

Migration, asylum and refugee issues briefing Scotland



Updated March 2021
by David Bradwell

Background

Scotland's population is now estimated to be around 5.4 million people, the highest level ever. Driving the growth has been the contribution of inward migration to Scotland especially over the last 20 years. According to the most recent census taken in 2011, around 7% of Scotland's population was born outside the UK; it is very likely that in the 10 years since that this proportion has increased.

At this Scottish parliament election, for the first time, anyone legally resident in Scotland is eligible to vote; this includes EU citizens with settled status, or people with leave to remain or refugee status.

EU citizens

A number of Churches have spoken out on the need to protect the rights of EU citizens living in Scotland and have shared information and guidance on how to ensure people are aware of the need to apply for Settled Status before the June 2021 deadline, within congregations and the wider community, especially in areas of greater deprivation. Churches are also beginning to adapt to the impact of the end of free movement, including in clergy recruitment and attracting volunteers.

Asylum seekers and refugees

The City of Glasgow hosts more people seeking asylum than any other local authority area in the UK. It is also the only local authority in Scotland that accommodates asylum seekers under the UK Home Office dispersal policy. Under this policy, if someone's asylum application is accepted, they are granted refugee status.

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Since 2015, a separate refugee resettlement programme has been operating, which brings refugees directly from emergency situations to the UK. Every local authority in Scotland has offered sanctuary to refugees in this way over the past few years. Most people have come from Syria or the wider Middle East and North Africa region.

Decisions about immigration policy, asylum and refugee resettlement are all the responsibility of the UK Government, although there are increasing calls that more powers should be devolved to Scotland, either to encourage more migrants to areas facing depopulation, or to deliver alternative methods of asylum support.

One area that the Scottish Parliament does have responsibility for is to do with migrant and refugee integration – measures such as healthcare, education access, housing advice and connections with community organisations. For a number of years the ‘New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy’ has had widespread cross-party and civic support, as well as engagement and participation by refugees themselves.

Globally, the number of people displaced from their homes is at an all-time high; conflict, human rights abuses, climate change and poverty all can contribute. How Scotland and local communities adapt to the reality of increased migration – and more importantly figure out a role to welcome the stranger – will remain important in the years to come.

Questions for candidates

1. Should Scotland be able to set its own priorities for immigration, separate from those for the rest of the UK? If so, what should they be?
2. How will you tackle the health inequalities revealed by the Covid-19 pandemic?
3. Do you support the welcoming of asylum seekers and refugees as 'New Scots'? If so, what further practical steps should be taken to welcome refugees to Scotland?

Further reading

The COSLA Strategic Migration Partnership (Migration Scotland) provides an overview of immigration matters in Scotland and has published several informative reports.

<http://www.migrationscotland.org.uk/>

Contact

We would like to know how this guidance was useful and what should be added or changed for future publications.

If you have questions, suggestions or comments please write to:

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