

Equality Impact Assessment for New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2024

February 2026

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Title of policy: New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2024

Summary of aims and desired outcomes of Policy:

The third New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy was published in March 2024. It updates and builds on the previous strategy – New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2018 - 2022 and seeks to promote a welcoming Scotland where refugees and people seeking asylum can rebuild their lives from the day they arrive. The aim of the revised Strategy is to ensure that Scotland’s New Scots approach to supporting integration still meets the needs of refugees, people seeking asylum, other forced migrants and communities. This Strategy defines New Scots and ensures that it is recognised that this includes other forced migrants as well as those granted refugee status (including newly recognised refugees) or awaiting an asylum decision. The Strategy reflects the changes in immigration policy that has led to people arriving through new resettlement and relocation schemes and other humanitarian protection routes. This includes people arriving in Scotland from Afghanistan and Ukraine, as well as from other countries under the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS). It has been updated to reflect the changes in the types of status that have been granted to people e.g. Hong Kong BN(O)s and people displaced from Ukraine. The Strategy also includes ‘people who are or may become stateless and in need of international protection’.

There were also significant changes in the UK asylum system during the previous New Scots Strategy including: procurement of hotels as contingency asylum accommodation; the introduction of full dispersal policy in 2022 and associated widening of dispersal; and the introduction of a streamlined asylum process in 2023. There was also the passing of the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 and the Illegal Migration Act 2023. UK level policy and legislation can have significant impacts on people seeking asylum and refugees living in Scotland as well as services which

support them (including local authorities, public sector, third sector and legal representatives). The refreshed Strategy therefore aims to be resilient to such changes and able to adapt where possible within the devolved context of the Strategy delivery.

Directorate: Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights

Division: Refugee Resettlement and Asylum

Team: Asylum and Refugee Integration

Executive summary

The New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2024 was published on 28 March 2024. It is the third New Scots refugee integration strategy, building on and updating the previous strategy to take account of developments within the last 3 years. It maintains the purpose to continue to coordinate organisations and community groups across Scotland working towards better outcomes for forced migrants.

It provides a clear structure for all those working towards refugee integration and aims to support an effective implementation of the rights and entitlements of New Scots within Scotland's devolved powers.

The development of the third Strategy was informed by an engagement process involving over 2,000 refugees and people seeking asylum as well as 250 sector professionals and refugee leaders. The engagement feedback, as well as the experience and evidence gathered implementing the Strategy over the past decade, has highlighted the needs of some refugees and people seeking asylum in particular. This includes women, children, young people, and members of the LGBTQI+ community.

The Strategy sets out six principles of the New Scots approach: integration from day one of arrival; a rights based approach; restorative and trauma-informed;

involvement of people with lived experience of forced displacement; inclusive, intercultural communities; and partnership and collaboration.

The Strategy sets out six overarching outcomes:

1. New Scots live in safe, welcoming, inclusive communities, where everyone's dignity is respected and everyone is able to build diverse relationships and healthy intercultural bonds.
2. New Scots are able to access well-coordinated services, which recognise and meet their rights and needs.
3. New Scots understand their rights, responsibilities and entitlements in Scotland and are able to exercise these to pursue full and independent lives. New Scots can pursue their ambitions through education, employment, culture and leisure activities in diverse communities.
4. Communities in Scotland understand integration interculturally and respect the diversity and strengths that New Scots bring.
5. Policy, strategic planning, and legislation, that have an impact on New Scots, are shaped through their participation and informed by their rights, needs and aspirations.
6. The principles of the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy guide all future responses to crises that bring forced migrants to Scotland and seek to ensure all such migrants will be treated equitably.

Background

The Scottish Government has stated its continued commitment in its Programme for Government 2024 to support integration of those seeking refuge and asylum within

our communities and to provide the safety and security needed to rebuild their lives through the delivery of the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy Delivery Plan.

This Strategy envisions local communities becoming more adaptable and resilient as a result of their welcoming of New Scots and the sharing of culture and skills. In order to support a long-term approach, the Strategy is not time limited. The New Scots Delivery Plan, shows the specific actions we will take, and when they will be undertaken.

The Strategy is the result of a longstanding partnership between the Scottish Government, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) and Scottish Refugee Council. It also supports the many partnerships and initiatives that exist across Scotland to welcome refugees and support New Scots as members of communities.

The beneficiaries of New Scots will be refugees, people seeking asylum and other forced migrants living in Scotland, as well as the communities they are settling in. It will also benefit third party organisations that deliver services and support.

