

Evaluation of Scottish Refugee Council's influencing work 2008-2012

Sarah Cutler and Dr Sarah Kyambi, December 2012

Key points and findings



Front cover image:

Christian Kasubandi, star of a two-minute documentary *Courage* produced by Scottish Refugee Council and the Media-Coop in 2011 to mark the 60th anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention.

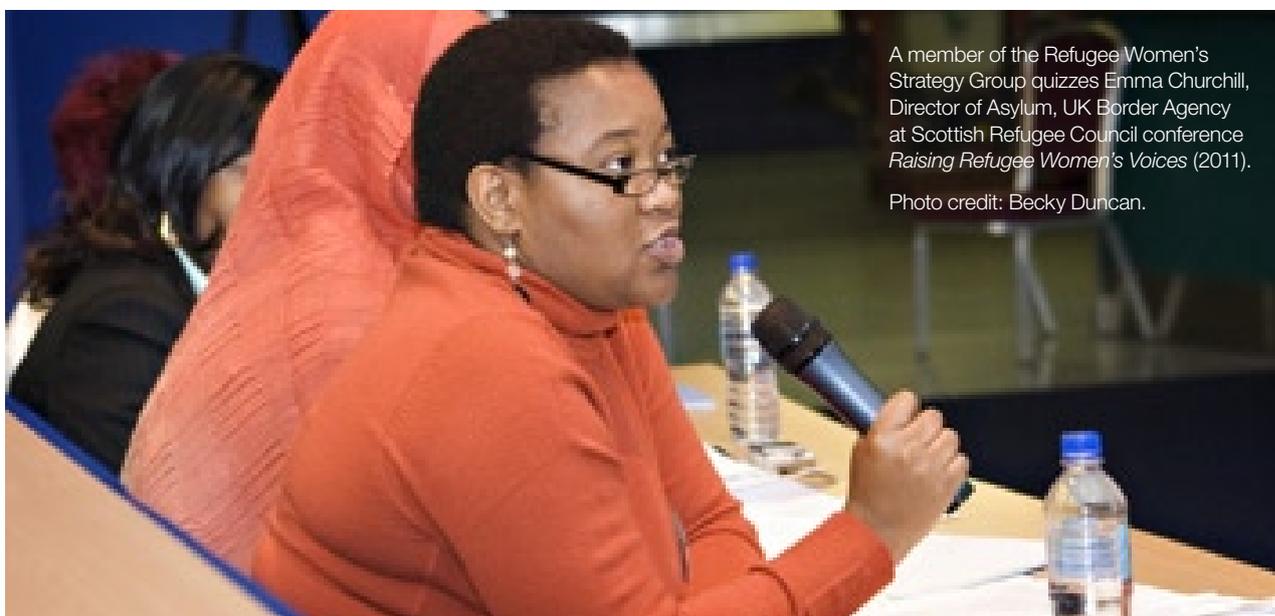
Photo credit: Angela Caitlin.

Introduction

This briefing sets out some key points and findings from an evaluation of the Scottish Refugee Council's (SRC) influencing work between 2008 and 2012. The evaluation assesses whether and how SRC influenced policy, practice and attitudes to refugees and asylum seekers. It considers future challenges and opportunities, and makes recommendations for how SRC can best meet these. The evaluation was conducted between August and November 2012. It is based on semi-structured qualitative interviews with stakeholders and staff, a commissioned media analysis, and analysis of SRC documents and outputs.

The evaluation considers the influencing work of SRC within the policy context of the period. The SRC's work is assessed in relation to the organisation's four strategic aims: (1) to increase public understanding of refugees and campaign for an end to discrimination, racism and prejudice; (2) to advocate for the rights of refugees and people seeking asylum and for fair and just legislation and policies; (3) to support refugees' integration and inclusion, ensuring refugee voices are heeded; and, (4) to ensure that refugees and people seeking asylum have access to quality advice services, information and support.

