About Scottish Refugee Council

1. Scottish Refugee Council is Scotland’s leading refugee charity working to ensure that refugees seeking protection in Scotland are welcomed, treated with dignity and respect, and are able to achieve their full potential. We provide advice to people seeking asylum and refugees in Scotland, and campaign for the fair treatment of refugees and asylum seekers and to raise awareness of refugee issues. We support organisations in the community working with or run by refugees; coordinate arts and cultural events; and work to raise the profile of refugees and asylum seekers in the media.

2. Our Holistic Integration Service is a partnership led by Scottish Refugee Council with Bridges Programmes, British Red Cross, Glasgow Clyde College and WEA Scotland. It supports refugees in Scotland and their family members to access welfare, housing, health, education, employment and to develop social connections upon being granted leave to remain. The service is independently evaluated by Queen Margaret University and the 2nd interim evaluation report1 was published in June 2015. We draw on evidence from this report to highlight refugees’ experiences of seeking employment in Scotland and to make recommendations to the Committee on improving employment outcomes for refugees.

3. Our women’s project works in partnership with the Refugee Women’s Strategy Group (RWSG), a group of refugee and asylum seeking women whose aim is to represent the views of refugee women to decision makers on the issues that affect their lives in Scotland. We include reference to evidence produced by the RWSG in our response.

Overview

4. The refugees who accessed our Holistic Integration Service in 2014-15 were predominantly from Eritrea, Sudan, Iran, Syria, and China. 64% were assessed as beginners in English (Access 2), 76.8% were aged between 18 and 34 years old, 71% were men and 29% are women.2 88% of new refugees accessing our service made claims for Job Seekers Allowance3 (JSA). With regards to employment, this means that new refugees are a young and active population with limited English skills but must demonstrate intensive job search activities to meet their benefit conditionality. Only 7% of refugees4 who accessed the Holistic Integration Service succeeded in gaining work, with men being more likely than women to start employment. These figures reflect the multiple barriers refugees are facing.

Our response

Employment and Support Advice

1 Insight into Integration Pathways, New Scots & The Holistic Integration Service, A report drawing on year two of the Holistic Integration Service http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/9731/HIS_Year_2_FINAL.pdf
2 Data on refugee profile on nationality, gender and age are representative of the head of the household and does not include everyone in the households.
3 77% of JSA claims were made by male-headed households and 23% by women.
4 Currently, the overall employment rate in Scotland is 71% and 64% in Glasgow. Youth unemployment, at 14.5%, is at its lowest level for five years.
5. The Holistic Integration service offers pre-employability and employability support. Within it, Scottish Refugee Council provides pre-employability support to remove some of the barriers to employment (such as homelessness) and to navigate the Department for Work and Pension (DWP) systems. WEA Scotland, which provides ESOL to refugees who are at beginner levels, and Glasgow Clyde College, which offers ESOL to pre-intermediate and intermediate learners. Both provisions adopt a learner-centred approach which focuses on the conversation needs of the learner. Bridges Programmes offers employability support to new refugees with at least pre-intermediate ESOL level. This support aims to enhance job search skills and to develop UK work experience by organising work placements.

6. New refugees experience multiple barriers to employment such as limited English skills, lack of experience on the UK labour market, no recognition of prior learning, and the negative impact of the asylum process on employment history and readiness to work. In addition to this, new refugees will face further difficulties when granted refugee status which will also have a negative impact on their capacity to work. Most will face homelessness and move in temporary accommodation which prohibitively high rent put refugees into a poverty trap as they are unaffordable if refugees are not eligible for Housing Benefit (for example in some paid work or full-time education). The challenges of accessing social security entitlements and support into employment are particularly acute for women, and have been explored by the Refugee Women’s Strategy Group in its report, *The Struggle to Contribute*. The report, *Insight into Integration Pathways, New Scots & the Holistic Integration Service*, demonstrates the dilemma which new refugees find themselves in when assessing whether to re-qualify in a field or to start in a new employment sector and the difficulty they face in choosing the most appropriate training and qualification.

7. The report also establishes that the combination of English language, pre-employability and employability interventions provided by the Holistic Integration Service is essential to mitigate the barriers to employment that refugees face. ESOL and Life Skills courses have a positive impact in supporting refugees to develop local cultural understanding and social connections: bonds with other refugees and links with employers and other services, while the advocacy work from Scottish Refugee Council enables people to gain settled housing which can then enable them to make sustainable choices in terms of education and employment. All of this contributes to refugees’ ability to make career choices and associated education and training plans. The model of the Holistic Integration Services is successful as it does not operate as a

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5 64% of beneficiaries of the Holistic Integration Service were assessed as Access 2, meaning that they might be able to hold a basic conversation on a familiar topic, understand a basic notice or complete a basic form. However, they would not be able to hold a conversation on a less familiar topic, nor write a simple text.

6 To address this, New Scots: Integrating Refugees in Scotland’s Communities, Education Action Plan has an action for the Scottish Government to revisit the Scoping Study on Support Mechanisms for the Recognition of Skills, Learning and Qualifications of Migrant Workers and Refugees.

7 In the 2nd year of the operation of the service, 92.5% of the new refugees who engaged with the service presented as homeless to their local authority following cessation of their asylum support.


10 HIS beneficiaries who secured housing since the beginning of the service waited less than the average time for settled housing according to Glasgow City Council’s draft Homeless Strategy 2015 – 2020 (on average 217 days).

