# New Scots and integration - communities, cultures and creativity

Chapter extract from ‘The New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy: A report on the local and international dimensions of integrating refugees in Scotland’.

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# Acknowledgements

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# Terminology and list of abbreviations

In line with Scottish Government policy, this report uses the term ‘New Scots’ to refer to: individuals and family members who arrive in Scotland under various refugee resettlement schemes; people who are claiming asylum and resident in Scotland; individuals who receive refugee status or another form of leave such as Humanitarian Protection or Discretionary leave and their family members; people who arrive in Scotland to be reunited with a family member who is a refugee; young people who are claiming or have claimed asylum or have been trafficked into the UK. The New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy is also relevant to other displaced groups such as survivors of human trafficking and people who are stateless.

BAME – Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic

COSLA – Convention of Scottish Local Authorities

LA – Local Authority

LtR – Leave to Remain

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

NHS – National Health Service

NSRIDP – New Scots Refugee Integration Delivery Project

NSRIS 2 – New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy (second iteration)

SRC – Scottish Refugee Council

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# Introduction

This publication is a chapter extract from ‘The New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy: A report on the local and international dimensions of integrating refugees in Scotland’.[[1]](#footnote-1) In the main report, we provide interpretive frameworks through which integration can be understood, a comprehensive overview of research findings concerning refugee integration in Scotland, and a series of recommendations to inform the development of the third iteration of the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy. The findings and recommendations presented in this chapter are based on academic research conducted by the University of Glasgow as part of the New Scots Refugee Integration Delivery Project (NSRIDP), a partnership project led by the Scottish Government with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), the Scottish Refugee Council (SRC) and the UNESCO Chair in Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts (RILA) at the University of Glasgow. The project sought to expand good practice and innovation in the context of integration in Scotland, as well as conduct primary research on refugee integration in Scotland to support the development of the third iteration of the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy (NSRIS).

This chapter extract presents key learnings, challenges and recommendations related to the role of community, culture, creativity and the integration of New Scots across Scotland. Belonging to a community, feeling in control of living within one, having things to bring to one – these are key elements of integration. Much of the scholarship that focuses on communities, culture and social connections of New Scots highlights both the importance of constructing and maintaining social ties and the complexity of doing so. Integration is a multifaceted, complex, dynamic and ongoing process involving intercultural dialogue and negotiation; creative, cultural and art-based initiatives are key to such dialogue, bringing together the many resources of New Scots and receiving communities and meeting many different cultural and social needs.

The New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2 understood the need to consider the role of communities in the context of integration and the importance of developing social connections. It therefore aimed to achieve the following outcomes:

* Refugees and asylum seekers live in safe, welcoming and cohesive communities and are able to build diverse relationships and connections.
* Refugees and asylum seekers understand their rights, responsibilities and entitlements, and are able to exercise them to pursue full and independent lives.
* Refugees and asylum seekers are able to access well-coordinated services, which recognise and meet their rights and needs.
* Policy, strategic planning and legislation, which have an impact on refugees and asylum seekers, are informed by their rights, needs and aspirations.[[2]](#footnote-2)

# Communities

*“Integration is that confidence that people can gain back by the control in their life. Like that feeling of productive. And that feeling of being part of the community, and that is what the people want.” (Hakim, community group)*

Much of the scholarship that focuses on communities, culture and social connections of New Scots highlights both the importance of constructing and maintaining social ties and the complexity of doing so. The Ager and Strang Indicators of Integration framework, on which much of the NSRIS is based, highlights the importance of social bonds (connections that link members of a group), social bridges (connections between groups), and social links (connections between individuals and structures of the state).[[3]](#footnote-3)

Initiatives which successfully foster and encourage intercultural and interaction encounter within local communities are central to integration[[4]](#footnote-4). Projects that work well are those where work is undertaken within a community development framework, where projects listen and adapt to what their communities want – “being very much led by the community and their ideas.” (Tam, community group)

Certain places in the local community are essential for providing information and for creating opportunities of contact between New Scots and receiving communities.[[5]](#footnote-5) Green spaces and schools, for example, are key in developing connections and exploring cultural norms.[[6]](#footnote-6) Public libraries in Scotland have an explicit ethos of strengthening the identity and sense of community, increasing involvement in community activities, and responding to the needs of individuals and social groups. Supporting the role of places where activities leading to encounter and integration can happen is key for NSRIS 3 moving forward. Such activities include sports, theatre, language cafés, outdoor volunteering and meal-sharing.

Interviewees repeatedly mentioned the need for support with transport costs for people seeking asylum. It could be within the power of the Scottish Government to allow free bus passes to people seeking asylum in Scotland. This would help to address the enforced poverty linked to the current UK asylum system and its detrimental consequences on health and wellbeing. It would also greatly contribute to New Scots being able to move freely and participate in their new communities.