The report focuses particularly on the work of the policy and communications team which is responsible for driving SRC's influencing work. Specific policy projects funded by the Big Lottery Fund Scotland, Comic Relief (women's policy and development) and the Diana Princess of Wales Memorial Fund (children's policy work) are assessed on the basis of the available project documentation. Evaluation of these projects focuses on evidence of progress towards stated project outcomes, clarity in the analysis of the policy context, appropriate identification of targets and allies, and existence of processes for monitoring and review.



A member of the Refugee Women's Strategy Group quizzes Emma Churchill, Director of Asylum, UK Border Agency at Scottish Refugee Council conference *Raising Refugee Women's Voices* (2011).

Photo credit: Becky Duncan.

Refugees in Scotland

- A significant number of refugees who arrive in the UK each year live in Scotland. Since 2003 roughly 10 per cent of the UK's asylum population has been accommodated in Scotland.¹
- Although immigration is a reserved matter, key areas of policy that impact on refugees' experiences and entitlements are decided by the Scottish Government.
- Policy determining refugees' access to health, education, housing, legal aid, children's services, policing and some integration support is more positive in Scotland than other parts of the UK. Access to services supporting integration is from day one, and a guardianship service is available for separated children. If an initial asylum application is unsuccessful, applicants do not need to navigate a merits test to access legal aid for appeals. Asylum seekers remain eligible for free health care while they are in Scotland and some are eligible for home-student fees for further/higher education.²
- These entitlements are arguably evidence of a greater political will to uphold the rights of those seeking protection from persecution and a commitment among parts of the public sector to make proactive attempts to address the needs of people seeking asylum.³ There is also political commitment in Scotland to fostering positive messages, and to funding work that promotes positive exchanges and increased understanding, which may translate into positive attitudes.⁴
- Our evaluation suggests that the constitutional situation provides more opportunities in Scotland to improve the lives of refugees, despite continuing constraints deriving from current UK policy on matters including asylum decision-making, asylum support, detention and dispersal. Alternative approaches piloted in Scotland have the potential to be of wider benefit to refugees in other parts of the UK.

.....

1 Based on figures from the UN Refugee Agency, Scottish Refugee Council broadly estimates that there are around 20,000 refugees and men, women and children seeking asylum in Scotland. UNHCR's Global Trends Report for 2011 presents statistics derived from government sources of refugee populations in each country (published June 2012). In the UK as a whole, UNHCR reports that there is a total of 208,000 refugees and people seeking asylum. Since 2001 approximately 1 in 10 of those seeking asylum in the UK have been dispersed to Scotland.

2 As of the 1 December 2007, in Scotland entitlement to 'home' fees is given to asylum seekers/ unaccompanied asylum-seeking children meeting certain criteria. See http://www.childrenslegalcentre.com/index.php?page=faq_Furtherandhighereducation_question4

3 For example Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board have recently established an NHS Asylum Health Bridging Team based at the Initial Accommodation building carrying out initial health assessments with new arrivals and proactively addressing low uptake of GP registrations on dispersal.

4 In 2011 Oxford University published research concerning attitudes towards immigration in different regions of the UK which indicates that Scottish attitudes to immigration are among the most favourable of all parts of the UK. In particular attitudes towards asylum in Scotland were more favourable than other parts of the UK. (Migration to the UK: Asylum, Migration Observatory, December 2011 <http://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/migration-uk-asylum>).

Scottish Refugee Council's influencing work

- SRC is a human rights charity based in Glasgow. Its vision is for a Scotland in which all people seeking refugee protection are welcome. It was established in 1985, and is the largest refugee agency in Scotland, with around 43 staff and 60 volunteers. SRC provides a range of services to people who have sought asylum, at various stages of their journey – from arrival to integration or departure. SRC is contracted by both the UK Border Agency and the Scottish Government to carry out aspects of this work, providing over 1000 face-to-face advice sessions each month. It advocates for the rights of refugees and people seeking asylum and for fair and just legislation and policies, and aims to increase public understanding of refugees through a range of policy, research, media, training and arts and cultural work.
- Over the evaluation period there had been some changes in staffing, but the policy and communications team responsible for driving forward the influencing work, generally ranged between seven and nine posts. At the time of writing, the team was made up of the head of policy and communications, a children's policy officer, an information officer, a media officer, a research officer, a training and events officer, and a women's policy development officer working together with a part-time community development officer.⁵

