



SCOTLAND WELCOMES REFUGEES CONFERENCE SUMMARY

Summary report of discussions from the Conference on 2 November 2016.



Introduction

On 2 November 2016 over 170 delegates gathered in Glasgow's Royal Concert Hall for the 'Scotland Welcomes Refugees' conference. 18 Scottish local authorities were represented as part of a diverse group which included New Scots partners, public sector, third sector, academics and refugees.

Delegates were welcomed by Dr Alison Strang, Chair of the Core Group of the New Scots Strategy, and Councillor Archie Graham of Glasgow City Council. Mohammed Abbas, shared his experience as a refugee and spoke of why he had chosen to live in Scotland once he received refugee status. Tawona Sithole inspired the delegates with his poetry.

"I want Scotland to be a place of welcome and safety where refugees can rebuild their lives."

*Cabinet Secretary for Communities,
Social Security and Equalities
Angela Constance MSP*



The keynote address was delivered by the Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities, Angela Constance MSP, who set out that the conference discussion would be important to "help us to shape the best support we can for the refugees and asylum seekers who are here and for those yet to come."

Sharing practice presentations covering the six themes of New Scots were heard:

- Housing – Accommodating Syrian refugees in North Lanarkshire
- Education – Glasgow ESOL Access Project
- Employment – Women into Sustainable Employment 'WiSE' project
- Health – Mental Health Foundation – the Right to Health
- Asylum – Legal Services Agency – Women and Children's services
- Community – The Amal Project – Aberdeenshire

These presentations highlighted that projects across Scotland are working for the benefit of refugees and the range of partners who are involved. This is a reflection of the intention of the New Scots strategy, as a framework to help collaborative working to support refugees.

The main purpose of the conference was to gather refugees, people who provide public services or facilities and people who work to support refugees to share learning from the work which has already taken place and to consider what could be improved for refugees and how that could be done. This summary document will focus on these discussions.

The examples discussed demonstrated a focus on supporting refugees and asylum seekers and recognition of the need to do this within communities. Delegate examples covered all six New Scots themes with particular focus on health (including mental health), education, employability, housing and access to services, information and awareness of rights. There were also examples highlighting work to engage with women.

ESOL and English language support recurred most across discussions as delegates highlighted both formal and informal provision which enables practice outside the classroom. The importance of English language skills for integration emerged as delegates referred to the benefits for refugees:

- developing confidence;
- understanding available services and how to access them;
- becoming independent;
- studying, volunteering or employment;
- mental health and wellbeing;
- gain or improve skills; and
- feeling part of the local community and able to fully participate in society;

*“English is a panacea.
How to relieve the depression
and forget the past and work
from now and future and meet
together.”*

Access to interpreters and the involvement of volunteers who speak Arabic to help support refugees arriving under the Syrian Resettlement Programme in community groups and initiatives were also highlighted as being valuable in helping to provide support.

When asked what has worked well and why, delegates were clear that people are at the core of successful integration (*see word clouds 2 & 3*). Whether that is the people providing a service; the people who are settling into their new homes; or the people in local communities who have been supportive and welcoming.

*“Syrian kids are now
participating as
community members
not as others.”*

- Coo Park Project, Falkirk

Delegates believed that opportunities to participate in existing community activities as equals is beneficial in enabling refugees to feel welcome and safe. It was also recognised that integration should support the existing community as well as new refugees to enable them to mutually benefit. A number of examples cited involving existing community groups or services and enabling refugees to be involved in leading groups or designing services as key to them working well.

Other examples of positive work to support asylum seekers and refugees raised in discussions included:

- Police Scotland engagement – building relationships with refugees which help to develop trust when engaging with figures of authority.
- Involvement in cultural, arts and sporting activities – particularly when done as part of the local community – reducing isolation, helping with English language skills and building relationships.
- Peer support: refugees sharing their experience and knowledge with others. For example, Syrian families who arrived in the early stages of the resettlement programme helping to support newly arrived families.
- Sharing of expertise by organisations with experience – specific examples included Glasgow City Council sharing with other local authorities through COSLA networks and the Scottish Refugee Council providing training.
- NHS staff training, particularly where tailored to specialisms and sharing e-learning with social work colleagues. Interpreting services for NHS and the Grampian prescription translation form were also highlighted as particularly useful.
- ESOL employability officer to help students develop skills in applications and knowledge of the UK job market, as well as access to work experience opportunities which help to prepare for training or employment.
- Consistent support worker to build trust with a familiar person and enable service to be more person centred.

“Indicators of good integration – breaking barriers – people who now feel comfortable working with police and authority figures, overcoming their previous experience with similar figures.”

- Uniting Nations in Scotland

“Interpreting service NHS = better access to NHS services; equality for all.”



context of limited English. A UK Government policy change to enable asylum seekers to work.

- There is a **high level of refugee involvement and engagement**, alongside closer working with third sector and community groups. More direction for volunteers in order to channel this resource.
- Destitution is eliminated.



Looking Ahead

The current *New Scots: integrating refugees into communities strategy* was developed in 2013 and operates from 2014 to end March 2017.

During the first discussions, delegates highlighted the following as key positives of the *New Scots* approach to supporting refugees in Scotland, which had enabled the examples discussed to work:

- Partnerships – working collaboratively and linking across services. A multi-agency approach. Focus on the Scottish context and enabling stronger partnership working.
- Community support and positive public response to refugees. Volunteers and community group engagement.
- Sharing expertise and best practice.
- Direct involvement of refugees – building trust and capacity for refugees to engage with policy makers and space for them to ask questions and receive answers. Refugee led groups and activities – enabling them to identify needs and help to design solutions.

