



AMIF ABM₃ New Scots: Pathways to Social and Economic Inclusion Project

Executive Summary

The AMIF ABM₃ New Scots: Pathways to Social and Economic Inclusion Project is a partnership between researchers from Queen Margaret University's Institute for Global Health and Development and three organisations who deliver specialist services to refugees in Scotland¹: Scottish Refugee Council, Workers Educational Association, and Bridges Programmes. The research component of the project has explored the following research questions:

- What is the role of social connections in refugees' pathways to social and economic inclusion?
- What meaning(s) do refugees ascribe to connections at different stages in these pathways?

The research has employed a mixed-methods methodology, including a multi-method Social Connections Mapping Tool, visual mapping workshops and interviews to engage with recently recognised refugees and practitioners.

¹We use the term refugee to describe any person who is seeking or has been granted international protection, including people who are still in the asylum process.

Key Findings

The findings confirm that social connections play multiple and interrelated roles in integration. These depend on the form connections take, the functions they play in people's lives, and what connections mean to people depending on their personal circumstances, capacities, and aspirations. All these elements are crucial to understanding and supporting refugees' economic and social inclusion.

Understanding connections: quality over quantity

Refugees value connections that provide information, enable access to essentials and broker access to other key services or organisations. These functional roles are not only played by formal organisations. Informal connections and close friendships are equally important. Faith-based organisations are also key connections for many refugees. They enable worship and can also act as meeting places, provide essentials, volunteering opportunities and opportunities to build English language skills.

Trust in connections is cultivated through treating people with dignity and respect. Trusted connections contribute to re-building confidence and self-esteem and facilitate further social and economic inclusion. Conversely, feeling ignored, discriminated, or disrespected can put a brake on inclusion. In the face of systematic barriers, important connections

not only signpost but advocate for people's rights. This has been a key role played by integration service partners and other refugee-sector organisations. These acts of care and solidarity are not passively received but can contribute to peoples' confidence to advocate for themselves and gain access to rights and opportunities.

Building social connections engages all actors in integration

In the face of systematic barriers, refugee-sector practitioners spend significant time on meeting essential needs. This takes time away from focusing on longer term goals. In rural areas and cities without a long history of welcoming refugees, gaps in local infrastructures including more limited provision from specialist organisations, can create additional barriers to social and economic inclusion. This highlights the need for statutory systems to adapt and improve so that refugees can access their rights directly.

Embedding social connections into service provision

It is more productive to discuss social connections in relation to other domains of integration, such as housing and employability, rather than to try to explore these in isolation. Building trusting relationships with named caseworkers is critical to adequately work towards integration goals. Services that provide opportunities for refugees to connect with others around common interests, through

social activities or peer-led projects, play an important role in building positive social connections.

Shared learning from the research partnership can help all partners justify their work internally and externally. Research partnerships also have the potential to be an important tool in challenging the systemic barriers faced by refugees.

Recommendations

For all:

- Support the development of informal social connections in areas where services are being developed and delivered.

Future integration services should:

- Continue to embed an integration planning approach that recognises people's strengths and supports them to achieve their personal goals and aspirations.
- Embed discussions on social connections into all areas of the integration planning process rather than discussing these in isolation.
- Continue sharing information, learning and expertise with specialist refugee services, local authorities, community groups and refugee-led initiatives.
- Invest in building and maintaining positive social connections amongst local and national services, and across different sectors and regions.

COSLA, Local Authorities, statutory services and New Scots working groups should:

- Develop a mechanism to map support networks in areas across Scotland to share information and enable effective referrals to them.
- Continue to engage with specialist practitioners, refugees and community groups to adapt services to diverse local contexts.

The Scottish Government should:

- Fund future integration services appropriately to enable the time required to realise a holistic approach to integration.
- Ensure statutory service providers adapt in order that refugees can independently access their rights
- Resource formal and informal opportunities for English language learning across Scotland.

The UK Government should:

- Ensure that integration and migration policies are based on robust evidence and recognise the ways in which asylum policy impacts on integration.
- Recognise and fund work that situates integration as a holistic process, not a series of pre-determined outcomes.

Future research should:

- Build long-term research-practice partnerships that enable dialogue between practitioners, refugees and researchers, including practitioner and refugee input into the research process
- Expand refugee research into areas with less experience of refugee settlement.

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Research Team: Dr Marcia Vera-Espinoza (Principal Investigator), Helen Baillot (Research Fellow), Leyla Kerlaff (Research Fellow), Dr Emmaleena Käkelä (Research Fellow), Dr Arek Dakessian (Research Fellow, Project Manager) and Marcus Fernandes (Research Assistant).

The full report can be found here, or scan the QR code:
<https://miscintegrationresearch.org/publications>



Contact: For more information, contact the Principal Investigator,
Dr Marcia Vera-Espinoza: mveraespinoza@qmu.ac.uk



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Migration, Integration and Social Connection Team
Psychosocial Wellbeing, Integration and Protection Cluster
Institute for Global Health and Development
Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh

