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Neighbourhoods and Community Briefing

Scottish Refugee Council Integration Study – Neighbourhoods and Community Briefing

Introduction

This briefing is one of five looking at domains of integration in Scottish Refugee Council's longitudinal refugee integration study. These findings are based on some of the data from Stage 1 (Winter 2010/2011) and Stage 2 (Spring/Summer 2011) of the study so combine 262 questionnaire responses and 30 semi-structured interviews. What follows is some of the main findings of interest within the realms of neighbourhoods and communities. More detail can be found in the full reports on http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/policy_and_research/research_reports

Satisfaction and safety in neighbourhoods

Just over 60% of asylum seekers and refugees feel satisfied or very satisfied with the neighbourhood they live in. Slightly more than that (64%) feel very safe or safe within those neighbourhoods. Men feel both more satisfied and safer in their neighbourhoods than women do.

Neighbourhood support and activities

Less than 20% of refugees and asylum seekers have close family members living in the same city. This lack of family nearby indicates the absence of a key source of support and is highlighted as a health issue by a number of respondents. Added to this, 37% of overall respondents speak with their neighbours once a month or less.

While a lot of refugees and asylum seekers appear to be involved in local communities, (22% attend local events at least once a month and 16% volunteer locally at least once a month), there is a large minority who never do either, 29% and 37% respectively.

Many respondents compared the neighbourliness of their new neighbourhoods very poorly against that they had left behind. One said "you know in my country you can see everybody, yeah. You know the person who lives there" whereas in Glasgow, "you can live in the building, two years, three years, you can't see your neighbours for three or four years" (E460).

Friendships in neighbourhoods

There were quite mixed perspectives about neighbours among our respondents. While many had little interaction, others identified individual neighbours with whom they had good relations (E752). Some told of stories of helpful neighbours who have been welcoming and open. Others did not mention help so much as general friendliness. "All my neighbours are my friends, they invite us to their home for dinner, they come to our home for parties, we get together most of the time during the week, you know, even my old neighbours" (E541). This man considered himself to be a very social person and made the point of inviting all of his neighbours to his home the week he moved in, and things just progressed since then. One respondent talked of friendliness with neighbours reducing stress levels. However, this individual referred to initial difficulties due to lack of English language proficiency (E751). As language has improved so have relationships with neighbours. Indeed some interviewees talked of contact with neighbours having a discernible impact on language skills (A75). This was a way to learn new words and to begin to understand

the Scottish accent.

There were also other good examples of friendly and welcoming neighbours. “The way they talk to you, they definitely know you’re an asylum seeker, but still they talk to you as a friend, they talk to you as if we’ve known each other for a long time. So I was like, so there are some people like this, these people are the same British. So when they brought me to where I am living now.....the Scottish man live opposite my building, when he discovered I have a baby, I don’t have a TV, I don’t have anything, and he told me, I have a small TV, do you mind, because of the baby, he said, so that the baby would be able to look at the TV so that I wouldn’t be bored” (E58). There were also a number of more specific examples of friendliness with neighbours. One spoke of the normality of his relations with his neighbours. “Sometimes I’m invited round to watch the football....., cos I have not got a box..... because I like the football and (neighbour’s name) I’m going to come round to see you and I go to watch football with him if he’s there” (E684).

Nevertheless, it was widely considered that people are often too busy to stop and communicate with neighbours (E137). For most this wasn’t viewed as a refugee specific issue as those from the host community were not seen to have good relations with one another either. “People are scared of each other. The way the homes are, you.....move to your home, you lock your door, you are inside there” (E382).

Integration by not having neighbourhood contact

However, the superficial nature of neighbourhood contact was mentioned by many interviewees. This was often explained in relation to the busy lives of those neighbours. “I don’t want to intrude to their lives” (E535). This desire not to be pushy or intrude led to many following the lead of their neighbours in the sense of not attempting any more than superficial contact. “There’s no sense of neighbour in here. You don’t know your neighbours, there’s no relationship. Maybe the maximum you can say hi, hello..... but you came to a new society and you have to accept it as it is, you can’t do anything about it. Although first few months and years, maybe a year or two, I was trying to be more open to my neighbours but I don’t feel that people welcome that (E536). This view of integrating by not having substantive contact with neighbours was also mentioned by another interviewee. “It’s about the cultural difference. Some people don’t feel there’s rules in this country whereby you have to be careful, and that careful thing, you know what I mean, watching people what they are doing” (E144).

Integration in some cases therefore, came to be seen as mimicking the relative non-neighbourliness of their Scottish neighbours. Many referred to integration as taking on the behaviours of the host society. One man compared Scottish neighbourhoods to country of origin neighbourhoods. “It’s not the same, because in my country of origin, we have friends, neighbours, talking, chatting etc. But here you can understand because everybody, as I said, is working. Everybody got his time. Everybody busy. Really I don’t... for ten months I know only one who is close to me, my neighbour, near to my flat. That’s all” (E38). He then felt that to integrate was to imitate the behaviours of their neighbours. He went on, “you have to be integrated, you know? This is what we are talking about, integration. So you have to follow the system of the country. We have to follow, so this is the system so you have to go on” (Ibid).

