The Responsiveness of Employment Service Provision to the Needs of Refugees

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Abstract

Government policy has called for employment-related services to be more responsive to the needs of more disadvantaged groups amongst whom high levels of unemployment persist, including refugees (DWP, 2005; DWP, 2006). The strategy for refugee employment (Working to Rebuild Lives) sets out to improve employment service provision for refugees through Jobcentre Plus working in partnership with specialist providers, comprising a range of third sector organisations (DWP, 2005; Jobcentre Plus, 2005). Whilst the principle of more ‘responsive’ services is broadly underlined in policy agendas, there has been limited analysis of the concept of responsiveness and of users’ and providers’ experiences in relation to employment service provision.

The presentation draws on the findings of qualitative research on the experiences and perceptions of refugee clients of employment service providers (specialist providers and Jobcentre Plus) regarding responsiveness to their needs. It also looks at providers’ perceptions of the factors affecting their responsiveness to refugees’ needs. The findings suggest that there are considerable tensions between, on the one hand, the use of job outcome-related performance targets to ensure improvements in service provision, and on the other, improving responsiveness to the needs of refugees. Too great an emphasis on achieving employment outcomes in the short-term may inhibit providers from adequately responding to the English language and other education and training needs of refugees. Moreover, it may exclude some specialist providers that are best placed to address those needs from access to public funding in this process.