Scottish Government Cabinet Secretary Fiona Hyslop meets Fuad Warmse as part of Scottish Refugee Council's media project Home in 2009. Linked to the Year of Homecoming in Scotland and Refugee Week Scotland, the Policy & Communications Team organised a series of open-to-the-media 'visits', where well-known Scottish people including politicians, writers and musicians visited the homes of refugees who now live in Scotland. The total PR value of the high quality media coverage achieved was £126,260 with 10.5 million opportunities to view (Source: Refugee Week Scotland 2009 evaluation).

Photo credit: Angela Caitlin.



⁵ SRC spending on its influencing work is published in its annual reports as a percentage or amount of (total expenditure): 2011-12 (£2,598,802) Advocating for refugees through research, policy and communications work: £567,473; 2010-11 (£3,438,228) Advocating for refugees through research, policy and communications work: 23%; 2009-10 (£3,460,331) Knowledge, policy and communications: 18%; 2008-2009 (£3,118,064) Knowledge, policy and communications: 16%; 2007-2008 (£3,208,080) Knowledge, policy and communications: 14%.

Key evaluation findings

- SRC's influencing work spans three distinct important roles:
 - a) providing input on the likely and actual impacts of changes in asylum policy and practice in Scotland;
 - b) providing expertise on the needs and experiences of refugees and asylum seekers on devolved policy areas; and,
 - c) highlighting areas of uncertainty in law and practice where reserved and devolved policy matters overlap or conflict.
- SRC has played an important role piloting alternative approaches on issues of guardianship, age assessment, gender sensitivity and improved responses to disclosures of sexual violence. This work has arguably had an important impact not just on practice in Scotland, but has triggered debate and discussion in the rest of the UK and provided lobbying material on alternatives.
- SRC is widely respected as a leading source of credible and trusted evidence and analysis on refugees in Scotland, and plays an important role in representing the views and interests of refugees at the Scottish, UK and EU levels, very often as the only Scottish organisation at the table.
- SRC is effective at using a broad range of influencing tools to achieve change including media, policy advocacy, research, training and arts and cultural work.
- SRC has generated opportunities and platforms for refugees to speak for themselves in policy and political arenas and in the media.



Impact and influence

- The reasons for policy change are complex and multifarious. It is not possible to causally link the positive policy for refugees in Scotland to the work of any particular organisation, as a complex and shifting mix of economic, social, political and demographic factors are at play. However, this evaluation suggests that SRC has contributed significantly to the development of positive policies and approaches in key devolved areas.
- SRC information and reports are highly regarded and viewed as good quality and trusted information across all sectors interviewed. Some interviewees assigned positive changes in policy and procedure directly to SRC interventions. These included: childcare provision at UKBA interviews⁶, age assessment and refugee integration policy.
- Government interviewees stated their respect for SRC's challenging function as vital and value both SRC's independence and its pragmatism.
- SRC has been able to use its political connections within Scotland and the broader scope for policy innovation in Scotland to develop policy alternatives.
- SRC are seen as playing an important role in representing the views and interests of refugees in Scotland at UK and EU level.



6 SRC have been involved in facilitating and supporting the Refugee Women's Strategy Group (RWSG) capacity to influence policymakers in the Raising Refugee Women's Voices project. This culminated in RWSG initiating a series of bi-monthly meetings with UKBA to discuss a variety of actions to improve the interview process for refugee women. One was to secure childcare provision so that women did not have to disclose details of their claims in front of their children.

Highlights: The following highlights have been identified by the evaluation. In each, SRC, often working in close partnership with others, has had a positive impact on key policy issues or agendas. This is not a comprehensive list, but illustrates the range of issues, tactics and partnerships undertaken by SRC.