Weather

The weather was mentioned by a number of interviewees as having a negative impact on neighbourhood contact. One said “the weather is nice, everybody, they want to come out and you can see each other” (E460). Another talked of going long months during the winter without seeing any neighbours (E750).

What is missing from neighbourhoods?

In questions about what people feel is missing from their neighbourhoods the main response, concerned social relationships from their country of origin rather than facilities. One said “family missing, friends missing, social life missing” (E35). The fact that he had quite a large co-ethnic community in Glasgow did mitigate these feelings to some degree.

Sense of belonging and experiences of racism

Despite many people lacking strong social relationships in their neighbourhoods, 40% of respondents said that they felt part of their local community, while only 20% said they did not. Men feel a greater sense of belonging than women.

Despite a relatively small number saying they did not feel part of their community; there were a large

number of experiences in neighbourhoods that are of concern. One referred to having been mugged twice and called racist names (E657). This led him to wanting to move to a new area. The culture of many of these communities was also mentioned in a negative light. One said, "I have a problem with drunk people especially in my neighbourhood....and I would say I scared to go out at night, even after two years and I try to don't go out on weekends, especially at night" (E529). Another, who had rated his neighbourhood highly and who said that he had never experienced discrimination later told of having been attacked by three drunks. He also alluded to more casual bigotry whereby he is regularly sworn at. When asked about whether these are ever reported to the police, his answer was similar to the feeling mentioned by others. He didn't report this as he didn't "want to create problems with the neighbours" (E137).

The fear some people have in their neighbourhoods was heightened for those with children. "You are scared for your kids all the time, when they are coming from school, their schools are not far but you're not really sure what will happen when they are on their way home you know" (E750).

Community

Many respondents said that they did not know if they felt part of their local communities (39%). While for some this appears to be as a result of being relatively new to the area, there also appears to be some question of what is meant by the question. Nevertheless, there were some respondents who did feel able to answer the question and there were a variety of responses concerning both membership and spatial elements. One person talked of community or bonds in relation to concentric circles. "Community means the local people which are in your street, the houses in your street that's a community and when you expand it, firstly your family, your home, that's the community, when you are together family, that's your small community and when you expand, when you go out from your home then the neighbours and then the whole street, that's your community and when you talk about village wise or city wise, then it is expanding and expanding they become community" (E35). For others, community was described in relation to either spatial, family or co-ethnic memberships.

Community support and belonging

The importance of sources of support, most particularly community support, was alluded to by a number of our interviewees. One talked of the need, especially when going through difficult or traumatic experiences, for people around you that can help. He stated "sometimes they say there is no place like home, when you are stressed sometimes. That's what I would say, it's good if you find good people around you, give you some support. But if maybe they are doing bad things, you feel like abandon it, like you are not valued, that's why we try to be in a community. If you're environment is good that will keep your mind maybe good, but if you find some neighbour bad you see is not good" (E752). The onus was seen as being on the refugees themselves to make initial contact. One respondent, for example, stated that "Because this is community, they're living their life. It's about me getting involved with them; it's not about them worried about me" (E144)

Community and ethnic bonds

However, for many the main source of community or friendships was with people from their own country of origin. There was an expressed view among a couple of our respondents that there was an ethnic dimension to neighbourliness. One, for example, said that there was little ethnic cohesion. "If I had Africans in my neighbours I think it would be easier to know each other, that I...but because I don't have them in my block, it's really very difficult.....because Scottish people communicate with other Scottish people, and the one thing is I don't want people to know which house I stay in" (E279).

Despite this, it was generally felt that things were progressing in terms of relationships with neighbours. "I'm better, much better than the first year. The first year a big shock, wow. A new environment, new people, new culture, everything new. It was very difficult to adapt. But now I can say, I'm very confident to speak to anyone and try to smile and make a relationship....I think a close friend is a kind of fortune when you need someone. Not just need, just to feel someone loves you, protects you, always tries to be with you in difficult times and enjoy with you" (E53).

Community and language

Language is widely seen as being a key factor in allowing people to feel part of their communities. One respondent said "that barrier language makes things more difficult, you know, because most of the people,

they don't understand why you don't understand language. It's like okay, this is a country speaking English" (E144). For this man, language development meant he had managed to make local contacts through socialising in the pub, and this then had knock on effects. "You know, when I go into a pub, I've a good reason why I'm going to the pub, it's about socialising, having my cup, my drink or anything, or have a talk...a chat with somebody. Nobody will be thinking why is he coming, what is he doing here, it's a social thing, everybody is welcome. But mostly, going in there, thinking what am I going to say to those people. It's about knowing what's happening in that pub, knowing what's happening in that community...in the community hall, knowing what's happening in the library, knowing what's happening in school grounds, you know what I mean, it's about all those things, getting involved with them" (E144).

