
Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee visit to Scotland

Key findings:

- **Media, terminology and political leadership** are key drivers in public attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers. Scottish Refugee Council work with newspaper editors and hold media awards for accurate reporting. Positive stories about migrants are communicated through events such as the Refugee Festival Scotland.
- **The Guardianship Service** in Scotland is proven to have a positive impact on the recognition of UASC. It costs £200,000 a year and supports 200 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC).
- Scottish Government's strategy, 'New Scots' focuses on '**integration from day one**', and sees integration as a two-way process. Draws on academic research into the 'indicators of integration'.
- Phase 2 of 'New Scots' is being developed. It's anticipated to introduce **standards for service provision**, which is particularly useful for areas that have not historically had refugees and asylum seekers. There has also been discussion of a '**Refugee Integration Bill**', which would entitle people to an integration adviser and support, similar to the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act.
- Refugees are **being dispersed to rural areas with no history of immigration**. Local authorities need guidance on how best to integrate new refugees, utilise skills and ensure community cohesion.
- **Employment and skills** are a big issue. Qualifications recognition and support to understand the UK employment and recruitment processes are key.
- UK Government legislation is **reaching into devolved areas more and more**. There are questions about whether asylum support should be devolved, especially around asylum accommodation.
- Scottish Government's approach is to '**provide an enabling statutory environment**' for local authorities to resettle refugees.

Morning session 1: Scottish Refugee Council and University of Glasgow panel discussion Scottish Government approach

- Scottish Refugee Council is **funded by the Scottish Government to run a number of specific services** including the Guardianship Service, integration projects and destitution projects.

- The Scottish Government's strategy focuses on '**integration from day one**' – alienation happens when integration doesn't work.
- Scottish Government **provides healthcare during the asylum process**, like Wales.
- Impact of **Guardianship Service** is demonstrated by results – 55% of UASC recognised, compared to 22% previously.
- **Phase 2 of 'New Scots'** (Scottish Government refugee strategy) is anticipated to introduce a set of standards for services in Scotland, which are particularly useful for local authorities with little previous experience of refugees and asylum seekers.
- Possibility of a '**Refugee Integration Bill**' – entitlement to integration adviser and support, based on Human Trafficking Act.
- Scottish **Legal Aid** is different to England and Wales – more widely available for immigration cases.
- Scottish Government's strategy aims to project **integration as a two-way process**.

Public attitudes/ media

- Most recent community cohesion campaign is called '**Fancy a cup of tea with a refugee?**'
- Language is an important part of the debate – 'New Scots' is a deliberate term. Some **terminology** has been 'debased' by media discourse – e.g. 'asylum-seeker'.
- **Media and political leadership** are major players in determining attitudes towards asylum seekers and refugees. Immigration debate has focused on humanitarian aspects.
- **Refugee Festival Scotland** is an annual Scotland-wide programme of arts, cultural, educational, heritage and sports events, coordinated by Scottish Refugee Council.

Rural/ urban experiences

- Scotland is similar to Wales in terms of geography – fewer **urban centres**.
- With SVPRS, people are moving to **areas with no history of immigration or refugees**.
- Universities of Glasgow and Swansea are conducting joint research into how refugees experience small towns and rural areas.
- Migration in rural agricultural areas has been focused on seasonal work. **Finding employment that is appropriate to previous experience and qualifications** is more difficult in rural areas, so people move to the cities.
- University of Glasgow has conducted participant-led **pop-up language cafes**, which are not formal classes, but a chance to socialise and practice English.
- **Sharing good practice at regional and local level** is fundamental.

Skills/ employment

- Scotland has a historical, **economic necessity to attract migrants** for labour.
- The Scottish Parliament's **Devolution (Further Powers) Committee** took evidence on post study work visas in January 2016.
- **Skilled potential of refugees is generally not being exploited**. The 'bridges' programme aims to help professionals find appropriate work through language training, cross-checking skills etc.
- **Qualification recognition** is still a big issue.
- The asylum process in itself is a **barrier to skills exploitation**, as skills and knowledge atrophy and degrade over time.
- There are specific programme for particular areas of work, e.g. doctors. Medicine is more straightforward because medical training is most likely to be undertaken in English around the world.
- As well as professionals, need support for **unskilled refugees**.
- Biggest problems relate to **understanding of the UK jobs market** as people have a different cultural understanding of employment and recruitment. Support with CV writing, applying for job, etc.

UK Government policy



- Immigration Acts 2014 and 2016 ‘**reaching into devolved areas** more and more’.
- There is a perception that the **UK Government is disinterested in integration**.
- SRC pushing for **devolution of asylum support**.
- Questions over what **EU rights will be integrated into domestic law** – detention, qualifications, etc
- Prof Nick Gill at Exeter University is conducting research into asylum seekers moving between detention centres. More info in the parliamentary Inquiry into immigration detention.
- The **driver of the SVPRS is to hit 20,000 target**, not necessarily the quality of resettlement. Matching people to rural/urban areas is not a priority, which means that people often move straight away.

Morning session 2: round table discussions

Good practice

- Maryhill Integration Network provides a vast range of integration activities including: choirs, dancing, family support, CAB advice surgeries, ESOL etc. The vast majority are volunteer-run. Received direct funding from Scottish Government and Glasgow Council.
- Refugee Women’s Strategy Group works together to represent the views of refugee and asylum seeking women to key decision makers and service providers in order to influence the policy and practices that affect their lives.
- The Geneva-based Oak Foundation is a key resource for funding.

Scottish Government approach

- The **process of creating phase 2 of the New Scots strategy** is really important – over 200 people at a conference recently.
- Use of **Alison Strang’s ‘Indicators of integration’ report** from 2008 aimed to:
 - investigate different **understandings of ‘integration’** as a concept;
 - establish a framework for a **common understanding of ‘integration’** that can be used by those working in the field of refugee integration in the UK; and
 - **design the framework for use by local projects and policy makers** to assist them with the planning and evaluation of services for refugees.
- Some criticism of the New Scots strategy that its actions are ‘too detailed’.
- **Asylum accommodation** is a big issue in Scotland too – housing providers are big companies with little interest in quality.
- Devolved administrations need to ‘**vocalise the shared responsibility for dispersal**’.
- Housing options need to be **presented early during/prior to the 28 day ‘move on’ period** so that homelessness is averted.
- **Housing and employment are closely linked** – people move where there are jobs, and this affects the availability of housing.

Destitution

- It’s **difficult to know how big the destitution problem** is, because people are ‘off grid’.
- There needs to be more understanding about ‘**no recourse to public funds**’ and what this means in terms of human rights – does it mean that SG can’t provide funding for destitution?
- **Preventing destitution** takes pressure off health and social services.

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC)

- Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act ensures that all children who arrive in Scotland alone and separated from their families **have the right to an independent ‘Guardian’ to advise and assist them**.
- Most UASC are in **supported care rather the foster care**.



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- **Social services are in charge of age assessments.** Under/over 18 determines level of Home Office responsibility. Wrong age assessments damage credibility. If they are deemed over 18 they are still eligible for asylum support, accommodation.

Skills/ employment

- ESOL provision needs to be tailored for women.

UK Government policy

- There is now a **‘two-tier’ asylum process** with the SVPRS.
- Overall feeling that there’s a **need to align the different schemes and routes** in asylum process.
- **Funding for SVPRS not a concern for Scottish local authorities** – provided by the Home Office.

Afternoon session 1: Third sector organisations (One Refugee Support, City of Sanctuary, Re-Act and The Welcoming)

- One Refugee Support **works with schools to challenge negative attitudes** about refugees.
- City of Sanctuary is undertaking a **mapping exercise to share information** about different services around Edinburgh.
- The Welcoming **provides tailored ESOL (such as ‘English for driving lessons’, ‘English for computing’ etc)** and home energy efficiency advice.
- Utilising **settled communities of refugees** to volunteer.
- **Consistency is important to newly-arrived refugees** – sustainable, regular and long term services.
- There are **transport** issues for people settled outside the city.
- The refugee issue is not being **discussed in schools as standard**, even with the current crisis.
- One Refugee Support is **preparing a booklet for children to take home**.

Afternoon session 2: Alexandra Devoy, Policy Manager- Corporate Parenting, Scottish Government

- SG’s role is to provide the **‘enabling statutory environment’** for COSLA and local authorities to coordinate the resettlement of refugees. Home Office runs SVPRS directly with LAs but SG has role in ensuring that everything is legal and people are supported.
- Guardianship Service started in 2010 as a pilot scheme. Independent review found positive impact. It **costs £200,000 a year to support 200 children** – Scottish Government are **under a duty to provide a guardian** who is qualified to level 2 UISC.
- UASC in Scotland cared for under **kinship model**.
- SG are investigating **how cost burden can be reduced while level of care is maintained**.
- SG **revisiting Children (Scotland) Act** to look at what defines a **‘looked after child’** in terms of UASC.
- There is **tailored training for foster families** with UASC.
- UK **Immigration Act needs Scottish regulations** to put National Transfer Programme on statutory footing from next year – same in Wales?

Afternoon session 3: Christina McKelvie MSP, Chair of the Scottish Parliament’s Equalities and Human Rights Committee

- Private discussion on committee work programmes and the potential for future collaboration.

