

# Refugee and Asylum Seeker Integration within Glasgow: A Lay Report

Produced in Partnership with Thriving Places



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## Introduction

This report summarizes the research design and study results of a research project completed in 2018 as part of a Master of Science degree in Education, Public Policy and Equity. The study was completed with input and recommendations from Thriving Places. Thriving Places is a community development initiative, managed through the Glasgow Community Planning Partnerships, that focuses on assisting neighborhoods that show consistently high levels of inequality. Thriving Places provided me with contacts and advice regarding third sector organizations involved in refugee and asylum seeker integration initiatives across Glasgow.

With rising numbers of refugees and asylum seekers, Glasgow has allocated resources and deputized organizations to promote integration – offering assistance, providing language and cultural classes, and building a sense of community for refugees and asylum seekers. Much of this has been made possible through Glasgow’s many integration networks, which bring together non-governmental organizations, charitable organizations, community development centers, and churches. By analyzing integration in practice, I wanted to understand how organizations interpret this concept and devise programs and activities to promote integration. Through my research, I hoped to understand how practitioner views on integration as a concept and an outcome may vary, specifically by focusing on the following questions:

1. How do integration organizations define integration? What does integration look like in practice?
2. How do organizational characteristics influence an organization’s approach to integration?
3. What challenges do Glasgow’s female refugees and asylum seekers currently face regarding integration, and what efforts have been made to address them?

## Methodology

Based on contacts from Thriving Places, I conducted my research using in-person interviews with practitioners from seven different Glasgow-area integration organizations. These organizations included integration networks, community development centers, charitable organizations, and churches.

Interview questions were prepared in advance, but I revised or added questions in each interview to address participant responses. Interviews were audio-recorded and manually transcribed to identify common themes and response patterns. I conducted analysis after all seven interviews were completed, so that I could identify commonalities

in participant responses without influencing data for interviews that were completed later in the study.

The study was approved by the University of Glasgow School of Education Ethics Committee in April 2018, prior to contacting any participants or collecting any data.

## Key Findings

After analyzing interview data, I identified five common themes across participant responses. These themes provided a more complex understanding of integration in practice, as well as highlighted common concerns regarding communication between policymakers and practitioners.

### 1. Defining integration

*“For me, integration is about people living together. It’s about celebrating the different cultures. Integration is very much about bringing people together, building social capital.”*

While participants offered differing definitions, they tended to describe integration as consisting of two primary goals: making sure that refugees and asylum seekers felt welcome within the Glasgow community, and helping refugees and asylum seekers access services that would assist in their everyday life.

### 2. Organizational differences

*“A lot of my work has been accessing funding, you know. And to be honest, two days a week, there hasn’t been a huge amount of time to do much development work.”*

Based on interview data, an organization’s ability to support refugee and asylum seeker integration is mostly impacted by the organization’s funding and its number of full-time staff members.

### 3. Female barriers to integration

*“We’ve got an issue at the moment that women can’t attend the ESOL class at college because it’s in the afternoon. So even though there’s crèche places, if you’ve got school pickup to do, then the class is 1:30-4, school finishes at 3, you need to leave at 2:30, there’s no point in you starting a class.”*

Participant responses emphasized that female refugees and asylum seekers face significant challenges that often prevent them from accessing integration programs and activities. This included lack of childcare at integration events, transportation concerns, and differing cultural practices that may prevent them from attending mixed gender events. Participant responses suggest that it may take female refugees and asylum seekers significantly longer to integrate into the Glasgow community than their male peers.

#### 4. Community engagement

*“I believe in the power of communities and I wanted to make sure that, when people arrived, they knew that there were people here that cared for them and that were thinking of them.”*

While participants offered several positive examples of Glasgow locals welcoming refugees and asylum seekers into the community, there were also examples of discriminatory or hostile attitudes. These examples indicate that greater efforts could be made to involve the local community in integration programs and activities.

#### 5. Feedback channels

*“Most of the time there was a lot of collaboration, and policy would be influenced from the bottom-up, there was evidence of that. We were learning as we were going along.”*

Many participants shared that policymakers often provided directives or guidance regarding integration initiatives, but that policymakers might benefit from having a clearer understanding of the challenges or concerns regarding integration from a practitioner perspective.

## Conclusion

The results demonstrate that Glasgow has a strong network of integration support for refugees and asylum seekers, and integration organizations communicate and collaborate effectively. While participants highlighted critical concerns, such as barriers facing female refugee and asylum seekers, responses also indicated that practitioners have been working to identify solutions for these challenges. While integration organizations tend to be in close communication regarding best practices or common problems, this communication does not always reach individuals at the policymaking

level. Bottom-up feedback channels, which would create opportunities for organizations to offer input to policymakers, might succeed in ensuring that integration policies better meet the needs of refugees and asylum seekers.

## Recommendations for Future Research

While integration research (including this study) typically focuses on how refugees and asylum seekers adapt to their new community, few studies analyze how the local community adapts to refugees and asylum seekers. Future research could therefore examine local attitudes towards, and involvement in, integration efforts. Additionally, future research could focus on the long-term impacts of integration efforts, most especially the impact of Glasgow's integration networks in improving outcomes for refugees and asylum seekers.