- Influencing Scottish Government to review its **integration strategy**, drawing on research by SRC, ensuring policy and funding development based on the important principle that integration is two-way and begins as soon as someone arrives in the UK.
- Ensuring **health access** for refused asylum seekers is retained, and successfully pushing for clarification of this to be published, reducing the likelihood of worsening health for those refused asylum.
- Piloting a **guardianship scheme** for separated children in Scotland, in partnership with Aberlour Childcare Trust, which is improving young people's ability to navigate and withstand the asylum determination process, by reducing social isolation and increasing their ability to actively participate in their protection claim.
- Devising an **age-assessment tool**, for use where a young person's claim to be under-18 is disputed, that has been adopted by all local authorities in Scotland.
- Playing an active role in the coalition to **end destitution** of refused asylum seekers (Still Human, Still Here), which secured a modest increase in asylum support rates for the first time since 1999.
- Delivering **training** rated 'excellent' or 'good' to over 1200 professionals in Scotland, influencing the practice of several organisations as a result.⁷



⁷ There has been a steady increase in the numbers of courses and attendees over the four years analysed, from 14 courses in 2008/9 to 41 in 2011/12, and in delegates from around 260 in 2009/10 to 440 in 2011/12. Training was provided both as public courses and in-house. Analysis of feedback from external attendees from 2011/12 shows that of the 273 pieces of feedback (slightly higher than 50 per cent of total attendees), 81 per cent rated the training 'excellent' and the remainder as 'good'

- Publishing **research on family reunion** which prompted UKBA to review their policy and issue revised instructions, and helped inform the subsequent provision of British Red Cross services to refugees.
- Brokering contact with UKBA in Scotland, and liaising with UNHCR and UK charities working on gender, to pilot a referral protocol to support agencies for disclosures of **sexual and gender-based violence** at screening.
- Responding promptly and usefully to requests for information, briefings and case studies from media, policy-makers, politicians and mainstream voluntary organisations, developing and maintaining a **trusted status as the ‘go to’ organisation on refugee issues in Scotland**.
- Coordinating a wide-ranging and **successful programme through Refugee Week Scotland, supporting over 35 community** activities through small grants, engaging political support at the highest level, and engaging and informing members of the public through events and media coverage.⁸
- **Extending the reach of SRC’s communication** through e-newsletters, social media and a new website, with overall visitor numbers up 15 per cent and a monthly e-newsletter launched in 2009 with 900 subscribers, which grew to 1660 by 2012.
- SRC’s monitoring figures show that they contributed to, or were involved in developing, between 200 and 300 stories a year, unrelated to Refugee Week. The findings of the media review commissioned for this evaluation show that SRC has had some success in proactive work to get **coverage of positive stories about refugees in to the print media**, with an increase in frequency of mentions between 2008 and 2012.
- Documentation from the period shows a **high level of involvement and visibility** for people with refugee backgrounds at SRC events, conferences and political meetings, for example, a conference on gender in 2011 (Raising Refugee Women’s Voices).

⁸ The reach of Refugee Week Scotland grew steadily throughout the evaluation period, increasing by one third from 90 events in 2008 to 120 in 2011, with an estimated audience at events over the period of around 100,000. Independent estimates of ‘Opportunity to see’ figures for the media coverage ran to over 4 million in 2011/12. An independent evaluation of Refugee Week 2012 found that 63 per cent of all media coverage in the UK in 2012 was generated in Scotland.

External relationships

The evaluation found:

- SRC relationships with government at all levels are particularly strong and mature, creating room for more creative problem-solving than would be possible in a more adversarial setting.
- Relationships with media and politicians are strong with SRC clearly emerging as the primary source of information on asylum seekers and refugees in Scotland for both.
- Relationships with the refugee sector outside Scotland are healthy and positive, involving formal and informal information sharing. Relationships with refugee sector organisations within Scotland would benefit from more active engagement and inclusion of those organisations in the SRC's influencing plans and theory of change.

Organisational strengths and challenges

The evaluation found:

- SRC has done well to weather a major restructure and the commitment of SRC staff to improving the lives of refugees and asylum seekers provides a strong sense of common purpose.
- Internal communications remain a continuing challenge particularly between different teams. Following the restructure, there may be room to scope out processes that allow for quicker communications between different levels of staff within a now smaller organisation.
- At a time of reduced resources and stretched capacity, SRC will need to be able to respond flexibly and to make tough choices regarding organisational priorities.

