

Home Learning Inequalities among Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrant Communities



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**Unleashing
Refugee
Potential**



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Introduction

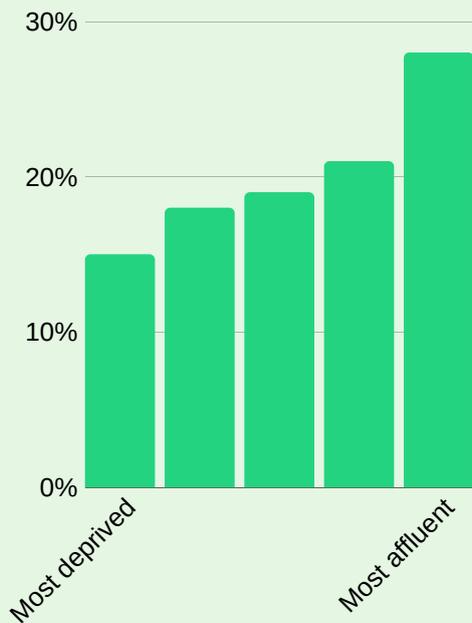
Following the shutdown of schools across the UK due to the Covid-19 pandemic, families are now responsible for continuing their children's education from home. Schools have remarkably adapted to support students remotely, which has posed many challenges for schools, students and parents.

Despite their best efforts to reduce inequalities through implementing various mitigation strategies, home learning is exacerbating economic inequalities in education as children who do not have suitable home learning environments are falling behind.

There are also significant additional obstacles to home learning that migrant families are facing during lockdown. These issues will likely persist even when schools reopen because disadvantaged students will have difficulty catching up with their peers.

We aim to highlight these issues from interviews we have carried out with eighteen parents from migrant, refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds. We will also offer recommendations to help reduce these inequality gaps.





Proportion of teachers providing laptops and devices to students

Research by the Sutton Trust shows that teachers from the most affluent schools were almost twice as likely to provide their students with tech equipment than the most deprived schools

(Sutton Trust, 2020) Source: Teacher Tapp/Sutton Trust survey of teachers in England, April 4th 2020

Home Learning Inequalities

Poorer children living in deprived areas, who do not have access to tech, learning resources, or food are experiencing huge disruptions in their education. Whereas more affluent families are more likely to be equipped to home-school their children and support their remote learning.

Research carried out by the Sutton Trust into the impact of the school shutdown highlighted the inequalities in home learning between richer and poorer families. Their study revealed that disadvantaged children are less likely to have access to the help and resources they need for home learning despite them needing most help. "in the most deprived schools, 15% of teachers report that more than a third of their students learning from home would not have adequate access to an electronic device for learning, compared to only 2% in the most affluent state schools".

Inequalities in support are reflected in the amount and quality of work being received by teachers; "24% say that fewer than 1 in 4 children in their class are returning work they have been set. 50% of teachers in private schools report they're receiving more than three quarters of work back, compared with 27% in the most advantaged state schools, and just 8% in the least advantaged state schools."

Teachers in the most deprived schools are also more than twice as likely to say that work their students are sending in is of a much lower quality than normal (15% vs 6%). (Sutton Trust, 2020)

"8% of teachers in disadvantaged schools are receiving more than 3/4 of the work back"

Home Learning Inequalities among Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrant Communities

Migrant families are facing significant challenges to home learning during the lockdown. Leeds' non-UK born residents have settled particularly in Gipton and Harehills, City and Hunslet, and Hyde Park and Woodhouse wards (Migration Yorkshire, 2019). These wards are some of the most deprived areas in the city (Leeds Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2019). In addition, migrant families have the added stress of a language and cultural barrier, which is preventing parents from being able to home-school their children. In schools across Leeds 22.1% of primary pupils and 16.5% of secondary pupils have English as an additional language (Leeds City Council, 2018).

In order to explore the implications of home learning for migrant families in more detail we have carried out interviews through Zoom with eighteen parents living in Leeds from a migrant or refugee background. During our discussions we investigated how effective schools' mitigation strategies have been for migrant families. The issues highlighted by the families we interviewed mirrored those brought to light by the Sutton Trust's study.

It became apparent that there are inconsistencies among the mitigation strategies that schools are implementing across the city. Schools have different approaches to managing the inequality gaps between their students mainly consisting of: welfare checks, giving advice on supervising learning, providing physical resources and work packs, food parcels and food vouchers, and tech equipment.

Half of the parents we interviewed said their children are completing their schoolwork on a smartphone, due to not having WiFi or suitable tech equipment. Parents with more than one child reported that their children are fighting over the smartphone to complete their work, which has led to huge disruptions to their schoolwork. From eighteen parents that we interviewed, three parents had received printed work packs and two requested work packs, but have not received an answer yet.