Changes since the last strategy

Since the last New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2018 – 2022, there have been a number changes including new legislation on asylum and largescale relocations and resettlement of people from Afghanistan and Ukraine. The Homes for Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme and the Ukraine Family Scheme were introduced in February 2022 to allow Ukrainian nationals and their family members to come to the UK. The Scottish Government introduced a Super Sponsor scheme which removed the need for people fleeing war in Ukraine to identify in advance an individual to sponsor their visa application.

In 2022, there were 6,463 people granted protection in the UK. For the first quarter of 2023, 4,339 people were granted protection – around two thirds of the number granted protection for the whole of 2022. This highlights a marked increase in the

number of people seeking asylum compared to the number recorded in December 2017 which was 3,650.

Further data showing increasing numbers is the figure recorded at the end of September 2023 where 6,090 people seeking asylum were in Scotland; 28,795 displaced people from Ukraine had arrived in the UK on a visa with a Scottish sponsor (at 31 March 2025); and 1,638 people supported in local authority accommodation in Scotland through the Afghan resettlement schemes.

The Scope of the EQIA

The New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy: 2024 will have an impact on the lives of people seeking asylum and refugees living in Scotland. This includes people who have been granted refugee status or another form of humanitarian protection including those coming through resettlement schemes and those who have been displaced arriving through relevant visa programmes; people seeking asylum; and those whose application for asylum has been refused, but who remain in Scotland.

The Strategy will also have an impact on displaced people from Ukraine who have already arrived or plan to move to Scotland under the Super Sponsor Scheme and other visa routes.

It will affect the communities in Scotland in which people seeking asylum and refugees reside, including local services, businesses, employers and members of the public.

The Equality Act 2010 places a duty (known as the Public Sector Equality Duty, or PSED) on public authorities to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- advance equality of opportunity; and
- promote good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 (Regulation 5) require public authorities to assess and review policies and practices against these three needs of the PSED.

For supporting integration of refugees, people seeking asylum and other forced migrants including displaced people from Ukraine, the following characteristics were assessed under the three PSED needs:

Age

Disability

Sex

Pregnancy and maternity

Gender reassignment

Sexual orientation

Race

Religion or belief

This EQIA aims to look at the next phase of Scotland's response through a holistic lens to explore how the direction of the Strategy may impact on people with protected characteristics.

In developing the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy, the Scottish Government is mindful of the three needs of the PSED. Where any negative impacts have been identified, we have sought to mitigate or eliminate these. We are also mindful that the Equality Duty is not just about preventing or mitigating negative impacts, as we also have a positive duty to advance equality.

Approaches and methods used to assess impact

Use of research and evidence including:

- an independent evaluation of the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2018- 2022 by ScotCen commissioned by New Scots partners.

- a report by IPPR to explore and assess the role of Scotland’s 32 local authorities in supporting the integration of refugees and people seeking asylum.
- a report by the University of Glasgow looking the local and international dimensions of integrating refugees in Scotland.
- a report by Queen Margaret University on the ‘Role of Social Connections, Time and Place in Refugees’ Pathways to Inclusion’
- A workshop exercise conducted in September 2023 to encourage the New Scots Core Group to consider potential impact across all protected characteristics during the development process.
- Internal discussions with colleagues from relevant Scottish Government policy areas and external discussions with relevant organisations working with protected characteristic groups.
- Analysis of the engagement which took place between November 2023 and February 2024 with over 300 sector professionals, refugee leaders and over 2000 people with lived experience.

In addition, quantitative data and evidence used for this assessment is outlined below that relates to Ukraine specific data.

- [Visa data by country, upper and lower tier local authority](#)
- [Analysis of Ukrainian nationals entering employment in the UK](#)
- [Sponsors’ experiences of Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme](#)
- [experiences of visa holders entering the UK under the Ukraine Humanitarian Schemes](#)
- [Ukrainian displaced people - economic impact of migration](#)

Evidence from literature research was also considered.

Key Findings

Potential positive impacts of New Scots and the strategic approach were identified across all protected characteristics. In particular the inclusive mainstreaming

approach, the commitment to lived experience and the fostering of a welcoming culture were seen as contributing to positive impacts.

Age:

Home Office statistics show that the number of people claiming asylum in the UK are predominantly 18 years old and over (80.5% in December 2023). There are also a significant number of children who are part of an asylum application (16,462 aged under 18 in December 2023 of which 62% were under the age of 14).

Positive impacts were raised around the commitments in the Strategy to ensuring that New Scots children will have their specific protection, welfare and integration needs met. The focus on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) within the draft Strategy was also raised as having positive impacts as this will help to ensure that there are appropriate and accessible services and support for this age group. There is a commitment within the Strategy to support young people to navigate trafficking, asylum, welfare, criminal justice and age assessment processes.

There is no specific focus on older refugees, therefore there is a potential negative impact on older refugees and people seeking asylum if they are overlooked in service provision and support. While older age group refugees and people seeking asylum are not specifically mentioned, New Scots can be from all age groups.

There is a potential positive impact where the Strategy promotes understanding rights, responsibilities and entitlements such as building capabilities across Scotland so that more areas understand family reunion processes and can be prepared to support people who have recently arrived under family reunion routes to ensure they understand their rights and how to access support when preparing for family arriving in Scotland through UK visa routes.

Items needing further and continuing consideration are reserved legislation and policies such as the Nationality and Borders Act (NABA) 2022 and Illegal Migration Act (IMA) 2023. It was recognised that UK level policies and legislation can affect children, young people and older people and the impact of any such changes on

delivery of the Strategy need to be taken into account. The Strategy promotes access to education and employment for all ages but there is a potential negative impact on older people if they are not targeted. There is a commitment within the Strategy to work with professionals to safeguard children.

The Strategy fosters welcoming and resilient communities. By promoting intercultural dialogue and understanding, the Strategy encourages local communities to embrace diversity. Because integration is seen as a multi-directional process, there is a positive impact enabling the promotion of intergenerational integration, encouraging dialogue and interaction between different age groups and the local communities.

Disability:

The results of the Scotland Census 2022 records that 10.8% of all people living in Scotland reported having a long term health condition or disability that limited their daily activities a lot, 13.3% reported that they were limited a little by their long term health condition or disability.

The inclusive mainstreaming approach was seen as likely having a positive impact as would helping to improve people's knowledge and understanding of their rights to services. The Strategy acknowledges the additional challenges faced by refugees and people seeking asylum with physical and mental health problems. Strategy implementation promotes a trauma-informed and rights based approach as one of its principles. The Strategy promotes inclusive access to services for disabled people which is a positive impact to ensure that a lack of knowledge or understanding of rights is addressed. Community engagement on the strategy highlighted additional challenges for disabled refugees and specifically the provision of housing. The Strategy promotes partnership and collaboration which will have a positive impact for disabled refugees by ensuring that service providers work together to coordinate and plan effective support for refugee integration including disabled refugees. The Strategy also promotes improved social connections within society and across communities for New Scots. This will include fostering good relations among and between disabled and non-disabled people.

Sex:

Home Office statistics show that during 2023 there were 9,608 women and girls who were the main applicant for an asylum application to the UK and a further 6,551 women and girls who were dependents in an asylum application.

A positive impact is recognised as the Strategy promotes collaboration and partnership working which extends to working across policy areas, including where those areas recognise potential harm or wider issues e.g. human trafficking, female genital mutilation, violence against women and girls. This helps to address and mitigate risks of women who may be vulnerable to different types of exploitation. There is a potential negative impact if support services discount the needs of men as highlighted in feedback from community engagement. The Strategy's trauma-informed and human rights based approach is a positive impact. The Strategy promotes understanding rights, responsibilities and entitlements ensuring that New Scots can pursue their ambitions through education, employment, culture and leisure activities in diverse communities. This is a positive impact on challenging gender discrimination. The Strategy promotes improved social connections within society and across communities for New Scots. This will include fostering good relations among and between men and women.

Gender reassignment:

There is a lack of any evidence relating to gender reassignment amongst refugees and asylum seekers in Scotland. The strategy is aimed at ensuring a rights based approach for all refugees and asylum seekers.

There were some potential gaps highlighted around gender reassignment relating to the visibility of gender reassignment amongst refugees and people seeking asylum in Scotland. The Strategy is seen as having positive impacts by taking a rights-based approach. It promotes inclusive service provision and taking a trauma-informed approach. It promotes inclusive communities, where everyone's dignity is respected and everyone is able to build diverse relationships and healthy intercultural bonds. Inclusive service provision and access to opportunities will positively impact on trans

people. A trauma-informed approach is also designed to be inclusive and sensitive to diverse needs which will also have a positive impact on trans people. The promotion of collaboration across sectors (that will have commitments to LGBTQI+ inclusion) means services are more likely to adopt inclusive practices including respect for gender identity.

The Strategy promotes improved social connections within society and across communities for New Scots. This will include fostering good relations among and between trans and cis people.