11 Costs of temporary accommodation are prohibitively high and put refugees into a poverty trap as they are unaffordable if refugees are not eligible for Housing Benefit (for example in low paid work or full-time education).
pipeline and beneficiaries can access services from all partners when most appropriate to them, based on their needs and circumstances.

8. Refugee women in particular report the need for more tailored and appropriate pre-employability and employability support. In response to this, the Refugee Women’s Strategy Group (RWSG) worked with Scottish Refugee Council and Glasgow ESOL Forum to develop *One Step Closer*, a pilot confidence building and employability skills course for asylum seeking and refugee women. The One Step Closer course was developed in response to identified needs, recognising that refugee women experience multiple barriers to accessing employment in Scotland. Following the pilot course, the RWSG evaluated its impact and produced and disseminated an evaluation report, which highlights the benefits of more tailored provision in this area.\(^\text{12}\)

9. The DWP recognises the need to support people who are beginners in English and now provides mandatory ESOL to job seekers who are assessed as below Access 3. While the increased provision of ESOL to refugees who need it the most is welcomed in some ways, the DWP provision does not form part of a holistic and person centred employability support. Also, as a result of the appointment of a single private provider (Ingeus) to deliver the mandatory provision, Job Seekers’ Allowance recipients already accessing other ESOL college courses have had to withdraw from their courses to attend the mandatory DWP provision. DWP provision is restricted to speaking and listening skills, and is therefore not only limiting employment outcomes to low skilled work, but is incompatible with mainstream provision as outlined in Scotland’s newly refreshed holistic ESOL Strategy.\(^\text{13}\)

### Recruitment, retention and promotion

10. Scottish Refugee Council regularly receives testimony from refugees who seek work and present a Biometric Resident Permit as a proof of their right to work but are still required by employers to provide a Travel Document. The latter looks more like a passport and employers tend to trust it more as a result. This is despite the fact that Biometric Resident Permits are marked clearly with the statement “WORK PERMITTED”. This creates barriers for refugees and other migrants in the UK to accessing employment. Travel Documents are only available to people with certain types of leave to remain\(^\text{14}\), have a high cost\(^\text{15}\) and take on average two months to be issued. Scottish Refugee Council understands that such indirect discrimination is primarily motivated by the fact that employers fear civil penalties. The future Immigration Bill\(^\text{16}\) focusing on criminalisation will continue to contribute to the creation of a hostile environment in which non-UK nationals face increased discrimination.

### Promoting positive action

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\(^\text{12}\) Refugee Women’s Strategy Group and Glasgow ESOL Forum (2014) One Step Closer
http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0000/9251/One_Step_Closer_FINAL.pdf


\(^\text{14}\) Refugees who are granted Discretionary Leave to Remain and Humanitarian Protection are not entitled to Travel Documents.

\(^\text{15}\) £72.46 plus cost for postal order

11. Scottish Refugee Council is aware of a number of positive action schemes that have led to positive outcomes. Such programmes successfully focus on training or the recognition of prior qualifications to enable someone to continue on to the most appropriate qualification or to seek work in their field directly. While these schemes are successful, they tend to target a professional niche and do not meet the needs of a wider population who may have limited language skills and lower levels of qualifications.

Recommendations

1. The Scottish and UK Governments should devolve the Work Programme to the Scottish Government and for the latter to be person centred and flexible so it genuinely mitigates in the multiple barriers to employment and creates effective opportunities to progress towards employment.

2. The Scottish Government should revisit the Scoping Study on Support Mechanisms for the Recognition of Skills, Learning and Qualifications of Migrant Workers and Refugees with a view to implementing appropriate recognition models for Scotland.

3. The Scottish Government should take proactive steps to working with employers and professional bodies to clarify their understanding of the right to work of non-UK nationals and to encourage employers to work with employability programmes (statutory and voluntary) to increase the opportunity for work placements in a wide range of fields.

4. The Scottish Government should use the learning from the Holistic Integration Service and One Step Closer to develop employability projects which holistically tackle the multiple barriers to employment faced by refugees. Such projects should be non-linear and operate in partnership with the DWP or as part of the wider work programme provision so that they can contribute to beneficiaries’ wider job search without the fear of sanctions.

5. The DWP should work with Scottish Refugee Council and the Refugee Women’s Strategy Group to develop a holistic and person centred employability programme for new refugees, prioritising support to people who are beginners in English.

6. The DWP should recognise the need to access all four Scottish Qualification Authority ESOL units to ensure adequate access to appropriate ESOL learning for new refugees in Scotland, in line with the language requirement for citizenship.

7. As recommended to the Smith Commission, Asylum seekers residing in Scotland should be allowed to apply and be granted a work permit in Scotland by the Home Office.

Elodie Mignard
Integration Development Officer

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18 71% of new refugees accessing HIS arrive with no further education beyond the equivalent of secondary schooling (22% have only attended school up to primary level)

19 http://www.scqf.org.uk/content/files/SCOF%20migrant%20scoping%20study%20low%20res%20for%20website.pdf

20 Regional variations in asylum-seekers’ access to employment exist in some European countries. For example, in Switzerland, asylum-seekers can apply for a work authorisation with the respective regional authorities (cantons). Each canton has its own policy and may limit the work permits only to specific occupations. No legislative change required – only change to Home Office policy