

## Scots give warmer welcome to asylum seekers than the English

Scottish public attitudes towards asylum seekers in Scotland are more tolerant than those in England according to new research published today (Tuesday) by the Institute for Public Policy Research (ippr). But younger Scots and those living in Glasgow - where the majority of asylum seekers in Scotland are housed - were the least tolerant.

ippr ran 13 focus groups in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee and grouped people together from similar backgrounds, age, economic status and ethnicity. They provide a rich insight in to the public attitudes to asylum seekers in Scotland.

The report says that in general Scots see asylum and immigration as relatively unthreatening. Many support the principle of asylum and believe that Scotland, and Great Britain, have a duty to offer sanctuary.

- *"Asylum seekers are trying to get away from persecution and we should welcome them"* (man, C2DE 25 -50, Edinburgh).
- *"As a civilised and democratic country I think that we should be providing asylum"* (man, ABC1 25-50, Glasgow).

Groups in Edinburgh and Dundee were generally unconcerned about asylum seekers.

But the report warns against complacency as the overall tolerance masks some hostility among particular groups. It showed that people in Glasgow were the most hostile towards asylum seekers. Young people aged 17-19 in all three areas were the most intolerant of asylum seekers and felt they were a threat to jobs.

- *"I don't even know what they are, I thought they were just Pakis"* (young woman, Glasgow).
- *"I think people think there's a lot of asylum seekers, because you drive through an area and you hardly see a white face"* (woman, ABC1, 25-50, Glasgow).
- *"Some of them who've been clearly persecuted, there are loads in the world, they've seen their family executed in front of*

*them, they escape and get away here and we say to them you can't work, go and stay in the Red Road flats, and everyone's going 'look at him, he's got a TV'" (man, ABC1, 25-50, Glasgow).*

The most common complaint was that asylum seekers were supported by the benefits system without working or paying taxes first. Most were unaware that asylum seekers are prevented from working.

- *"They are getting council houses that we can't get, getting paid money to live on that we don't get" (young man, Dundee).*
- *"I don't have a problem with anyone coming to the UK as long as they are not sponging from the Government and are contributing. There [are] a lot of people out there who don't want to work and try to live off the state, so if people coming from other countries want to contribute and work then why not?" (man, C2DE 25-50, Edinburgh).*

**Miranda Lewis, ippr senior research fellow and report author said:**

"Scotland's largely positive attitude to asylum seekers is because the Scottish Executive, refugee groups and the media have done much to change public opinion for the better. But they need to guard against complacency. Intolerance is still strong in Glasgow, particularly among the young."

What Scots said about asylum and migration:

- *"They got private land, five bedroomed houses, they were given a car, these are the stories we hear, I am not sure if there is any truth in that" (woman, C2DE, 25-50, Edinburgh).*
- *"You get a lot of people complaining who are quite ignorant and saying they are taking our jobs who probably haven't worked for years, they should be getting jobs themselves" (woman, C2DE, 25-50, Edinburgh).*
- *"I don't have a problem with anyone coming to the UK as long as they are not sponging from the Government and are contributing. There is a lot of people out there who don't want to work and try to live off the state, so if people coming from other countries want to contribute and work then why not?" (man, C2DE, 25-50, Edinburgh).*

- *“The way I thought was that these people must be pretty desperate if it was better to come to this country to live in a hovel, in the cold and rain. For those that are genuine it must be really grim and we should feel sympathetic towards them, but it’s because of all the hangers on” (woman, ABC1 25-50, Glasgow).*
- *“The amount of money that the government spends on bringing these people into the country, it’s terrible, I’m sorry to say that charity begins at home” (woman, C2DE, 51+, Glasgow).*
  
- *“In Scotland, people are more understanding of my culture than in England, I felt this when I have been many times to London” (man, BME group, Dundee).*
- *“I think it is quite a taboo subject. Public services provision and income for asylum seekers is a taboo amongst Scottish people” (woman, BME group, Edinburgh).*
- *“[Glasgow] is so multicultural, a melting pot and it’s so friendly” (man, BME group, Glasgow).*
- *“My sister lives in Australia, and it is only now becoming apparent that she is not Scottish, we were able to integrate well here” (woman, BME group, Edinburgh).*

*‘Warm Welcome: Understanding attitudes to asylum seekers in Scotland’ by Miranda Lewis is available from [www.ippr.org](http://www.ippr.org)*

The report recommends that Scottish Executive should:

- Include greater detail about asylum seekers and refugees in the One Scotland campaign, and stress Scotland’s role as a provider of sanctuary.
- Begin to discuss low-skilled jobs in the Fresh Talent initiative, and use it to fund refugee adaptation courses.
- Make accessible information about asylum seekers available on its website, including facts and definitions.
- Ensure that front line staff in contact with the public have the correct information to counteract myths.
- Continue to work to integrate asylum seekers as well as refugees.
- Openly refute inaccuracies in Scottish media reports of asylum issues.
- Continue to provide political leadership with strong statements on the rights of asylum seekers.
- Include specific questions about attitudes to asylum seekers as part of the One Scotland campaign monitoring.

- Support efforts to enable asylum seekers to integrate by continuing to offer English lessons where appropriate.
- Support the production of jointly produced and agreed information materials, from voluntary sector organisations and local authorities.
- Ensure that the 1951 Convention on Refugees is covered in the national curricula in an appropriate context, and monitor its implementation.
- Continue to support asylum seekers to volunteer in community projects or to undertake voluntary work while their cases are being heard.

### Notes to editors:

ippr carried out a total of thirteen focus groups across the research areas with a range of participants from different backgrounds. Each focus group brought together people from similar backgrounds. This helps participants feel comfortable about speaking out. The different groups were:

- Social classes ABC1 (upper and middle class) aged 25-50
- Social classes C2DE (working class) aged 25-50
- Social classes ABC1 (upper and middle class) aged 51 or over
- Social classes C2DE (working class) aged 51 or over
- People from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds (recruited to report the largest ethnic groups in each area)
- Young people aged 17-19
- 1 group aged 25-60 of people living in specific postcode areas in Glasgow (near or amongst dispersal areas)

ippr undertook mapping exercises in each area, examining census data, local press activity and National Asylum Support Service (NASS) data. This was to establish the numbers of asylum seekers in each area and to build up a picture of key local events. In Glasgow we also met key stakeholders to discuss their views of public attitudes.

One Scotland is the Scottish Executive campaign designed to tackle racism in Scotland. It is supported by the One Workplace Equal Rights project that tackles racism in the workplace

The Scottish Executive's Fresh Talent initiative was set up to counter Scotland's falling population. Formally introduced in February 2004, the

initiative aims to encourage people from the EU and beyond to live, work and study in Scotland.

The report was supported by the Scottish Refugee Council

The report will be launched on World Refugee Day Tuesday 20 June 1.30p.m - 3.45p.m at The Royal Scottish Academy, The Mound, Edinburgh. Media are welcome to attend and should contact the Scottish Refugee Council 0141 248 9799.

*Asylum: Understanding Public Attitudes* by Miranda Lewis, published in June 2005 examined English and Welsh attitudes to asylum. It is available from [www.ippr.org](http://www.ippr.org)

### Contacts

Matt Jackson, ippr senior media officer, 020 7339 0007 / 07753 719 289 / [m.jackson@ippr.org](mailto:m.jackson@ippr.org)

Richard Darlington, ippr media manager, 020 7470 6177 / 07738 320 645 / [r.darlington@ippr.org](mailto:r.darlington@ippr.org)