it on chicken and chips at the 'Chicken Spot'. Laughing and smiling, he says he made a lot of money.



He talks about his football team and two youth workers he met at youth club who supported him with advice and guidance. He marvels at how far he has come. Mardoche loves football and that even though life was hard for him; he found enjoyment and joy playing it. In fact, he says it can teach you things, which he found valuable amidst the troubles he was dealing with.

Mardoche talks about his ambitions. He is a talented footballer who has had trials with clubs including Chelsea and the club he supports, Arsenal. He was doing well over the period of his trials at Arsenal but eventually his home life was so unsettling that he could not do his football skills justice. If he does not become a football player he may coach football. He aims to open a football academy in Congo one day although he is sure that he wants to make his life here.

Through the photos he took for us and the words he spoke he told us the story of the conflicts that he had with his aunt who was suffering from mental delusions and had threatened him with a knife. Mardoche was 11 or 12 at the time. Things got so bad that one weekend he planned to see his friends, enjoy his time and then commit suicide by poisoning himself. At the end of a difficult sequence of events Mardoche was placed with a foster mother who had come to the UK from Sierra Leone.

Despite these troubles, Mardoche managed to rebuild his life with the help of friends as well as youth and social services professionals all coming from a diverse set of ethnic groups. While Mardoche may not always have felt supported by his family he seems to have found a group of people who may not be biologically related or even share a similar cultural background to him but support him anyway. While the youth and social services are often maligned in the public imagination here they helped provide a network of advice, support and resources that other migrants in our sample appear to lack to their detriment. He spent some time in a foster home in West Ham where he made a good friend. This friend took him to football games at West Ham and they used to watch Match of the Day together (a football highlights programme). Mardoche reports that this friend is now doing well and has moved into his own place. His friend is Ethiopian and came to the UK at a young age. He also made friends with a girl from Ethiopia there and a boy from Burundi.

Mardoche had a mentor assigned him by social services. He appreciates his perspective and remains in regular contact with him even though he is now over 18 and is now catered for by the leaving care team rather than as a looked after child. This mentor is a British-born white man. He has a close friend who is also a participant in this research and who was born in Ghana. Like Mardoche he has had professional football trials. Mardoche also has a friend from Jamaica who went to the same school. When he called round before school his family would offer him breakfast. Mardoche also maintains contact with three youth workers. One is a black man who may or may not be a migrant from one of the Caribbean Islands (Mardoche is unsure when I ask him). Another is a white woman who is born and brought up in North London. And then there is a British born Ghanaian youth worker whom Mardoche has known since he was around 11.

Mardoche's foster mum is from Sierra Leone and after Christmas he went on holiday there where he went clubbing and played football. Mardoche wants to rebuild a relationship with his auntie and uncle. Mardoche is grateful that his uncle brought him over from Congo especially because this meant leaving one of his sons there and this seems one reason he is keen to maintain a relationship with him. He likes his foster mum but she is against this and sometimes he feels she does not understand. Mardoche complains about having to stand there and listen to her lecturing him and he puts this down to African culture where he feels the mum is always right.

Mardoche has experienced deep troubles but is putting his life together and building home in London. He feels attached to people from a whole range of backgrounds and in a sense the world he has built amounts to a habitable form of multiculturalism that bridges difference and combines diverse social networks. They might come from different parts of the world but they help him feel like he belongs here. Mardoche now contributes to his community by coaching youngsters at Arsenal FC. He hopes they will gain some of the life skills through football which he says football has given him. This theme of building social cohesion across difference rather than through cultural homogeneity recurs throughout our study.

Ali: Community

One of the surprising findings of our work is that it is sometimes the most marginalized young migrants and asylum seekers who are that are most committed to bridging social divides through voluntary work, neighbourliness and fostering community cohesion. Ali exemplifies this.

Ali is a young man from Afghanistan. Talking about the lack of opportunity if one does not have papers he says: "If you're going to the college they ask you for a paper from Home Office. If you haven't got it, so no college, no education, no work!". He expands on how if one tries to work outside the law because legal working is not allowed, one can face difficulties. Speaking about friends he knows, work is often low paid, and sometimes employers refuse to pay them at all: 'If they are working they're getting crazy as well.' And on the possibility of deportation he adds asylum seekers are 'Getting crazy if they're going home like this [ie if they're deported].'

