

Addressing the gendered dynamics of asylum seeker and refugee integration provision in Scotland

Key findings and recommendations

Executive Summary

Gender dynamics impact the entire process of displacement experienced by asylum seekers and refugees. Environments which cause displacement are often highly gendered, exerting particular forms of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV). Displaced environments also produce gendered hierarchies of safety, vulnerability, representation and credibility. These conditions impact people of all genders but disproportionately and adversely affect gender minorities, such as cisgender women, trans, non-binary and queer people.

'Integration' processes – the post-migration systems through which asylum seekers and refugees access and are supported to access key facilitators of social citizenship – are also highly gendered. In the UK, gender disparities in immigration and integration systems begin at the point of arrival and persist through 'integration' pathways. Devolved infrastructure has allowed the Scottish Government to create respective gender and integration policies that are distinct and divergent from approaches elsewhere in the UK. However, GLIMER Research indicates that (1) integration processes in Scotland produce gender unequal effects (2) service providers' approaches to gender are inconsistent and would benefit from centralised guidance, and (3) policy tackling gender *and* displacement is under-realised.

Drawing on qualitative research undertaken in Scotland between 46 stakeholders with specialisms in gender and displacement, we argue that a nationally-supported discussion about gender and the integration of asylum seekers and refugees is long overdue. With scope for the Scottish Government to act under the devolved settlement on both gender and integration, and with precedent in both areas for an equalities-orientated approach, there is an opportunity for Scotland to develop leading, progressive policies on the gendered inequalities associated with integration. Currently in Scotland, there are organisations with expertise in gender and displacement whose impact is localised or under-resourced. There is therefore also opportunity for the Scottish Government to develop integration and gender policy in collaboration with and in support of existing expertise.

Research indicates that gendered inequalities experienced by asylum seekers and refugees during the integration process are highly likely to compound other social disadvantages which have long-term impacts on their access to equality and opportunity, such as health, socioeconomic and housing inequality. This policy brief presents our research findings and makes recommendations for how the Scottish Government can address this cycle.

Methods and empirical research

GLIMER is informed by a combination of policy analysis and qualitative research with multi-party stakeholders. This policy brief draws 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).

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

Though it is an influential factor in pre- and post-migration experiences of displacement, gender is often 'neglected' or treated as a 'vector of discrimination' in approaches to the 'integration' of asylum seekers and refugees. However, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that (1) experiences of displaced migration, (2) immigration systems and (3) integration pathways are themselves gendered and that this is a key factor in displaced migrants' immigration and 'integration' prospects.

The gendered impacts of integration services and integration processes are likely to affect displaced migrants' access to housing, education, employment and healthcare. They are likely to compound the effects of other social inequalities, such as border controls or racism, and impact displaced migrants' safety and access to social opportunities. They are highly likely to disproportionately impact displaced women, who become 'invisible' and 'stuck' in the system, and who experience long-term disadvantage, socioeconomic difficulty and social marginalisation. Understanding *how* integration processes are gendered, *who* they effect and *what* they do is therefore a crucial first step in addressing inequalities associated with displacement and integration.

How does gender impact the integration of asylum seekers and refugees in Scotland?

1. Gendered systems impact key categories of integration

Gender minorities experience gender inequalities across categories considered to be key 'facilitators' or 'indicators' of integration, including access to housing, ESOL education and labour market access. For instance, existing asylum housing systems create sometimes insurmountable difficulties for women experiencing SGBV to seek safety elsewhere. In the meantime, housing processes are inadequately equipped to respond to the needs of trans, non-binary and queer displaced migrants. Elsewhere, displaced women encounter systemic barriers to ESOL education and employability training.

2. Gender shapes the design and delivery of integration services

GLIMER Research found evidence that stakeholders and service providers are aware of and work to undo gender inequalities from the areas in which they work. However, service provision is also shaped by stakeholders' own approaches to gender, which existed on a spectrum ranging from gender-blind to gender-mainstreamed. Stakeholders

reported uncertainty about situations in which displaced migrants' and service providers' approaches to gender norms were at odds.

3. Gender inequality impedes the participation and representation of gender minorities in civic and policy making processes

Inequalities of representation begin at the point a displaced migrant makes an application for asylum, persist through integration environments, and are compounded by a civic and policymaking infrastructure in which displaced women's organisations are inconsistently and under-resourced, resulting in barriers to participation in policy and civic activities.

How do gender and displacement interact in the devolved landscape?

The Scottish Government is in a position with significant potential to address some gendered inequalities experienced by asylum seekers and refugees living in Scotland.

Although legislative capacity on many issues related to gender is reserved to the UK Government, the Scottish Government has scope to create divergent policy and legislation on gender in devolved areas. It has used this opportunity to create an enhanced and progressive gender architecture that contrasts to approaches in the rest of the UK. It has also mobilised its devolved powers to create a distinctive approach to the integration of asylum seekers and refugees. The *New Scots* Strategy articulates a clear vision for 'two-way' integration in Scotland. It has also made use of the Scottish Government's devolved powers by giving refugees *and* asylum seekers access to education and employability training 'from day one', in contrast to the rest of the UK.

