

Improving ESOL provision for displaced adult migrants in Scotland

Key findings and recommendations

Executive Summary

ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) provision for asylum seekers and refugees in Scotland is devolved to the Scottish Government's (SG) education brief and has developed independently of and diverged from UK Government approaches in England. The SG's ESOL Strategy, now in its second iteration, *Welcoming Our Learners* (2015-2020), interacts with other policy areas, including Adult Literacies, Community Learning and Development (CLD) and the New Scots integration strategy to provide guidance to all migrants in need of English language tuition in Scotland. The SG has established a fee waiver for asylum seekers and any migrants in receipt of benefits, including refugees. This fee waiver is distinctive to Scotland and in keeping with the SG's 'from day one' approach to integration, meaning that asylum seekers and refugees do not face financial barriers to accessing ESOL provision.

However, whilst the SG's approach to ESOL provision for displaced migrants addresses immediate financial hurdles to accessing ESOL, other barriers persist, including immigration demands relating to their status, health and wellbeing factors and precarious housing, all of which can adversely impact a person's ability to (a) access ESOL and (b) learn in the same way as other learners. GLIMER Research finds that in Scotland, these factors are exacerbated by environmental and systemic factors in a noticeably complex ESOL environment, which do not explicitly take into account additional barriers and vulnerabilities for displaced migrants.

This Policy Brief by the GLIMER Scotland team puts forward recommendations for how this can be addressed.

Methods and empirical research

GLIMER is informed by a combination of rigorous policy analysis, qualitative research with multi-party stakeholders, and secondary analysis. This policy brief is reliant on ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from devolved and local government, the third sector and community groups. We worked across several locations that included both the site of Dispersal (Glasgow) as well as areas involved in the Vulnerable Person's Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), conducted.

The GLIMER (Governance and the Local Integration of Migrants and Europe's Refugees) Project is jointly funded by JPI Urban Europe and Horizon 2020. Bringing together researchers and practitioners from five lead institutions – the University of Edinburgh, the University of Glasgow, Università della Calabria, Malmö Universitet and the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies – it researches how issues relating to governance impact displaced peoples' experiences of integration in contemporary Europe

Web-page: glimer.eu



Context

Overview

ESOL is the umbrella term for English language education for speakers of other languages, delivered primarily to migrants in the UK. The devolution of ESOL delivery to the SG's education brief has enabled approaches to diverge from those taken by the UK Government. These include the development and sustained resourcing of an ESOL Strategy since 2007, and a language learning environment that has advocated a 'two-way' approach.

How does ESOL provision work in Scotland?

The adult ESOL landscape in Scotland caters for a range of proficiency levels through a broad range of providers. These can be categorised into three strands:

1. SG funded ESOL. This includes ESOL classes run by Further Education providers, funded through the Scottish Funding Council. It also includes Community Learning and Development ESOL, managed by local government and delivered by a range of providers.
2. UK Government funded ESOL. The VPRS provides designated funds to participating local authorities to deliver ESOL classes to resettled refugees. Local authorities can choose how they wish to utilise these funds. Whilst some Scottish local authorities have chosen to channel funds into existing ESOL infrastructure (such as FE or CLD courses), others have created classes specifically for VPRS refugees.
3. ESOL funded by the third sector. This includes courses delivered by NGOs such as the Red Cross, as well as community initiatives. Funding may come from external parties such as the Big Lottery.

These providers deliver a range of adult ESOL courses, including: general ESOL, ESOL for employability, and 'survival' ESOL. These can be delivered in formal (FE classrooms) or informal (conversation cafes) settings. Most ESOL provision corresponds to SCQF standards set by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA).

What about ESOL for displaced migrants?

In contrast to ESOL approaches elsewhere in the UK, the SG waives ESOL fees for asylum seekers, and for any learners in receipt of welfare provision, including refugees. This means that displaced migrants do not face fee barriers to language education in Scotland. However, asylum seekers and refugees experience other barriers to ESOL.

For asylum seekers, this includes: disruption to ESOL attendance due to immigration obligations (attending interviews, or 'signing in' at the Home Office), disruption to learning due to trauma and health issues and disruption to learning due to precarious accommodation. In Glasgow, both asylum seekers and refugees encounter long waiting lists to access FE ESOL courses; however they can experience additional barriers to other migrants because they are not part of established communities who can support FE access. Displaced migrants are also more likely than migrants of other statuses to have low levels of literacy, which means that they may have additional difficulty even in accessing ESOL provision. Issues with literacy were reported by stakeholders involved both with Dispersal and the VPRS.

What are the implications?

Though Scotland benefits from the presence of an ESOL Strategy, the ESOL landscape remains characterised by complexity. The different ways in which ESOL is resourced shapes (a) what kind of ESOL is delivered (b) who can attend (c) accreditation. Without active consideration, the learning, social and health needs of displaced migrants may go unaccounted for, and be inadvertently made worse by policy changes that have not mapped their specific impact on displaced migrants. GLIMER Stakeholders expressed concern that recent changes made by the SFC to the funding of FE and CLD adult ESOL courses may adversely impact displaced migrants in this way.



Findings

GLIMER Research identified the following gaps that adversely affected access to and provision of ESOL for displaced migrants.

1. Existing registration systems for FE ESOL create informal barriers for displaced migrants

Places on Further Education ESOL courses are usually allocated through self-registration systems. Places are often limited and therefore competitive. Some groups of ESOL learners have (a) established community infrastructures and (b) external resourcing, resulting in coordinated, incentivised registration. FE ESOL places therefore are sometimes filled by people with less precarious migration statuses, leading to fewer places available to asylum seekers and refugees.

