



Interim Report 7: Settled Housing

Introduction

This Interim Report summarises findings from a series of interviews undertaken with beneficiaries of the ABM AMIF3 funded project 'New Scots: Pathways to Economic and Social Inclusion'. In this phase, the Queen Margaret University research team focused on refugees' experiences of sourcing and settling into suitable long-term housing. The findings demonstrate that there are significant systems barriers to accessing settled housing, and the key role played by Scottish Refugee Council, other civil society organisations and informal connections in resolving these.

Methods

The research team conducted interviews with ten service beneficiaries between June and July 2022. The sample of participants was drawn by the Monitoring and Evaluation Officer at Scottish Refugee Council from those recorded on the database as being supported by an Integration Adviser and living in permanent accommodation. Individuals were first contacted by Scottish Refugee Council to check they were happy to be contacted by the research team, who then followed up to arrange a suitable time to interview them. Each interview was conducted online via Zoom by a researcher who used participative mapping methods to discuss the people and organisations that had been important to participants in their lives in Scotland. When these had been noted, participants were asked to identify who had been the *most* important. An example of the 'bullseye' method used to map these connections is below at Figure 1. The interview comprised additional questions around their experiences of their journey to settled housing, with a focus on the role played by different people/organisations in their move from asylum accommodation to the home where they live now. Pseudonyms have been used throughout the report to refer to participants.

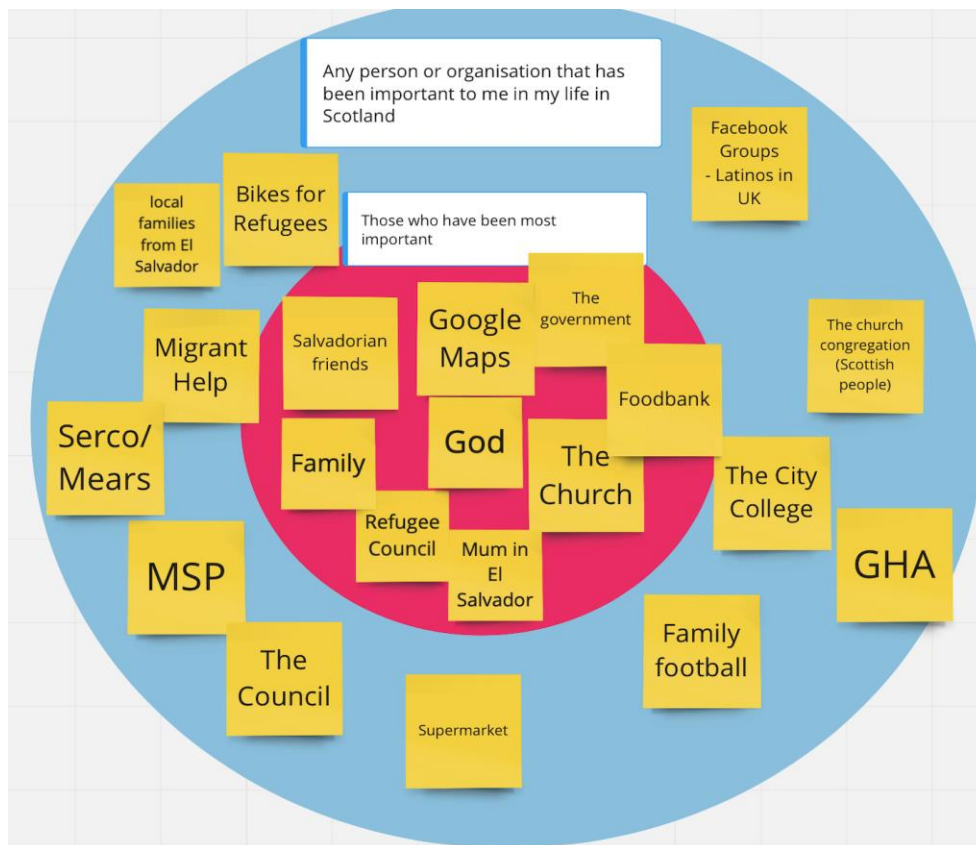


Figure 1: Bullseye map, David

Participant profile

Five women and five men from a mix of nationalities and linguistic backgrounds took part in the interviews. All participants spoke English well or fluently which may present a bias in the findings presented here. Spoken English was not a criterion for interview selection and participants were offered interpreters - however, all participants elected to conduct the interview in English. This may reflect that only those with a good command of English felt comfortable answering the call to ask them to take part in interviews.

As set out in table one, participants had lived in Scotland for between 1 and 6 years. The table refers to men or women as 'living alone' rather than 'single' as at least one man had family still living abroad and waiting to join him in the UK. All except two participants were living in rented social housing in Glasgow. One participant was living in private rented accommodation in Edinburgh, and another was looking for suitable accommodation in Birmingham and London at the time of interview. Only three participants were in what they considered to be suitable housing. Their own assessment of suitability is summarised in table one.



Table one: participant summary

Participant (Pseudonym)	Gender and family status	Time in Scotland	Granted status	Suitability of Housing (self-assessed)
Sira	Woman, living alone	6 years	2021	Rejected first offer. Now in suitable accommodation.
Ali	Man, living alone	1.5 years, (2 years UK)	2021	Unsuitable. Told he had to accept first offer. Too noisy. Wants to move to London.
Zahrah	Single mother	4 years	2021	Rejected first offer, just moved into more suitable accommodation.
Faaris	Man, living alone	2 years	2021	Rejected social housing offer due to cost. Looking for suitable family accommodation through private rented sector.
David	Man living with wife and children	4 years	2020	In suitable housing.
Benjamin	Man, living alone	4.5 years	2021	Private shared accommodation – would prefer more privacy.
Nadim	Man, living alone	3 years	2022	Unsuitable, noisy.
Ava	Single mother living with daughter	4 years	Not known	House not suitable (old, many stairs), area good.
Monica	Single mother, 4 children	3.5 years	Not known	Not suitable. Threatening neighbour.
Tara	Woman living with husband	2 years	Not known	Not suitable area, antisocial behaviour and insects in house.

Individual pathways

This report focuses on the role different individuals and organisations played in supporting beneficiaries to access and settle in permanent housing. However, each individual's integration pathway is unique. To illustrate this, three individual pathway maps are presented in this report. The key used in these maps has been simplified from IR6.2 as follows:



- Red = Statutory Organisations
- Purple = Civil Society Organisations (including third sector, community organisations and faith groups)
- Yellow = Individual connections
- Green stars = Outcomes

Experiences of statutory housing provision

While all participants were asylum route refugees, not all had lived in asylum accommodation. One man who had originally been in Scotland as a student had received financial support from the university hardship fund to continue to stay in student accommodation until he was granted refugee status. Another man who had come to the UK for work lived with his parents in London until his asylum application was resolved. Regardless of their previous housing situation, all had had to seek new, sustainable housing after being recognised as refugees.

Several participants either did not know or could not remember the names of people or organisations who had helped them get settled housing. Some people spoke interchangeably about the 'council', 'council housing' or 'housing association' and there was a sense that many people did not understand the housing allocation process, the respective roles or functions of different organisations, or in many cases, their entitlements to housing. For example, the man below was unclear on which organisations the people who had helped him were from:

Interviewer: So, when you first had to leave your asylum accommodation, who helped you to work out what you had to do next?

Respondent: I don't know, it's Stevie, is contact person, called I think in English. Stevie, like, they took my case when I finished with Mears, and he sent me to the hotel, and then he find me this house [...] No, no, he didn't find me, sorry, the Council Project find me this house, but he helps me, like, how to arrange the things, how to pay a rent, and to get me stuff for the kitchen, sofas, carpets. (Nadim).

Later, however, he indicated that it was Scottish Refugee Council who had supported him in finding a house through the Govan Housing Association, although he remained unclear on the respective roles of the Council and Scottish Refugee Council in this process.

Four participants recounted being told by Glasgow City Council that they had to accept their first offer of housing, and others indicated that they were only given one offer despite being unhappy with their allocated housing:

Interviewer: And did you get offered any other houses, or just this house?



Respondent: *No, just this house. I told them I don't want this house but they told that you have to select this house because you don't have any choice. (Ava).*

Three participants recounted further negative experiences of their interactions with the Glasgow City Council. One woman felt that the council needed to show more care and kindness in their interactions with people in the homelessness system:

Glasgow City Council, they don't even want to listen for me. I've not found favour in their presence, anything that has to do and I have to call them, it makes me depressed... I don't like to have connection with them. (Zahrah).

Another woman explained that she had been threatened with homelessness by her housing officer when she refused her first offer of housing:

Yeah, because I was – I have a caseworker at the Glasgow City Council, so he was the one who offered me that place which I rejected, and he wasn't happy with me. So, he told me that "I'm not going to be your caseworker anymore, because you got one offer, and if you don't take it, that means you make yourself homeless." So, I called Jessica [Scottish Refugee Council] and I was crying, and she start helping me. She told me, "I will apply for you many places." So, I think she applied three places for me, but I got this one. (Sira).

Her individual pathway map, represented below (Figure 2) shows a red dotted line to indicate the negative relationship she experienced with her homelessness caseworker at Glasgow City Council. The role of civil society organisations in advocating for improved provision is outlined below.

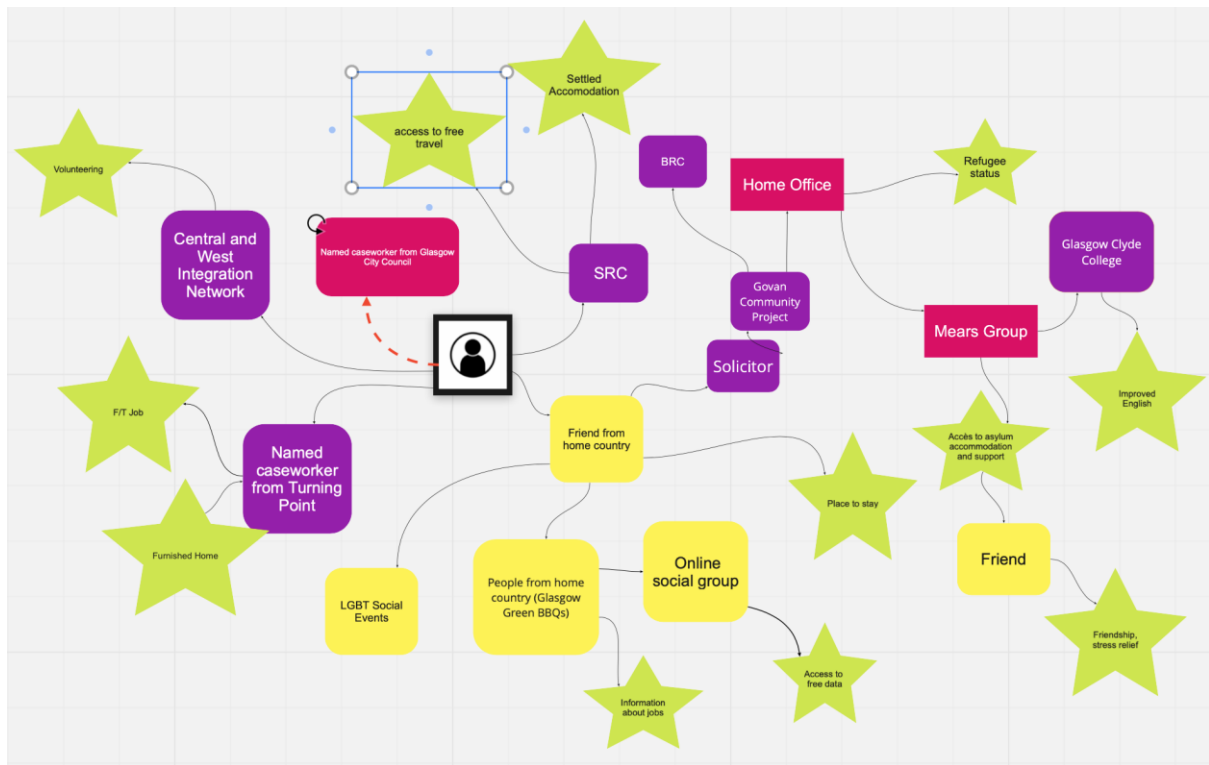


Figure 2: Pathways Map, Sira.

Contrastingly, one participant gave particular mention to an individual – at times referring to her as from the “council” and at other times from the “housing association”. This person had helped her to find suitable accommodation in the area she wanted so her children could stay in the same school. The fact that she used the terms “housing association” and “council” interchangeably suggests that she did not distinguish between the two organisations:

the lady in the housing association is always on call for us, like she makes sure that we quickly get this house here in Castlemilk, that the stress we’d pass through then was too much, because we have to leave home early, at six o’ clock for the children to get to school at nine o’ clock, and we take two buses to go, two buses to come back, so it was so difficult but people really stood up for me, like those people in the council, but I forgot their names. I forgot their names. (Monica).

The two participants who had not been housed in asylum accommodation had been navigating the social and private rented sector without support, finding it challenging to secure suitable accommodation. One participant was unable to find suitable accommodation in Glasgow and was consequently searching for temporary accommodation in Birmingham and London until his family were able to join him in the UK. He had chosen not to receive support to find accommodation from his adviser at Scottish Refugee Council and, finding himself ineligible for homelessness



support from the councils in Birmingham and London, preferred to “stand alone”, saying:

I think if people, and this is actually self-esteem, if people stand alone that will be better than if they ask support of someone. This is me actually, that's why I decided to find my own, on my own to cope with the challenges actually.
(Faaris).

This participant was highly educated, well-connected and in part-time employment. Despite this, it was evident that he was facing real challenges in understanding and navigating the private and social rented housing sectors in Scotland and England.

Role of civil society organisations in navigating housing pathways

A range of civil society organisations had played an important role for many participants. This included guiding and advocating for them through the housing allocation process and providing practical assistance to help them settle into new homes. Scottish Refugee Council's Integration Advisers performed a valuable role informing people of their housing rights and advocating for them when they had been offered unsuitable or inadequate accommodation:

Glasgow City Council was giving me a headache, but through my caseworker at Scottish Refugee Council I can speaking to them, she was talking to them as well, she didn't leave them alone she wanted them to settle me because when I got my apartment the caseworker at the Council was not really helpful and because he says to me 'you've got an apartment', but in the apartment nothing was there, no washing machine, nothing and I called my caseworker at Scottish Refugee Council and she said 'no, that is wrong, they must put things there for me'. (Zahrah).

Echoing previous findings, when participants spoke of particularly supportive connections, they emphasised their consistent communication and offers of support:

She helped me to apply for accommodation with Glasgow City Council, Jessica [caseworker from Scottish Refugee Council]. And she always called me to check if I need anything. She's always communicating with me. (Sira).

Churches were important connections in this regard also. For one participant, church had played a key advocacy role to enable him and his family to remain in an area where they felt settled. As illustrated in his individual pathway map at Figure 3, the church campaigned on his behalf to the Council and the local MSP for him and his family to be housed in Maryhill where they had been living:

Because when I arrived in this area, it was not my permanent flat. When I received my status, the Council told me that they move me by another place. But my family and my children like this area, so the church sent a letter for the Council asking if it was possible to live in this area. So that's why I stay in this area, so they don't move for another place. (David).

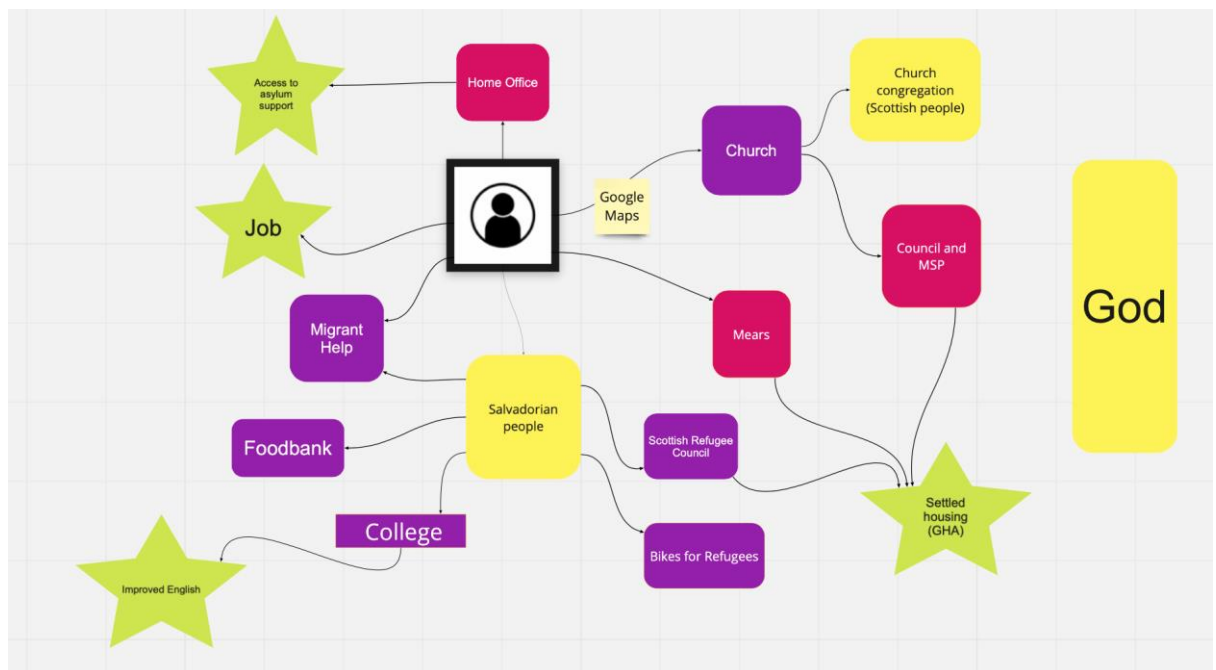


Figure 3: Pathways Map, David.