Life after Iraq

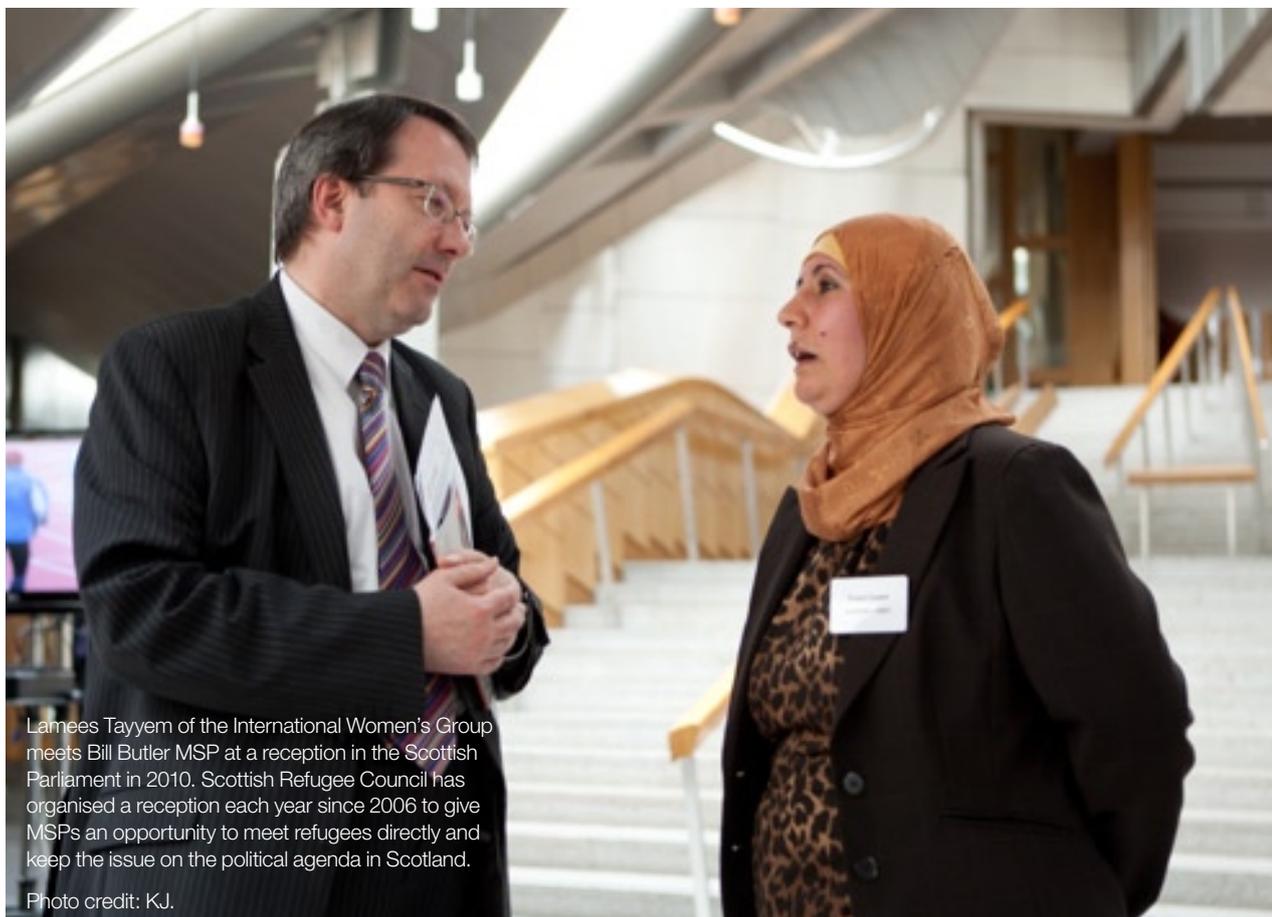
In 2008 Scottish Refugee Council commissioned award-winning photojournalist Angela Catlin and journalist Billy Briggs who travelled to Syria to document the lives of some of the ordinary Iraqis trying to survive in extraordinary circumstances. They also recorded the experiences of Iraqi refugees who have made it to Scotland in search of safety. An exhibition of the photographs, *Life After Iraq*, ran from May 2008 until October 2008 at the St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art in Glasgow. Glasgow Museums recorded 66,000 visitors to the exhibition. The project also generated a number of feature and news articles. The exhibition went on to tour around Glasgow schools and be shown in Paisley and Cardiff.