Community cohesion

48% of our respondents feel that the neighbourhood they live in is a place where people with different backgrounds get on well together, with just under 16% disagreeing. Interestingly asylum seekers felt that their neighbourhood was a place where people of different backgrounds got on well together in larger numbers than refugees.

Some of the problems in neighbourhoods were looked at in quite a philosophical way. One referred to moving new communities into poor neighbourhoods where people were struggling and were therefore uneasy with the newcomers. "Bringing the poor people into an immigrant area, that would be scary you know, not everyone can deal with that situation.....Some people come onto the bus talking a different language and doing stuff and it's not unusual in the Scottish society and it makes some people angry, and even if you are born here, people in Scotland they don't have experience in immigration and stuff" (E606).

Others felt that there had been significant progress in their neighbourhoods. For example, one man told us "the area is good, before it was bad but now because the Strathclyde police they make good progress there also, and the area is quite good" (E752). Added to this, there was a feeling that relationships with neighbours had also improved.

Others simply felt that their neighbourhoods were good places to live. "I guess because they are friendly, you know, when you are in the midst of people that loves you, that they don't discriminate, you know, you feel relaxed, you feel at home" (E58). Another man stated that "that's my second address in this neighbourhood and I haven't had any problems with the neighbours. They are welcoming, they speak and they ask how you are" (E137).

Cohesion and integration

Many respondents alluded to cohesion in their cities or localities and this had an obvious effect on integration for them. There were a number of interviewees who felt that they lived in fairly multicultural and cohesive communities (E752, E153). Another felt that Scotland generally was a place where people from different cultures get on well together (E38). However, others felt there was either a passive form of cohesion where the absence of trouble was seen as representing cohesion (E460).

Others still felt that things had improved in terms of community cohesion over the period in which they had lived here. One interviewee argued that the increasing multicultural nature of Scotland was having a positive impact, stating that "it was very white when I arrived but thankfully I think more people are coming in. I've seen quite a few blacks and they will say hello, hello when you pass by. I smile and I feel happy. But generally it's a community that if you didn't make noise, they didn't make noise at you. Simple and straight forward as that" (E140). Another agreed that this was having a positive effect on cohesion. "This is a place that I would call home, I think it's more...it's becoming more friendly, it's becoming a place, and they're holding together hands to be able to support each other" (E279).

Local integration

Integration was seen as something that occurs at a smaller spatial unit than city or country, but in a specific smaller locality. One stated simply that "myself I think the integration comes first of all from yourself also and your neighbour. My experience if they move us to a new home, if you have good neighbour that will make you good and the area, if the area is also good it will make you feel good also. But if the area is bad and the neighbour is bad you see all things bad can happen also" (E752). Another felt that the city was the most important. "I always like Glasgow and I'm happy in here it's like, like I can say, people say like it's my

second home, I can say like my first home.....because I come in like a young age and I get used to in here, everything..... for me it's like I was coming here, when I come in here seventeen year old and I spend eleven year in here so just like most of my age I spend in here as well like (E430).

Employment and community

Various voluntary jobs were widely mentioned as sources of friendship and even community (E460). However, paid work, or the absence of paid work was a key factor in increasing social circles (or not) and making people feel part of the community in which they live (or not). "If we could integrate in some way like work, that's how we can socialise with people. At school, work, in society" (E681). One man stated that, "I think you feel a part of the community when you are working. When you are working... working full-time you think yourself a part of the community but when you are not working, just sitting in the house or just going to the college or something you feel yourself you are not useful for the country"(E38). He went on that "You have to feel as if you are useful, you are doing something. If just sitting in the house or just going to the college to pass the time and learning something I think that's not... sometimes when I'm in the college they say all my class-mates are only 16/17 years. I'm 26 years and I say to myself, what am I doing here? I should be working (Ibid). Another related this to both work and other aspects of society, "I'd like to enter your society" (E33), with the implication that there were barriers, particularly employment barriers, preventing this from happening.

Next Steps

In the early months of 2012 a number of interviews and workshops will be conducted about neighbourhoods and communities. This will add to the existing data about what is happening in neighbourhoods and communities, and together will provide a more meaningful understanding of the community and refugee integration in Scotland.

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Scottish Refugee Council is an independent charity which provides advice and information to people seeking asylum and refugees living in Scotland. We also campaign for fair treatment of refugees and people seeking asylum and to raise awareness of refugee issues.

This research project runs for two years and will provide better information and understanding of the lives of refugees and people seeking asylum in Scotland. The project uses mixed methods and is supported by an Advisory Group of academics, the voluntary sector and statutory authorities. The work is funded by the Big Lottery Fund.