The church also came up as a provider of essential help including providing used furniture, with one participant describing how the church provided this help to anyone regardless of faith and based upon what people themselves felt they needed:

if you go there they will ask you “what do you need, how can we help you, what kind of thing do you need?”. You tell them this is what you need, and they will deliver for you. It has nothing to do with your faith, they don’t even care what kind of faith you belong to. (Zahrah).

As we have seen in previous interim reports, named individuals in organisations who were in regular contact and consistently followed up with individuals were seen as acting with care; and were perceived to be going beyond performing a functional role. This in turn meant that they played key roles in helping participants to settle in their housing, sustain their tenancies and, in one case, pursue other aspirations such as finding a job. Sira’s caseworker at Turning Point had not only helped to furnish her flat and apply for financial assistance from the Scottish Welfare Fund, but also had suggested she apply for a job at an organisation where he himself had previously worked. Having now been offered the job, she described how he had always gone the extra mile to help her and said of him:

I always just stop him, “George, I need this. George, I need that.” [laughs] (Sira).



Similarly, Positive Action in Housing were said to have consistently kept in touch and sought feedback:

They are a very good organisation. Very, very helpful. Positive Action. There is nothing you call them for and they will even be calling you for your feedback to check on you. Positive Action is a very good organisation that anyone else would like to go there. (Monica).

The ability to build these trusted connections over time emerged as one of the strengths of the civil society organisations described by participants.

Suitability of housing

Only three of the ten participants considered their settled housing to be suitable to their needs. The top priorities for participants in the area they lived in (whether they felt they had been offered choice or not) were whether the area felt safe, quiet or peaceful, and being well connected to transport and amenities, particularly shops. Many people also wanted to live near a green space. Anti-social or threatening behaviour in their building or local area was the main issue for at least three of the participants. One woman who lived with her husband said simply:

Really I want to live in peace. And I don't know. In our close, there are always garbage in our close. You can feel – sorry, it's not in my culture to say something like that, but you can feel the smell of urine in close. [...] These things – or throwing an egg in our flat, is not a good thing to ... Shouting in the middle of night, and something like that, is not good. I don't know, where can I go, but I hope the new place, if I move, I hope these kinds of things do not happen. (Tara).

Another woman, quoted below, had requested a move from her Housing Officer because of threatening behaviour from a neighbour.

No, no, no, I'm leaving because I've told my housing officers, and they've put me on another list to move, so anytime they will move me from here because we don't feel comfortable living here. We are living here with fear, fear. (Monica).

Aspirations changed for individuals over time; where at first some were grateful just to have an address (Nadim), over time they hoped for a more sustainable standard of living than in their initial or temporary accommodation. This resonates with previous findings that integration is a step-by-step process. Proximity to their children's school and the quality of the school were priorities for families with children. The woman quoted below would have preferred to stay in the area she had lived in temporary accommodation for proximity to her children's school and the shopping mall, but was advised to choose another area as it was difficult to find accommodation in Parkhead:



