

RIGHTS, RESILIENCE AND REFUGEE INTEGRATION IN SCOTLAND

NEW SCOTS & THE HOLISTIC INTEGRATION SERVICE

A report sharing insights from the Holistic Integration Service 2013-2016

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HOLISTIC INTEGRATION SERVICE MODEL

- The Holistic Integration Service (HIS) is a unique partnership led by Scottish Refugee Council with British Red Cross, Bridges Programmes, Glasgow Clyde College and Workers Educational Association Scotland offering up to twelve months support to people who have been granted Refugee Status, Humanitarian Protection, or Discretionary Leave to Remain following an asylum claim in Scotland.
- It is underpinned by an empowerment and rights based approach that has aimed to ensure that, ***“Refugees are effectively integrated into Scottish society and able to exercise their rights and have their needs met.”***
- The service has addressed the needs of new refugees within a holistic understanding of integration based on the ‘Indicators of Integration’ framework¹. It has sought to deliver a genuinely person-centred service following the principles of: early intervention and prevention; recognising resilience and vulnerability; pursuing sustainable outcomes for refugees.

Who has benefitted from the service?

- 1,885 refugee people have engaged with the service since May 2013.
- Across the three years 78% of households presented as single
- Over the three years, 74% of households who accessed the service were headed by men.

- Throughout the service the four main countries of origin of beneficiaries have been Eritrea (30%), Sudan (21%), Iran (15%) and Syria (10%) - accounting for 76% of the total number of people who accessed the service.
- Refugees who accessed the service were primarily of working age, with the majority (73%) aged between 25 and 39.

Key features of the partnership

- Regular ‘Community of practice’ meetings of practitioners in the partnership to discuss the practicalities of service provision through real case studies were appreciated as a very effective mechanism for relationship building, problem-solving and service improvement.
- Partner managers built trust through meeting as an ‘Impact Network’ to oversee service delivery and also identify strategic issues emerging from beneficiary data. Managers identified the relationships forged as one of the most valuable outcomes of the partnership and were committed to maintaining and potentially widening this network to improve the quality of future service provision.
- The Joint Client Data Base, a case management system upgraded by the Scottish Refugee Council with the investment of its own resources (£104K), has been a key tool in the gathering of systematic information about new refugees using the service. It has depended on consistent and skilful data entry by Integration advisers and has been used widely to provide evidence for policy and practice advocacy throughout the three year programme.

¹ ‘Indicators of Integration,’ Ager & Strang, 2008

- The HIS programme learning team have hosted a range of dissemination events with policy, practice and refugee stakeholders throughout the three year programme, shared data updates with the 'New Scots' strategy Core group, and published a report annually.

Learning from and Contribution of the Holistic Integration Service

Access to Housing Rights

- HIS has played a vital role in ensuring that refugees understand their housing rights and exercise them effectively.
- HIS has continued to promote and facilitate access to settled housing as a key stage in the integration process.
- The great majority of new refugees experience homelessness: 84% of refugees who accessed the service presented as homeless to the local authority when their asylum support ended.
- Refugees continue to experience challenges in accessing statutory homelessness provision, especially temporary accommodation. This is particularly acute as most refugees have to present as homeless 'in crisis' when their asylum support ends.
- Men spend more time in homelessness than women. Refugee women spent on average 193 days in homelessness compared to 222 days for men. The reasons for this require further investigation.

Access to Welfare Benefits

- 87% of beneficiaries in year three required assistance from the service to make their initial claims, this demonstrates HIS is a vital access point to benefit entitlements.
- Ongoing delays in initial access to benefits has meant that the 28 day 'move-on' period after refugee status is granted is clearly insufficient for most refugees to avoid destitution but make a transition to mainstream welfare support.
- Engagement with DWP has improved the customer journey, but other systems – for example National Insurance Number allocation – continue to function inconsistently.
- Refugees often require and have received ongoing advice from HIS to navigate the complexity of benefits systems, particularly with regard to sanctions.
- Refugees experience acute periods of destitution and prolonged period of living on low income
- Refugees feel shame at being dependent and are keen to 'free' themselves from benefits through work and education.