Although Ali lives in a multicultural area where many daughters and sons of parents and grandparents who migrated to the UK live, he faced hostility towards himself when he came: 'Yeah, first time when I came here they were thinking that I'm coming from cave or I'm an alien from another planet, sometimes they were taking the piss'. Ali shows us photographs of his hometown, his friends and family. He expands: 'But I was thinking, you know, that man doesn't know, they have been born here and they never travelled, they never met other people so it's their first time.' Since then Ali has made friends with neighbours. One gave him his dog which he named Abighai, meaning cousin. Ali cleans the garden of another neighbour, an 86 year old former Army member he refers to as grandma. He built a bench out of a discarded bed for the residents in his building.



He does not want to go back: 'I'm a little bit poor but I swear I'm happy like that, I'm quite happy living here'.

At the time of writing, he has a new venture through which he wishes to serve the community. Ali has approached his local council with a proposal to rebuild and refurbish unused council property. They would provide him with materials and he would provide and lead the workforce. In conjunction with a charity who are supporting his application, and through years of contacts gained from visiting and volunteering with community centres and in helping his neighbours, he has collected a range of people who wish to volunteer unpaid on this venture in order to develop work skills and to contribute to their community.

Policy Recommendations

Juan's case highlights a circumstance in which he is aiming to educate himself and to counteract ongoing shortages in the care industry but is hampered in this because of the welfare and material vulnerability his immigration status causes. Eventually, he returned home because of the immigration regime. Katrin observes the way in which her family and friendship contacts helped her in her search for accommodation and education, as well as providing a companionship that was missing for Emmanuel who was homeless for a period. Katrin's experiences highlight how despite the legal and social support she had that many others in our study, such as Mohammed did not have, it was difficult for her to negotiate an overly-bureaucratic immigration framework. Ache and Dorothy wanted to pursue careers but faced challenges in studying in the present. Dorothy wanted to serve her community by becoming a midwife. They were both also uncertain as to what would happen in the future, how they would afford university fees and even if they would still be here. Mardoche faced truly great challenges in his life too. He was not contending with an uncertainty of over his immigration status and how long he would get to stay in the country although his family life was troubled. Like Katrin, he was also able to access community, social and welfare support networks that helped him in supporting himself. Mardoche now works with young people. This is one example of what happens when young migrants are supported. Mohammed is a hard worker who is resourceful, resilient and has an entrepreneurial spirit although labour market restrictions mean that the country cannot fully benefit from his grit and talent. Ali is not waiting for his status to be secure to be a part of the community. He already is. The question is not can the country afford him, Mohammed and the others but can we afford not to have people like them here? Meeting these young migrants and the many others who feature in other publications from the study has led us to conclude that there is a political, economic and welfare case for less regulation that would de-criminalise young migrants and facilitate greater social inclusion and access to the labour market. We have summarised these proposals in the following recommendations.

On work we suggest:

Declaring a London-wide amnesty allowing those who are defined as overstayers, or who are otherwise undocumented, the right to work.

Allowing all those with temporary leave to remain the right to work and the opportunity of supporting themselves.

Automatically granting National Insurance Numbers to young migrants over 16 whose cases are currently being processed by The Home Office.

On immigration processes we suggest:

Offering young migrants wider levels of access to legal advice and provide greater public investment in welfare organizations dedicated to supporting them.

Addressing the inadequacies and failures within the immigration bureaucracy particularly in relation to the loss of documents, inaccuracies and delays in progressing cases.

A working groups should be set up into streamlining the documents needed to support immigration claims for students and asylum seekers.

Formal acknowledgement should be made to Solicitors and Applicants of documents submitted in support of immigration claims.

The provision within the UK Border Agency of dedicated and responsive consultants and a more open tracking system to allow young migrants to be updated on the current state of their cases.

On education we suggest:

Asylum seekers should be charged home fees rather than international student fees.

Greater flexibility in the amount of hours overseas students are allowed to conduct paid work.

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