Photo credit: Angela Catlin.



Conclusions

- SRC is seeking to influence a high-profile and contentious area of policy, at a time of shrinking resources and budget cuts across the public and voluntary sectors. It exists to serve people who have fled horrific situations, and after difficult journeys too often find their lives in the UK beset by official indifference and hostility, and their attempts to build a new life blocked by law and policy that prevents them taking charge of their situation. The organisation's staff and volunteers appear highly motivated and dedicated, but face significant external hurdles to securing clients' basic entitlements. Many staff and volunteers we spoke to clearly felt that the need is often greater than their ability to respond.
- As the largest refugee organisation in Scotland, a membership organisation, and contractor to the UK Border Agency and Scottish Government, there is rightly a high level of expectation and scrutiny of SRC's work. It is, to some extent, required to perform different roles for its many stakeholders in Glasgow, Scotland and the UK- refugees themselves, grassroots organisations, voluntary and statutory sector partners, campaigners, academics, policy-makers, journalists, politicians and the general public.



Lamees Tayyem of the International Women's Group meets Bill Butler MSP at a reception in the Scottish Parliament in 2010. Scottish Refugee Council has organised a reception each year since 2006 to give MSPs an opportunity to meet refugees directly and keep the issue on the political agenda in Scotland.

Photo credit: KJ.



- Capacity has been significantly reduced elsewhere in the organisation, which has had an impact on its influencing work. Further, the organisation, alongside partners in England and Wales, has had to defend the existence of a role for the voluntary sector in provision of asylum advice which has taken up a good deal of the time and energy of senior managers. At a time when many aspects of the asylum and immigration process are being parcelled up and contracted out to private sector companies, it will become increasingly important for agencies to quantify and articulate their view of the value of independent asylum advice.
- Despite these challenges, our assessment of SRC's influencing work is that it does a good job of balancing varied, and sometimes competing, demands. It has made clear progress against the outcomes set for the three funded projects assessed for this evaluation, reacting to emerging opportunities and adapting strategies in response to changing circumstances.
- The organisation appears to have a strong strategic planning framework. However, staff face difficult choices on a daily basis about where limited capacity can have most impact. They are faced with a fast-changing and complex policy environment and many systemic problems of pressing urgency for the individuals affected. Like many organisations combining service delivery with seeking change, SRC has to deal with perennial challenges of striking the right balance between pursuing strategic policy goals and tackling operational policy issues arising from its casework. It also has to make difficult judgments about when and how to use 'inside track' influencing with government and public bodies, and when to take a visible, public campaigning stance.
- Our view, supported by our interview findings, is that many of the challenges facing SRC are likely to intensify over the coming years, as public spending cuts continue to bite. There will be the additional opportunity and challenge raised by the inevitable debate about the independence referendum in 2014, where immigration, as one of the few reserved issues, will receive significant attention.

Future challenges and opportunities

The evaluation makes a number of detailed recommendations to SRC to inform decisions about their future work. These are grouped around four key areas: (1) selection of strategies and goals; (2) methods; (3) internal processes, and (4) external relationships. They include recommendations to: review and articulate their theory of change; build on models for involving refugees in their influencing work; seek independent funding to increase capacity to work on operational policy issues; support direct communication and minimise bureaucracy; create space for new ideas and support staff to be able to work autonomously; review the organisation's networks, relationships and engagement strategy; develop SRC's brokering role; be strategic about sustaining pressure on influencing targets.

