

Research briefing

Refugee Integration in Scotland Briefing 1: Key Findings from Stage 1

Introduction

Scottish Refugee Council is undertaking a longitudinal study of refugee integration in Scotland.

This briefing paper is the first in a series that will highlight the findings of each stage and relate them to specific policy areas, but also the links between those policy areas. This briefing contains the top level findings from the first quantitative stage of the research and is based on 262 questionnaire responses from people seeking asylum and refugees in Glasgow, with a small number also coming from people living in Edinburgh. The questionnaire and briefing covers issues relating to employment, housing, education, health, communities and overall aspirations.

Basic Demographics

The questionnaire was completed by people from some 37 different countries who have arrived in Scotland in each year between 1998 and 2010. These include Iran, Iraq, China, Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea and Somalia.

Slightly more women than men completed the questionnaire and about two thirds of responses are from refugees, with the other third being from asylum seekers.

Employment

There are very low levels of employment among our refugee sample in Scotland. Of those with the right to work in this study, just 32, or just over 20% are in some form of paid employment. This is despite well over three quarters of people indicating that they would like to be working.

Of those working, there is evidence of people's skills and experience being under-utilised. Most work in poorly paid and insecure forms of employment, despite many having high skills levels.

These low employment levels are contributing to considerable financial hardship. Over 68% of all respondents stated that they were struggling to cope financially, almost three times as many as the 15% most deprived Scots in the Scottish Household Survey.

Over one third of respondents feel that their financial situation has recently deteriorated, although there is considerable optimism that things will improve in the future.

Housing

Regardless of how long people have been in the country, there are high levels of housing churn with nearly half having been in their present accommodation for less than a year.

The largest landlord is Glasgow Housing Association, followed by Glasgow City Council, although, after contractual discussions between Glasgow City Council and the UKBA, these tenancies will have subsequently been transferred to Y People.

Satisfaction with present housing is relatively high; with 53% indicating that they are either satisfied or very satisfied.

However, satisfaction is lower among women, and lower still among women with children.

Despite relatively high satisfaction levels, a majority of respondents would like to leave their present accommodation. The main reasons for wanting to leave concerned the size, type and physical conditions of the property.

Education and Language

The educational background of refugees in Scotland is diverse. However, the mean figure for the number of years of education is only slightly below the UK figure, 11.94 years compared to 12.6 years. The figures show that some refugees are very well educated, while others have very little formal education.

Some 85% of respondents stated that they would like to return to education. The type of courses wished for are diverse and reflect the variety of educational backgrounds of refugees and asylum seekers.

A large proportion of respondents have attended some form of education in Scotland, with ESOL by far the largest form of study undertaken.

Satisfaction with education in Scotland was high, with around two thirds saying that the amount of education they had received was satisfactory.

Among those with children, satisfaction with their children's education was higher still, at around 89%, only slightly lower than the Scottish average.

Over two thirds of respondents feel confident speaking English. Confidence is higher among men than women.

Health

Over 96% of refugees and asylum seekers are registered with a GP, while 77% are registered with dentists.

Respondents self rate their health quite highly, although lower than the general Scottish population, with 59% stating that their health was either excellent or good, compared to 75% of the Scottish population in the Scottish Household Survey indicating similarly.

Refugees rate their health higher than asylum seekers and men rate their health higher than women.

Our respondents have a higher incidence of mental health problems than the overall Scottish population. Asylum seekers have worse mental health than refugees and women have worse mental health than men. This leaves asylum seeking women comparable to only the Scottish population with the worst incidence of mental health problems, those that indicate their health is poor or very poor, and very low earners.

Just over a third of respondents indicate that they have a disability, an illness or health problem, a mental health problem, or both.

A significant minority of respondents feel that their health has deteriorated in the past six months to two years.

Communities

Just under half of all respondents do not have any family members in Scotland, or even Britain. Similarly, just under a third never attend local events, and over a third never attend community meetings or volunteer locally. A significant minority, (over a third) therefore never meet relatives, with about 20% also saying that they never speak to their neighbours.

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Nevertheless, 61% of respondents were satisfied with the neighbourhood that they live in with a similar number feeling safe within those neighbourhoods.

Almost 41% feel part of their local community, with just 20% saying that they do not feel part of that community.

Similarly, just under half of respondents felt that their neighbourhood was one in which people from different backgrounds get on well, with just 15% disagreeing.

Discrimination

Over 70% of refugees and asylum seekers in Scotland feel that they have been discriminated against. The most common basis for that perceived discrimination was due to being a refugee or asylum seeker, with slightly lower numbers indicating that they feel the discrimination they experienced concerned their nationality, colour/race or language.

Most experiences of discrimination are infrequent but over 10% experience discrimination on a weekly basis, with a further 15% saying such experiences were monthly.

Overall Conclusion

The questionnaire finished by asking how happy respondents were with their life in the UK. Around 70% stated that they were either very happy or happy.

Therefore, despite all the problems and issues facing refugees and asylum seekers in Scotland, a large majority feel happy here.

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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.