Sexual orientation:

UK Government statistics show that in 2022, 2% of asylum claims in the UK (1,334 claims) included sexual orientation as part of the basis for the claim (LGB asylum applications). There is no Scotland specific data available.

There are potential positive impacts for LGBTQI+ New Scots as the Strategy takes the position that integration support begins from day one of arrival, is rights based and trauma-informed. Community members highlighted the need for meaningful support upon arrival to Scotland and that trauma can impact on the processing of information upon arrival. An understanding of the experiences of LGBTQI+ New Scots and their experiences of homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, stigma, hate crime, violence and persecution and how this impacts on establishing trust was needed. The Strategy seeks to promote New Scots living in safe, welcoming and inclusive communities. This will be a positive impact on LGBTQI+ individuals who can face additional barriers. Points were raised around how increased understandings of rights to services and support networks, and of hate crime (including how to report these) were seen as having positive impacts. A focus on access to well-coordinated services, which recognise and meet New Scots' rights and needs are considered positive impacts to address the issues and challenges faced by LGBTQI+ New Scots. Inclusive service provision and access to opportunities will positively impact on trans people. A trauma-informed approach is also designed to be inclusive and sensitive to diverse needs which will also have a

positive impact on LGBTQI+ people. The promotion of collaboration across sectors (that will have commitments to LGBTQI+ inclusion) means services are more likely to adopt inclusive practices.

The Strategy promotes improved social connections within society and across communities for New Scots. This will include fostering good relations among and between LGBTQI+ people.

Pregnancy and maternity:

The Strategy promotes access to well-coordinated services which recognises and meets New Scots' rights and needs. There is no impact in relation to advancing equality of opportunity in terms of pregnancy and maternity.

Race:

Home Office statistics for asylum applications do not provide a breakdown of the grounds for an application, but the nationality of applicants is published. This cannot be seen as a direct indicator of race for asylum applicants but can be indicative of the diversity of racial background. Data shows that the top 5 nationalities receiving Section 95 support in Scotland at year end June 2024 were Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Syria, Eritrea.

The inclusive mainstreaming approach and the fostering of a welcoming culture were raised as having potentially positive impacts. Lived experience involvement in shaping, monitoring and implementing the Strategy was also raised as having positive impacts. Through the Strategy, there will be an opportunity to challenge racism from the experiences of refugees and people seeking asylum.

The Strategy aims for New Scots to be able to access well-coordinated services, which recognise and meet their rights and needs. This includes providing New Scots with access to information that allows them to understand the routes into employment based on their qualifications in identified sectors.

The Strategy implementation will provide an opportunity to address racial discrimination from the experiences of refugees. The Strategy seeks to address racial discrimination through its promoting of safe, welcoming and inclusive communities and promoting understanding of integration interculturally and respecting the diversity that New Scots bring and therefore is a positive impact. The Strategy also promotes partnership and collaboration. This ethos will help to address tensions in the context of scarce resource and pressures on public services. These are positive impacts.

Religion or belief:

The valuing of lived experience as a principle and the 'inclusive mainstreaming' approach with Scottish Government (SG) were seen as positives for the Strategy. Focusing on involving lived experience in the implementation of policies such as hate crime is a positive. The Strategy ensures that refugees and people seeking asylum of all faiths and beliefs have equal access to services and opportunities and that policies and decisions are shaped through New Scots' participation and informed by their rights, needs and aspirations. There is an expectation that services will be delivered in ways that accommodate religious beliefs. This will positively impact on people of all faiths and beliefs.

The Strategy promotes integration through intercultural connections, respecting diversity and the strengths that New Scots bring. On this basis the Strategy encourages dialogue and understanding between individuals of different religious backgrounds within local communities.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2024 will not disadvantage any equality groups.

The EQIA analysis shaped the policy making process by drawing out particular challenges which people with different protected characteristics can face as refugees or people seeking asylum living in Scotland. This gave the opportunity for

stakeholders to reflect on the different experiences individuals may have and to consider steps which could be taken to ensure that actions are planned in a way that take account of the barriers and particular needs of some groups.

New Scots has been designed to have a positive impact on all aspects of integration for refugees, people seeking asylum and other forced migrants living in Scotland. It also recognises that integration is a multi-directional process which needs to involve communities that refugees and people seeking asylum are settling in. Therefore the Strategy has potential to have positive impacts on the broader population and help to support the development of more resilient and inclusive communities.

Changes in immigration policy can impact on refugees and people seeking asylum. Through partnership and collaboration, the strategy will ensure that concerns of those with lived experience and those supporting refugees will be raised with UK Government.



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