During her opening address the Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities announced a commitment to develop a new strategy, built on the positive work of *New Scots*. She emphasised the benefits of working in partnership to develop and implement *New Scots*. She also recognised the significant changes which have occurred since *New Scots* was developed, particularly that refugees are now living in local authorities across Scotland, many of whom had no previous experience of supporting refugees.

“Our work will be national in scope, conducted in partnership and keep the wellbeing of refugees at its heart.”

*Cabinet Secretary for Communities,
Social Security and Equalities
Angela Constance MSP*

The new strategy is to be developed during 2017. The conference took the opportunity to begin initial discussions by asking delegates to consider what the aims of the new strategy should be.



Delegates were clear that the strategy needs to continue to deliver support for refugees and asylum seekers. Some delegates considered whether the term 'New Scot' needs to be clarified or whether anyone who is new to Scotland should be included within the scope, particularly vulnerable non-English speakers and wider minority groups. However, these discussions indicated recognition that the particular challenges for refugees and asylum seekers require specific focus. Discussions also indicated recognition that work to support refugee integration has wider benefits for the community, including other people who are new to Scotland, and that some of the challenges for refugees also impact on existing communities.

Key messages from delegates for over-arching aims were:

- Scotland to be a safe, inclusive country where there are opportunities for all. A cohesive, multi-cultural society.
- All themes of the existing *New Scots* strategy are still relevant and should remain a focus.
- Need to work to prevent a two-tier or multi-tier system. New Scots should aim to provide equal support across Scotland regardless of route into the country for asylum seekers and refugees.
- To remain flexible to respond to changing global events.
- A truly national scope – supporting refugees wherever they are in Scotland and within the new context. Recognising the potential new challenges as refugees are no longer just in the central belt or in urban environments. To share the expertise and knowledge of Glasgow and experienced organisations and build on it.



Delegates also focused on a need for the *New Scots* strategy to engage with communities more, enabling them to be more involved in supporting refugees and to benefit themselves. Suggestions to increase community development and cohesion included:

- Capacity building and engagement as a key part of the strategy.
- Link into existing resources, services and groups which are already active in the community.
- Improve awareness of right and responsibilities in using and accessing public services, education and employment.
- Cultural integration, particularly around support for women (promoting gender equality). Training and awareness around domestic abuse and child protection.
- Public awareness - raise profile of refugee contribution to Scotland and the message that Scotland needs refugees. Dispel myths by sharing people's stories and increasing public awareness of refugees and their rights.
- Enable more involvement in social and recreational opportunities as a means of combating isolation and helping people to feel secure in their community:
 - In arts and culture as artists, participants and audience.
 - In sport and leisure both making use of existing facilities, participating in groups and volunteering to help or lead activities.
- Empower refugees. Maximise opportunities within existing community to prompt participation and involvement. Encourage refugees to identify their needs and make individual choices to pursue their ambitions, fulfil their potential and become independent.

Delegates were also asked to consider what policy changes are needed to achieve their suggested aims, who should be involved in partnerships and who should have lead responsibility, what resources are needed and any mitigating barriers. A number of tables did not progress to consider these elements for all of their suggested aims. Some discussions suggested changes to policy which is reserved to the UK Government and is beyond the scope of *New Scots*. For example, to allow all asylum seekers to work, SQA ESOL qualifications to be valid for citizenship purposes and to provide a welfare benefits package to people who have no recourse to public funds.

Challenges

The main challenge identified by delegates was the risk of a two-tier or multi-tier system developing due to disparity in rights, entitlement and support available to refugees and asylum seekers depending on their route to Scotland. This was identified as a threat to community cohesion as it could create artificial divisions and resentment between refugees, who may be of the same nationality, but receive different support and can access different services based on how they arrived rather than their needs.

Other challenges identified by delegates include:

- Promoting a wider knowledge and awareness of *New Scots* strategy for general public/society.
- Media influence – negative reporting and the concept of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ refugees.
- Engagement – the time, effort and resources required to properly engage with refugees and existing communities. How to ensure the voices of people who don’t speak English are heard.
- Reliable and accurate information for refugees and asylum seekers about their status, rights and options (including travel and moving within Scotland).
- Single young men – particularly for how to support them to settle into communities, find work and with mental health support.
- Engaging women.
- Language – the cost of translation and access to interpreters. Potential barriers to ESOL participation including access to childcare and stigma sometimes attached to ESOL.
- Extending the strategy out with Glasgow and the central belt – supporting refugees in small or rural communities.
- Lack of evaluation of the processes involved in resettling families.
- What is appropriate to tolerate in terms of values, gender divide, cultural practices and what needs to be challenged.

What Happens Next?

Refugees continue to arrive in Scotland. The Scottish Government, COSLA and our local authorities are working with the Home Office to receive refugees under UK resettlement programmes. Asylum seekers continue to be dispersed to Scotland and people who have received refugee status continue to choose to live in Scotland. Public sector bodies, third sector organisations and community groups will be continuing to support refugees and asylum seekers in Scotland.

Delegates gave a clear indication of a desire to continue to support refugees and asylum seekers to integrate into our communities and to build on the work of *New Scots*.

The conference discussions will help to inform the development of a new strategy. It is intended that there will also be further opportunities for engagement during the strategy development in 2017. Everyone is encouraged to look out for these opportunities and to contribute to shaping the strategy so that we can continue to welcome refugees and support them within inclusive communities.

