

**Minutes of Meeting of**  
**Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Racial Equality**

**held on 5 June 2013**

**Present:**

Bob Doris	MSP (Convener)
Jamie McGrigor MSP	(Vice- Convenor)
Jatin Haria	CRER (Secretary)
Alex Dingwall	CRER
Harriette Campbell	WSREC/ACWA
Pat Elsmie	Migrant Rights Scotland
Vicki Burns	SRTRC
Shaben Begum	SIAA
Maria Throp	Central Scotland REC
Mohammed Razaq	WSREC
Meg De Amasi	Stirling Multi Cultural Partnership
Mahmud Al-Gailani	VOX/Voices of Experience
Zaffir Hakim	One Workplace
Jonathan Ssentamu	Waverley Acre
Gozie Joe Adigwe	STUC Black Workers Committee

**Apologies:**

Hanzala Malik	MSP
Jackie Bailie	MSP
Davidson Chadema	UCU/STUC BME Committee
Naren Sood	EMCC
Kash Taank	Glasgow Life
Chris Oswald	EHRC
Derek Kelter	Inclusion Scotland
Surjit Chowdry	EMCC
Naeem Khalid	Frae Fife
Naseem Anwar	University of Strathclyde

## **Welcome**

Bob Doris MSP welcomed attendees to the meeting of the group.

## **Discussion: Refugee integration in Scotland and the development of a Scotland-wide strategy to support the integration of refugees in Scotland**

A presentation was delivered on this topic by Gary Christie, Head of Policy & Communications at the Scottish Refugee Council.

Members were circulated copies of the SRC report 'Refugee integration in Scotland' as well as the terms of reference of the Refugees in Scottish Communities strategy.

Refugee Integration is one of the 'durable solutions' outlined by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Voluntary repatriation - returning to one's home country – is considered the most desirable solution. If returning home is not feasible because of ongoing instability or conflict, then establishing roots in the host or asylum country may be another option. Finally, resettlement to a third country can be a solution for individuals who are not sufficiently protected in the original host country or who are considered to be particularly vulnerable for various reasons (e.g., disabled/injured, women-at-risk.).

Gary's presentation outlined the high level findings of the report setting out that the very word 'integration' can be a very contentious term. The report covers the areas of Employment, Housing, Education, Health, Community and neighbourhood, the Integration Processes and the question of what do refugees integrate into?

The report notes that refugees need to have rights and the right to realise that they have rights.

The report highlights that there is a low level of employment amongst refugees. Those in work tend to be in low paid jobs and confined within narrow employment options. Zero hour contracts are a notable feature of refugee

employment. Despite refugees having the same educational standard as the general Scottish population there are real and significant barriers for refugees in securing employment. Even where refugees have very high levels of education and skills the evidence is that they are not only failing to secure employment at those levels but having to undertake employment at significantly lower levels.

On Health the report shows the very significant impact of the asylum process on refugees particularly female asylum seekers who suffer from a very low level of mental health.

The evidence on community integration shows that refugees want to engage and develop friendships and do not want to be segregated. However employment is a key factor in doing this. The report talks about the concept of 'passive cohesion' where the community is ok if there is no trouble in the area rather than having positive relationships with neighbours, etc.

The report is very much targeted towards the UK Government because of the reserved nature of much of the legislation. In contrast to the UK's position that integration commences once refugee status is approved: the Scottish Government has taken the position that integration does not begin on the day on which an asylum seeker is recognised as a refugee, but on their first day of arrival in Scotland. However, there has been somewhat limited research on refugee integration in Scotland.

Gary concluded by looking at the current work underway involving the SRC, COSLA and the Scottish Government to develop the Government's strategy to support the integration of people seeking asylum and refugees into Scotland. The group, hope to publish in October. The document will situate refugee integration within wider equalities frameworks and also provide evidence of innovation and good practice in Scotland which can potentially be applied to the needs of other migrant groups in Scotland and which can be used to influence the UK government's integration strategy and responses to integration in other devolved areas.

The meeting then opened up for questions. At this time Jamie McGrigor MSP offered his apologies as he needed to attend other business.

Note: Code of Conduct

6.4.3 Rule 10 requires that meetings of Cross-Party Groups must be attended by at least two MSPs and both MSPs must be members of the group. If it is discovered, on meeting, that only one MSP can be present, the group can meet on an informal basis only, i.e. it should not conduct any votes or agree a course of action unless that decision is ratified at the next formal meeting of the group. Informal meetings should only take place occasionally. It is recognised that it would be unfortunate to cancel a meeting with no notice when perhaps guests may have been invited to make presentations and members of the group may have made special travel arrangements.

As only one MSP member remained present the meeting proceeded on an informal basis. Decisions made will require to be ratified at the next formal meeting of the CPG.

The question and answer period resulted in three agreed areas for action:

- To write to the Minister regarding the strategy on refugee integration and asking how this will be supported and monitored and also what future evaluation of the impact of the strategy is proposed.
- To write to the Minister regarding refugee access to NHS services in Scotland.
- To ask the Scottish Minister to write to the UK Minister regarding housing and dwp benefits and the scope for increasing the 28 day timescale.

#### **Dates of Future Meetings**

These will be circulated following the Convenor's next meeting of the secretariat.