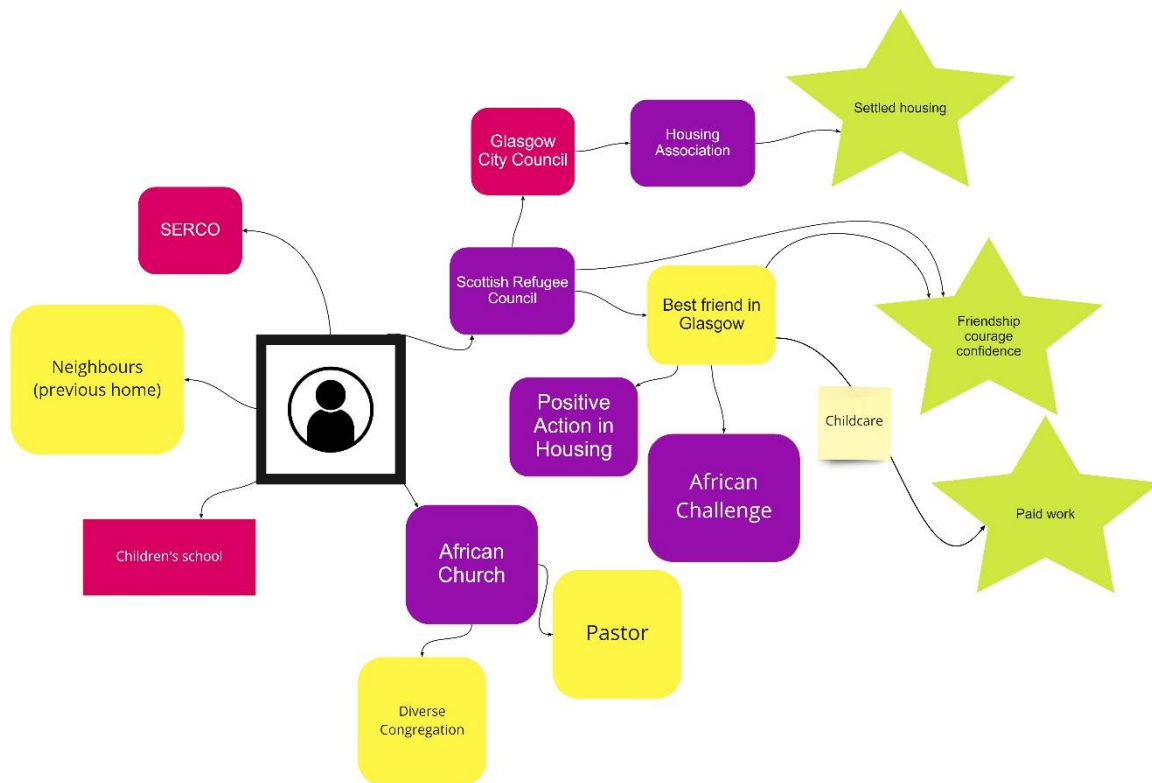
The children are able to stay in the same school, it's a bit far for someone that is not driving but my children will stay in school because school is good and they have been good to us, my children feel happy. (Zahrah).

There was evidence too of the important role of individual, informal social connections in helping people to choose an area they would like to live in. Some participants explained that they had been advised by friends that a particular area would be more suitable for them, for example, because it was more peaceful and there was less anti-social behaviour. Others explained that they had sought out housing in certain localities because they had a family member, friend or other connection living in the area who could support them in settling in the area and finding work:

I've got a friend that was moved to Cardonald, no, her experience there was so top-notch, and every time she will be calling me, "you need to come to this area. It's not like your area, that they bully you," all those things. And even some people in my church, because when I told them in the church what I'm passing through here, they will say, "No," they will tell me some areas that are very nice, like Cardonald, like Mosspark, so they will tell me to tell my housing that they have to move me there. (Monica).

The centrality of this friend to many other areas of this participant's life is illustrated by her pathways map at figure 4.

Figure 4 – pathways map, Monica



Another man was trying to swap his social housing with someone in London so he could access work opportunities. A few people also aspired to be able to buy a house of their own. This has been raised in previous interviews (see Interim Report 1 for example) as a longer-term goal for economic inclusion that some refugees would welcome information and support on.

Conclusion

As we have seen in previous interim reports, the most valued connections in supporting people with their pathways to settled housing have been those who have offered not only basic information and advice but also consistent support in working towards personal needs and aspirations.

“When people have change of circumstances they need more support and with kindness of explaining things to them, they can come again and again to ask the same question, they [Glasgow City Council] need to have this mind of tolerating people and help them to achieve what they want to achieve, when they achieve it they won’t come back again”. (Zahrah).



Findings from this phase of the research indicate that civil society organisations, including AMIF partners, and informal connections of friendship and mutual support are those most likely to offer this level of consistent and ongoing support.

The findings show too that, while people aspire to find housing that meets their and their families' long-term needs, they often find themselves obliged to accept and then live in homes that are not sustainable in the longer term. Accounts of experiences of anti-social behaviour and abuse are of concern in this regard and highlight the ongoing nature of support that maybe required as people settle in new localities. These and the negative experiences of statutory systems also indicate that, as we have highlighted in previous reports, integration is multi-directional. Even those individuals who are confident in their capacities to understand and navigate systems will find this task complicated without adaptation by statutory systems themselves.



This work was undertaken as part of the AMIF-funded 'New Scots Integration – A Pathway to Social and Economic Inclusion' ABM3 Project.