2. Recent changes to SFC requirements on accreditation are unclear to providers

Recent revisions to SFC ESOL funding have tied ESOL resourcing for providers to the provision of evidence of progression. Evidence includes, but is not limited to, a learner completing accredited courses. Emphasis on accredited learning may disproportionately impact displaced migrants because they (a) may face barriers in access and (b) may not find it suitable for their specific learning needs. GLIMER participants expressed concern that undue emphasis on accreditation may mean (1) resources are not allocated to other forms of learning and (2) consequently adversely impact provision regularly accessed by displaced migrants.

3. Stakeholders expressed concerns over how to formally demonstrate 'progression' at National 2 for literacy level ESOL learners

National 2 / SCQF Level 2 ESOL descriptors encompass a wide range of ESOL abilities, from 'literacy level' to 'beginner'. Stakeholders expressed concern that the range of ability encompassed by National 2 made it difficult to formally demonstrate the progression of 'literacy level' learners, a situation that would disproportionately impact displaced migrants.

4. A lack of oversight into how FE providers distribute ESOL funds caused concern for CLD and community ESOL partners

Recent revisions to the SFC ESOL funding infrastructure have placed responsibility for the distribution of funds on colleges. However, at the time of research, there was no infrastructure in place to provide oversight of college decisions. Stakeholders expressed concern (a) that college resourcing decisions may not include the more informal types of ESOL provision regularly accessed by displaced migrants and (b) that the absence of oversight infrastructure may allow this to go unchallenged.

5. CLD providers acknowledged that they sometimes did not have sufficient expertise on displaced migration, or that they could not access organisations which did

CLD ESOL caters for all types of learners, including asylum seekers and refugees. However, CLD providers interviewed by GLIMER felt either (a) that they did not have expertise on the specific barriers faced by displaced migrants to ESOL provision or (b) that they were unable to access organisations with refugee expertise for advice.

6. Post-2020 SG ESOL provisions for remote and rural VPRS areas are underdeveloped and in need of attention.

In some remote and rural areas in which refugees have recently been resettled under the VPRS, college ESOL can be inaccessible due to the distance of colleges from where refugees live, and issues with public transport infrastructure. CLD ESOL is thus additionally important because it can take place in locations accessible to refugees. Under recent revisions to SFC ESOL funding, colleges are responsible for, but not obliged to allocate, resources to other providers, including CLD. However, at the time of research, CLD provision in remote and rural Resettlement areas was funded by resources provided by the VPRS, resources that are time-limited and tapered. As CLD providers are central to the provision of ESOL to refugees in remote and rural areas, the SFC should develop a precedent for college-led CLD ESOL funding before the end of the Resettlement Scheme in 2020.



Findings continued

- 7. Guidance in future ESOL policy needs to be reworked to better account for the distinctive ESOL experiences of displaced migrants.**
The SG's's current ESOL Strategy acknowledges the needs of asylum seekers and refugees by asking practitioners to refer to the New Scots Strategy. Whilst the acknowledgement of the distinctive needs and barriers of displaced migrants related to ESOL is welcome, GLIMER Research highlights the need to include more active and formalised guidance for addressing these in future policy documents.
- 8. A lack of mapping across the ESOL landscape in Scotland has resulted in gaps in knowledge about how it works.**
At the time of research, there is little information on how the many and complex factors involved in ESOL provision interact and shape the ESOL landscape. Further mapping is required in order to understand issues such as the resourcing, capacity and sustainability of existing ESOL provision.

Recommendations

Below, we make ten recommendations designed to improve ESOL access to and provision for displaced migrants in Scotland. Recommendations are grouped in pairs into five distinct themes, and are as follows:

Work with Further Education providers to improve informal barriers to ESOL education for displaced migrants. Actions include:

1. Address informal barriers to Further Education ESOL places by introducing a place-sensitive class quota for asylum seekers and refugees.
2. Introduce place-sensitive and gender sensitive quotas for Further Education ESOL places for displaced migrants.

Consider formal mechanisms for tracking progression at literacy level ESOL and improve guidance about literacy level accreditation for practitioners. Actions include:

3. Clarify SFC guidance relating to accreditation and progression for ESOL learners.
4. Consider the merits of a National 1/Level 1 descriptor in order to formally track the progression of literacy level ESOL learners OR consider how learner progression through existing National 2/Level 2 literacy level descriptors can be more formally recognised

Improve oversight of college distribution of ESOL resources, and give particular consideration to colleges in Resettlement areas. Actions include:

5. Increase oversight of how colleges distribute SFC resources to other ESOL providers.
6. Resource, or incentivise colleges to resource, CLD ESOL appropriate for refugees in remote and rural Resettlement areas.

Improve local and national government engagement with language issues specific to displaced migration.

Actions include:

7. Resource or incentivise CLD partnerships to work with at least one organisation with expertise in displaced migration. In remote and rural Resettlement areas, provide resourcing or incentives for the development of organisations with refugee expertise.
8. Introduce support for ESOL policymakers in SG to actively seek feedback from 'hard to reach' organisations working with displaced migrants.

Address gaps in existing ESOL policy and knowledge.

Actions include:

9. Develop existing guidance in the future ESOL policy to actively recognise how the distinctive environment of displaced migration may impact ESOL access and provision. Actively connect to New Scots policy and policymakers to do this.
10. Undertake a comprehensive mapping exercise of ESOL providers and funders in Scotland

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This policy brief is supported by our full report into ESOL governance in Scotland, available at: glimer.eu/outputs

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