The evaluation report identifies particular issues that need to be taken into account:

- There is a continuing role for SRC as the trusted 'go to' source of information and briefing for the media, politicians, policy-makers, academics and mainstream voluntary organisations. This day-to-day role of informing and supporting debate and policy development is valued and should be sustained. There is a great deal of support for SRC to play a role in informing the debates on constitutional change in the run up to the independence referendum in 2014.
- Pressures on funding are likely to persist and there will be an increasing need for SRC to evidence the case for voluntary sector provision of advice services in competition with the private sector.
- There is an on-going need to demonstrate the transferability of the 'Scottish experience' on asylum to persuade others that policies and practices trialled in Scotland can be adopted elsewhere without significant extra cost.
- The current positive political and media environment on asylum and immigration in Scotland remains tentative and will continue to require active engagement with both groups to ensure gains do not dissipate, particularly in the run up to the independence referendum.
- An ingredient of success in the SRC's work has been the model of combining intensive community development support with refugees, with policy influencing – this is resource intensive but effective.
- There is evidence that SRC's arts and culture work has been important in creating a positive space for influencing political and public awareness in support of refugees, which points to the importance of supporting arts and cultural work to influence change.



Some of the refugee film-makers responsible for producing *Courage: 60 years of the Refugee Convention* (2011) in action.

Photo credit: Angela Caitlin.

Annex 1: Summary of methodology

The evaluation of the work of the policy and communications team took place between 15 August 2012 and November 2012. The evaluation is based on review and analysis of the internal management documents and the outputs of SRC's policy and communications team over the period, a series of semi-structured qualitative interviews and a comparative media analysis. A mapping of developments in immigration policy over the period was conducted to provide policy context and background. 33 interviews were conducted with external stakeholders and 17 internal interviews with the policy and communications team and selected SRC staff and board members. The external interviews were conducted in two waves. The media analysis was commissioned and examined coverage of refugee and asylum issues and SRC mentions in the print media in Scotland of two snapshot periods between 2008 and 2012.⁹



Two participants from the Spirit Photography Project (2012) in action. Twelve refugee participants worked with Scottish Refugee Council and Streetlevel Photo works to document refugee communities in Glasgow. An exhibition was mounted at prominent arts venue Trongate 103 in Glasgow from 7 June until 22 July 2012. 32,843 footfalls were recorded in the venue over the period and an image from the exhibition was presented to Deputy First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon MSP by participants.

Photo credit: Rana Ali

⁹ This review did not include broadcast or social media. It was based on a Lexis Nexis database search, and gathered a snapshot of coverage mentioning refugees or asylum seekers in a Scottish context, and stories that mentioned SRC. The stories that mentioned SRC were assessed for type of mention (eg quote, letter, reference) and some analysis of the tone of that mention.



A meeting was held with policy and communications staff to discuss emerging findings between the two waves of external interviews. This helped clarify emerging findings and produced a preliminary structure for the final report around which the successive wave of interviews was focused. Care was taken to identify a broad spread of interviewees in the first wave to ensure a range of perspectives had been gathered at the emerging findings stage. On the basis of this, additions and substitutions could be made to the final wave allowing for more interviews to be conducted on areas where a consensus of opinion was less evident.

External interviewees were identified using a list of key stakeholders provided by SRC, with additional suggestions made by the evaluation team. The first wave of interviews was also used to identify any additional interviewees whose input could be of value. The interviews were semi-structured with a topic guide produced for external and internal interviewees. This topic guide was followed in abbreviated form in the second wave of interviews focusing on those areas where interviewees could be expected to best comment. For some organisations, interviews were conducted with several individuals at different levels. A small number of interviews (around 20 per cent) were conducted in person where this was felt to be more appropriate or convenient, the rest were telephone interviews.

Interviewees were informed that SRC was aware that they were to be interviewed, but that quotes would not be attributed to them without their express written consent. SRC staff were informed that they would not be asked to identify themselves. The research methodology was checked against the Self-Audit Checklists of the University of Edinburgh's Research and Research Ethics Committee to ensure compliance with a respected standard of research ethics.¹⁰

During the report writing stage an action research workshop was held with key SRC staff and selected others to help crystallise and clarify recommendations and to discuss findings in more depth. This was facilitated by Mark Bitel from Partners in Evaluation Scotland, who acted as advisor to the evaluation team, but was not involved in conducting the research.



10 Available at: <http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/research/ethics>