Integration is predominantly experienced at the local level – where people develop connections to (and through) local places. Successful projects make uses of local resources to foster interaction and help people feel involved in their local area:

*“A lot of play and playful behaviour like sports, like the Loose Parts [playing with junk],, outdoor cooking and fires, community garden. We are part of a community garden so some of the families have actually taken ownership of a bed and now use that and grow their own veg” (Tam, community group)*

Research also suggests that New Scots experience higher levels of trust amongst connections made through shared placed of worship. Research shows that New Scot respondents have high levels of trust amongst friends in shared places of worship – which points towards the key role of religious groups and institutions for creating opportunities of encounter and welcome.[[7]](#footnote-7) Moreover, further research has demonstrated how transnational connections play an important role amongst young people especially and that faith can play a role in supporting transnational solidarities amongst young people against racial injustice.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Faith communities, then, can be a vital support for the integration of New Scots into Scotland’s communities, providing abundant and varied resources in terms of networks, people, time, premises, donations and more. Inter-institutional elements of integration, such as communication and information sharing, are also part of the work done by and in faith communities. However, faith is currently “an afterthought in NSRIS” (Marta, community group), with “so many resources underused”.

# Cultures

A variety of networks, cultures and communities need to be involved if integration is to happen. Culture, here, is understood as an intrinsic part of people’s lives which informs intercultural encounter and is a critical element of intercultural communication and integration. Research repeatedly shows that successful integration projects working in the field of culture operate from a participatory community development approach, where work is planned and delivered with, for and through communities. Projects also fare better where their funding allows enough flexibility to accommodate change that occurs as a result of iterative consultation with communities.

Much like integration, cultural work should be thought of in terms of a process rather than a series of pre-determined end goals. Sometimes this process can also involve uncertainty amongst receiving communities of how to tackle different cultural mores or views. It is also clear that there can be fixed expectations across the multiplicity of actors engaged in integration about what forms cultural behaviour might take; but individuals will often not conform to these stereotypes or will deviate from expectations in dynamic ways. Mechanisms such as UNESCO’s ‘Story Circles’ are helpful tools for widening the perspective on questions of cultural miscommunication and allowing for intercultural dialogue to take root and prosper within Scottish institutions and communities.[[9]](#footnote-9)

It is important to recognise that intercultural encounter can be difficult; but in the difficulty lies important learning.[[10]](#footnote-10) Dialogue is key to such intercultural negotiations leading to integration rather than conflict. Research shows that intercultural dialogue and encounter is aided by initiatives which bring together New Scots and receiving communities in ‘shared doing’: endeavours linked to needs, interests, places and enjoyments which are held in common by New Scots and receiving communities alike. A community development approach is, again, critical to successful work, as is an approach which is open to different ideas and creative approaches.[[11]](#footnote-11)

There is another critical aspect of culture to consider in the context of New Scots integration: the wider socio-political cultural milieu fostered by political and economic choices at a governmental level. This report has repeatedly discussed the ‘hostile environment’ created and maintained by the current UK asylum system, and the very real detrimental effects on people seeking safety wrought by this environment of menace and fear, structural violence and despair.

The Scottish Government is therefore to be commended for its commitment to a language of inclusion and welcome for New Scots at the highest levels of socio-political discourse; this commitment greatly facilitates the everyday work of integration being undertaken across Scottish communities. However, despite generally positive views towards migration in Scotland, numerous studies have found evidence of New Scots experiencing racial or religious discrimination.[[12]](#footnote-12) Acknowledging such problems and learning from them is of vital importance.

# Creativity

Creative intercultural work is key to increasing trust and connections between New Scots and receiving communities and addressing problems linked to discrimination and negative narratives about New Scots. At the social level, cultural work creates opportunities for shared experiences; gives voice to experiences that might be hard for receiving communities

to grasp; and offers a counter to stereotypical narratives of migration and dependency. Creative work can also be uplifting and give New Scots a renewed sense of value in terms of their role in society, supporting them to feel part of *“making a piece of communal work that could celebrate and create conversation and create ownership of that experience.” (Tam, community* *group).*

Such work, however, is difficult to maintain if funding is limited, short-term or difficult to navigate. Integration work specifically based on arts and culture is critical to intercultural dialogue and should be further supported and prioritised.[[13]](#footnote-13) Many respondents across different sectors acknowledge that these are difficult times, featuring financial uncertainty and a ‘cost of living’ crisis, and as a result many cultural venues and arts-based initiatives are closing or reducing the scope of their work. In this context, it is vital to understand creative work related to the integration of New Scots as something which benefits the broader communities in which New Scots live – not as something competing for scarce resources with other creative work. Creativity as a way of working, as an approach to resolving and transforming difficulties, is also a resource which is commonly found among many of the NSRDP projects observed and which can bring benefits and learning to the broader network of community projects across Scotland.

# Recommendations

* Encourage, support and fund community development approaches as a resource for delivering and planning successful integration
* Further prioritise the inclusion of the arts and culture in the New Scots theme of ‘Communities, Culture and Social Connections’
* Support and develop more flexible and long-term funding initiatives
* Allow free bus passes to New Scots seeking asylum, to help them access services and integrate better in Scottish communities.
* Faith communities should be present as an important element in NSRIS 3, as part of a commitment to support community development practices which build bridges between communities and develop integration through strong interpersonal and inter-organisational connections and networks.
* The existing resources provided by faith communities should be recognised and supported by NSRIS 3 as significant parts to the integration landscape across Scottish communities. Part of this recognition could involve a validation of the language of welcome present across all faiths which urge people to “welcome the stranger”, which is a cultural resource that can be used by a wide diversity of communities across Scotland.
* Following the evidence of NSRIDP sports-based projects, the critical language and role of sport in community integration - sport understood and promoted as a powerful and empowering language of the body - should be fully incorporated into NSRIS 3.

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9. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000370336> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
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