Challenges and Potentials

There is clear scope for the Scottish Government to mobilise its devolved capacity to act on the combined effects of gender *and* displacement on asylum seekers' and refugees' experiences of integration. However, arguably to date, this scope is under-realised. Although *New Scots* contains provisions for gender, it does not provide clarity of vision that it affords to other integration categories. Meanwhile, though gender policy is increasingly looking at the intersections of gender and other protected categories, the effects of inequality on displaced, gendered minorities are too often treated as a 'specialist' issue outside the responsibility of mainstream policymaking.

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Findings

GLIMER Research findings can be categorised into four key themes. Below, we summarise key points of interaction between processes related to integration, and gender inequality.

• Housing and Accommodation

- a. The no-choice basis through which Dispersal housing is allocated leaves women and girls experiencing domestic sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) vulnerable to further abuse, or at risk of homelessness and exploitation should they leave.
- b. The category of No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) compounds the risk of homelessness and exploitation for displaced women as it restricts their access to women's refuges.
- c. Gendered perceptions of vulnerability impact the extent to which resources are available to support displaced men experiencing homelessness or destitution.
- d. Housing administrators were sympathetic to but unfamiliar with the specific housing needs of displaced trans migrants.
- e. 'Clustering' accommodation practices, used by housing practitioners to ensure that Dispersed, asylum seeking women are not isolated from others in their communities, inadvertently place women at risk of exploitation by organised groups who identify and target 'clustered' areas.

• ESOL Provision

- a. Gendered classroom dynamics may adversely impact refugee women's opportunity to learn English. Refugee women's groups reported that women were more likely to access, progress and feel safe in language classes if they had access to gender-differentiated provision.
- b. The benefits of gender-segregated ESOL courses were disputed by ESOL providers, who cited capacity and resourcing barriers to gender-based ESOL. Some providers also argued against gender-segregated ESOL on ideological grounds.

- c. ESOL classes which covered issues related to women's health, maternity and domestic lives were infrequent and under-resourced
- d. Displaced women often face a 'double' childcare barrier to ESOL access
- e. Interpreting situations create potential for gendered exploitation and violence to which women are particularly vulnerable.

• Labour Market Access

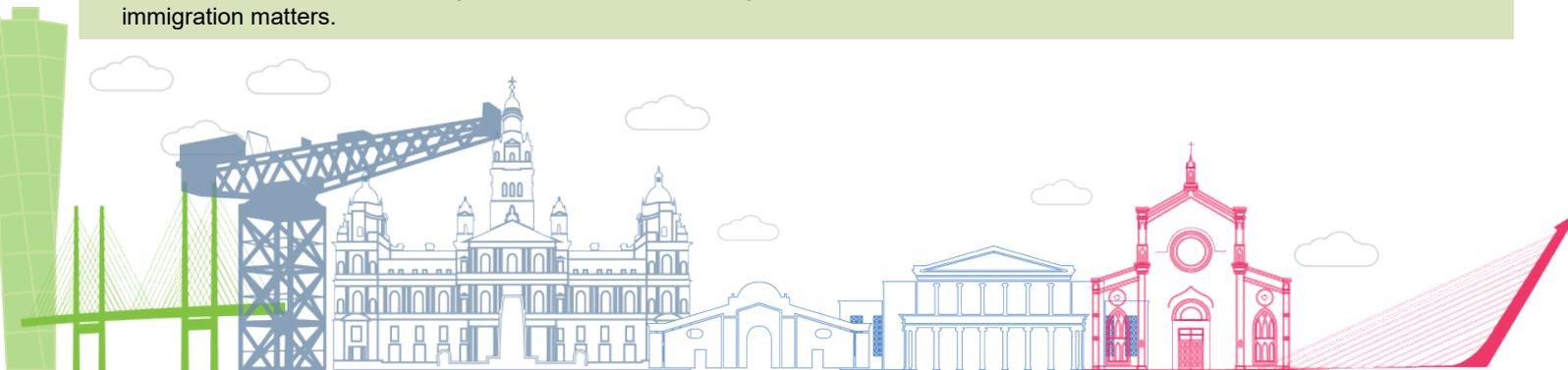
- a. Refugee women in employment are frequently under-employed, or placed in positions unlikely to lead to career progression
- b. Women-specific employment services for displaced migrants are almost non-existent and chronically under-resourced
- c. Displaced women from cultures with conservative gender norms were likely to face double gendered barriers to the labour market: (1) from domestic environments and (2) from discriminatory employer attitudes
- d. Despite stakeholders reporting a track record of refugee women setting up their own businesses, enterprise and entrepreneurship services are gender blind

• Gendered approaches to integration services

- a. Gender-specialist and gender-mainstreamed approaches had a demonstrable track record of improving access to services, support and opportunities for displaced women
- b. Calls for gender-mainstreamed approaches to housing, ESOL and employment were often too quickly dismissed by service providers and failed to consider the merits or reasons underpinning the requests
- c. Under-resourcing for public and third sector organisations which provide services for displaced migrants is a barrier to gender-mainstreamed approaches.
- d. Gender-mainstreamed approaches were only successful if they also considered the intersections of race and legal status to displaced women's experiences in Scotland.