Connecting through language

- The majority of new refugees (76% in year 3) have beginner English skills (Access 2) but are strongly motivated to build upon these to attain higher levels of confidence in English.
- Refugees report that limited English skills make many aspects of their lives in Scotland more difficult including getting to know local people, dealing with official appointments and letters (DWP, housing, medical).

- HIS has been an invaluable access point to initial assessment and 'Survival English' classes (WEA); and to more sustained college-based ESOL provision (Glasgow Clyde College).
- HIS had a positive impact on refugees by providing ESOL classes which include cultural and local knowledge.
- The introduction of the 'English Language Requirement' by DWP – has had an impact on the initial pathways through ESOL assessment and provision envisaged by HIS.
- While certificated ESOL provision is highly valued by refugees, there is a need to recognise and promote more social and contextual English learning environments to complement formal learning.
- Many refugees struggle to find opportunities to meet with local English speakers to practice their language skills.
- Despite experiences of racism, refugees find Scottish people friendly and this is an important factor which influences their decisions to remain in Scotland in the long term.
- At the same time, refugees would value more opportunities to interact meaningfully with Scottish people.
- Refugees reported that they were often required to meet basic needs through informal social connections, for example 'sofa surfing' when homeless, eating with friends when receiving no benefits, and finding a job. Often refugees either had no one to turn to, or felt that such requests put too much strain on their relationships
- The 'Peer Education' and 'HIS Community Conference' models recognise the importance of refugees' existing social connections whilst providing opportunities to expand and mobilise connections further and engage local communities.

Social connections

- HIS has promoted the development of new friendship through the provision of ESOL classes and employability courses. It also acted as a bridge to Scottish society by supporting refugees to navigate new systems and access services.
- Refugees report high levels of social connections with friends and family and yet many express a strong sense of homesickness and loss at being apart from close family members.
- Refugees report high levels of personal experiences of racism and verbal abuse, particularly whilst living in temporary homeless accommodation.

Independence and confidence

- HIS promoted resilience by addressing key areas of: confidence, understanding systems, accessing rights, English language ability and health.
- Recognising and supporting people's resilience has been central to the programme's ethos and outcomes.
- Refugees describe developing resilience by increasing confidence and independence. Refugees are keen to regain their independence after the forced dependency of asylum procedures.
- Developing English language skills, education and employment are seen by refugees as the principal pathways towards improved independence and a better life.

Employment & education

- While education is a priority for many refugees, few will access non-ESOL education within the first year after status as most need to improve their English language skills before they can engage in other education.
- Refugees are strongly motivated to gain employment but only 9% of refugees are recorded as having obtained paid employment within the year after being granted status.
- Barriers to employment include language, lack of work experience in the UK, and very little recognition of prior learning and qualifications.
- Refugees with higher English skills and levels of education are more likely to gain employment.
- Social connections can compensate for limited English skills, particularly where people are joining long established communities. However such work is not likely to afford the opportunity to improve English language and therefore can inhibit any progression or further integration.
- Refugees' employment is characterised by instability and poor terms and conditions.
- Refugees have well-developed, ambitious plans for future employment. Many are interested in owning their own businesses.
- The combination of education and employment service offered by HIS has successfully assisted people on pathways towards employability and paid employment. A key element has been helping people navigate the sometimes conflicting priorities of educational achievement and work experience.

Biographies

Alison Strang is a psychologist working with communities affected by conflict around the world. Her research focuses on the assessment of wellbeing and social networks. She is cofounder of the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Network (www.mhpss.net) and chairs the Scottish Government strategy implementation process: 'New Scots: Integrating Refugees in Scotland's Communities'.

Helen Baillot was the Research Assistant with Queen Margaret University for the evaluation of the Holistic Integration Service. Prior to this she has been an independent researcher and the principal investigator for studies on tackling female genital mutilation in Scotland and on the treatment of women's narratives of sexual violence within UK asylum processes.

Elodie Mignard started working with Scottish Refugee Council in 2010 to work on housing policy and practice. From May 2013, Elodie became the Integration Development Officer with the Holistic Integration Service and joined the learning team with Queen Margaret University. She was recently appointed Refugee Integration Service Manager.