Half of the parents we interviewed are using their smartphones to home-school their children because they do not have WiFi or tech equipment at home.

According to the Sutton Trust's study, 28% of more affluent state schools have provided students with laptops, compared to only 15% in the most deprived school (Sutton Trust, 2020). Only one parent we interviewed mentioned that both her children were provided with laptops, despite none of the parents owning one. Even though some schools are providing laptops and tablets, they are not able to cover the cost of WiFi access and a printer.

Two of the parents we spoke to ended up buying a printer as they have three children, but the cost of the ink now exceeds the cost of the printer itself and they cannot afford to maintain it. Some of the families cannot afford to buy pens, paper and educational books let alone the tech devices required to home-school their children. This is particularly difficult for migrants with No Recourse to Public Funds as well as asylum seekers, who live on asylum support of £37.75 a week per person in their household.

We found that there were also inconsistencies around welfare checks that teachers carry out. Teachers have been contacting families to advise them on directing their children's home learning and offering support to reduce inequalities among their students. Welfare checks are essential as they give parents an opportunity to discuss concerns and offer a space to explore solutions.

However, according to the parents we interviewed who have limited English, many people are struggling due to the language barrier. The parents we interviewed had not been contacted through interpreters and often their children will interpret for them, which proves they will not be able to support their children with their schoolwork.

Parents expressed their feelings of shame and guilt for not being able to support their children with their work or communicate their needs with teachers due to their limited English. The lack of confidence and inability to express themselves in English impacts their ability to self-advocate and can mean the magnitude of their situation is overlooked.

We discovered that cultural differences were equally as hindering for the parents we interviewed. Parents who are first-generation migrants do not have lived experience of the curriculum of schools in the UK, or knowledge about the pastoral support within schools. Some parents we interviewed did not know about their rights in the UK or they could ask the school for help if they do not have food. Some parents who had not yet received free school meal vouchers through the national scheme, were not aware of the support available to them.

Parents also expressed their heightened levels of stress and anxiety under this lock-down and reported low self-esteem due to the combination of: lack of enough space for their children to play or do their schoolwork, the difficulty to communicate with schools in getting support, the inability to help with their children's work, and financial constraints. Mental health issues are also particularly present among refugees and asylum seekers, who are five times more likely to have mental health issues than the local population.

Parents expressed heightened levels of stress, as well as shame and guilt, for not being able to communicate in English and support their children with their schoolwork

Conclusion

The closure of schools in response to the Covid-19 pandemic has posed many challenges to schools, parents and children. Schools have implemented mitigation strategies to reduce inequalities in home learning including: welfare checks, giving general advice on supervising learning, providing physical resources and work packs, food parcels and food vouchers, and tech equipment.

However, these measures vary greatly from school to school, and often the most deprived schools cannot provide the necessary resources for students due to stretched resources.

From our research we have found that closure of schools due to Covid-19 is not only leading to inequality gaps between richer and poorer students, but it is also generating additional challenges among migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

Through our interviews with eighteen parents from migrant, refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds we identified that the main issues hindering home learning are: financial constraints, lack of tech equipment and internet access, lack of educational resources, language barrier, cultural barrier and lack of confidence.

Even when schools reopen disadvantaged pupils and children from refugee, asylum seeker and migrant families will be left behind. We believe that there must be a push to support these children to reduce educational inequalities so they can fulfil their potential.



Recommendations

One-to-one tuition for children whose parents cannot support with home learning

Children with parents who have limited English are left to their own devices to complete their assignments and are significantly disadvantaged compared to children who have parents that can support their learning. Providing one-to-one tuition for these children would not only reduce the inequality gap between migrant and local students, but it would also improve the mental well-being of parents, who are feeling overwhelmed and stressed that they are not able to support their children.

Interpreters for welfare checks

Specific needs of migrant, refugee and asylum seekers should be addressed by schools. In order for schools to be able to communicate effectively with both the students and the parents directly it is important to use interpreters. This would allow schools to be fully aware of the family's situation and prevent children from interpreting for their parents.

Supporting migrants, refugees and asylum seekers to understand their rights and UK systems

We discovered that many parents did not know about the pastoral support within schools or how to navigate UK systems. It would be beneficial to provide tailored training for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers to help them understand their rights and how to navigate UK systems. This would address these knowledge gaps and promote equal opportunities.

Providing tech equipment, resources and internet access

Providing tech equipment, internet access, stationary packs and printed work packs where necessary for disadvantaged students is necessary to reduce the inequalities among poorer and richer students.