Where can the Scottish Government intervene on gender and displacement?

- Scope for devolved administrations to make policy interventions on gender *and* displacement is impacted by (1) the devolved settlement and (2) the person's immigration status.
- Asylum seekers, who are designated by the UK Government as having 'No Recourse to Public Funds', have restricted access to the areas over which it is possible to take a devolved approach to gender equality. For instance, though they are able to access devolved gender policies on education and employability, they are unable to access gender policies on social security measures.
- Furthermore, the designation of asylum seekers as NRPF means that the Scottish Government is unable to make housing or social security interventions to mitigate the gender unequal effects of immigration programmes such as the Dispersal Scheme.
- The Scottish Government is also unable to make changes to reserved immigration programmes which have gender unequal effects.
- There is scope for Scots Law legislation that is pertinent to gender issues, such as the Domestic Violence Act 2018, to intervene on immigration matters.



Recommendations

Below, we make recommendations designed to improve gendered inequalities related to the integration of asylum seekers and refugees in Scotland. Recommendations correspond to the findings above, and are as follows:

Housing and Accommodation

- 1. Increase resourcing and capacity for women's refuges to support homeless or destitute displaced women**
 - Increase capacity in Women's Refuges for homeless asylum seeking women, or displaced women with NRPF. Scottish Government to support collaborative work between anti-destitution networks and gender-equality organisations.
 - Ensure the work of the Scottish Government's HARSAG group includes specialist consideration of the intersections of gender, displaced migration and NRPF.
 - Investigate and clarify the full extent of Local Authorities' powers under the devolved framework to offer emergency accommodation to displaced migrants at risk of SGBV.
- 2. Investigate and address the danger posed to displaced women by the organised targeting of 'clustered' accommodation**
 - The Home Office/ Mears/ Migrant Help to track and act upon reports of targeted, housing-based exploitation through developing partnerships between local housing administrators and displaced women's groups.

ESOL Provision

- 3. Develop an evidence-based approach to gender-differentiated ESOL provision**
 - New Scots Evidence Group to work with partners to conduct further research on the impact of a gender-differentiated approach to ESOL provision.
 - New Scots to broker small, pilot collaborations between ESOL providers and displaced women's groups to provide 'safe' ESOL spaces for displaced women.
- 4. Make childcare provision for ESOL classes a national requirement**
 - All Further Education and Local Authority ESOL providers to be encouraged to explore routes to additional funding to allow for the provision of childcare as standard.
 - FE and LA ESOL Providers to explore new ways of working to accommodate childcare needs, such as remote working, or allowing children into class.
- 5. New Scots to review interpreting standards and good practice informed by work with specialist displaced women's groups.**

Table 1: Guide to devolved powers in which Scottish Government can create policy for gender and displacement

	Asylum seekers	Refugees
Immigration policy/ legislation	Reserved restrictions	Reserved restrictions
NRPF	Reserved restrictions	Reserved restrictions
Social Security*	Reserved restrictions	Reserved restrictions
Education	Devolved powers in use	Devolved powers in use
Employability	Devolved powers in use	Devolved powers in use
Housing**	Reserved restrictions	Potential for devolved use
Public Sector Equalities Duty	Devolved powers in use	Devolved powers in use
Scots Law	Devolved powers in use	Devolved powers in use

*Restricted portion devolved to Scotland **Housing benefits are reserved

■ Devolved powers in use ■ Reserved restrictions
■ Potential for devolved use

Labour Market Access

- 6. Address trends in displaced women's unemployment and under-employment**
 - Third sector and DWP to build on existing public/private sector relationships and encourage gender-based positive action when working with private sector employers on refugee employment schemes.
 - *Close the Gap* initiative to develop a specialist research and policy stream about race, displacement and gender in the labour market.
 - Expand and scale-up existing third sector initiatives designed to support BAME and displaced women to access the labour market.
 - Scottish Government to urgently amend entrepreneurship and enterprise policy to include a gender-aware approach.

Policy and Governance

- 7. Improve national and local knowledge of the interaction and their consequences between displacement, gender and race in Scotland**
 - New Scots to actively articulate gender recommendations for devolved policy areas.
 - Develop specialist knowledge in the Equalities Unit of the intersection of gender, border controls and race.
 - Scottish Government to encourage cross-unit collaboration between New Scots and Equalities themes.
 - Third sector women's and gender specialists to work with existing BAME and displaced women's groups to expand knowledge of race and immigration on policy areas, and to offer collaboration and capacity building in established policy areas.
- 8. Robustly support existing schemes developed by displaced women's groups to develop policy engagement and political participation.**

