

Is the public library included? An analysis of local government documentation on the integration of forced migrants in Scotland

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Abstract

Introduction. *Library and information science researchers identify public library roles in the integration of forced migrants into local communities. Here an analysis of formal documentation issued by local authorities allowed for an exploration of public libraries as services to aid the integration of forced migrants in Scotland.*

Method. *In 2021, 23 Scottish local authorities responded to Freedom of Information requests to supply documentation on the integration of forced migrants.*

Analysis. *Inductive thematic analysis was conducted on 141 files. Complete coding resulted in 44 consolidated codes and 4 candidate themes.*

Results. *Scottish local authority documentation primarily records provision for the integration of forced migrants, rather than advocates policy or guidance. The local authorities focus mainly on housing, education, and health, with close attention to the legal context, in efforts to address forced migrant integration needs. Public libraries feature only occasionally in the documentation: as services that support orientation and/or provide leisure facilities. Their potential to contribute to meeting information needs, or supporting literacy and learning, is not considered.*

Conclusions. *The integration of forced migrants is an important priority of Scottish local authorities, but one that does not currently acknowledge the roles that public libraries play in such endeavours.*

Topic areas: Library studies

Keywords: Public libraries; migration

Introduction

This paper is concerned with the perceived role of Scottish public libraries in the integration of newcomer populations who have entered the country as a result of forced migration. Forced migration is a migratory movement prompted by pressure, compulsion, or coercion (IOM, 2019). It relates to refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons.

In this paper ‘forced migrant’ refers to both refugees and asylum seekers. This usage of the term recognises the different treatment of each designation in UK legislation. ‘Integration’ is understood as the process by which migrants become fully incorporated into a receiving society (Oduntan and Ruthven, 2019 p. 792). The meaning of this term also implies that the receiving society accepts and incorporates aspects of the forced migrants’ background into itself (Gsir and Mescoli, 2015).

It has been demonstrated in prior research that public libraries contribute to the integration of forced migrants into the receiving society in several ways. The research reported here explores the extent to which formal documentation issued by local government plans for, and recognises, such contributions in Scotland. This work is novel as the first study of this nature, i.e. one that explores the role of public libraries in the integration of forced migrant populations on the basis of documented local government policy.

First the research context is established with an overview of background literature on forced migration and national policies, and research of relevance to public libraries and the integration of forced migrants. Then follows the research questions and a description of the

research approach: data collection from local authorities by Freedom of Information requests, and inductive thematic analysis of 141 documents. The results show that public libraries feature in this documentation. However, their mentions are very limited, and the full range of services evident in the extant literature on public libraries and forced migrants is not reflected in these formal records of provision. This raises questions about the extent to which valuable work undertaken by public library services that could help forced migrant population settle in their new communities is acknowledged, and may indicate that public libraries in Scotland are under-exploited in this respect.

Research context

Forced migration and national policies in the UK

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) reported a global figure of 30.5 million displaced forced migrants at the end of 2020, up from 30.2 million in 2019 (UNHCR, 2020; UNHCR, 2021a). In line with the steady increase of international forced migration, Scotland receives large numbers of forced migrants. This figure has shown growth in recent years, as shown in Table 1.

Year	Number of refugee arrivals in Scotland under resettlement scheme	Number of asylum seekers not yet granted leave to remain in Scotland
2020	128 (Home Office, 2022a)	32,296 (Home Office, 2022b)
2021	1,251 (Home Office, 2022a)	38,339 (Home Office, 2022b)

Table 1: Growth in number of forced migrants in Scotland 2020-2021

Despite this growth, the most recent official figure for the entire population of Scotland (June 2020), records 409,000 non-British Scottish residents, representing 7.6% of the total Scottish population (National Records of Scotland, 2021).

As forced migrants continue to seek sanctuary, countries deemed safe, such as the UK, develop policies to address their responsibilities under the 1951 Convention on the status of refugees (UNHCR, 2010). Indeed, at the time of writing the *Nationality and borders bill* (proposed legislation to regulate the provision of nationality, asylum, and immigration) is under consideration in the UK House of Lords (Bill 187, 2021-2022). Whether the bill contains sufficient provision to support forced migrants or undermines the 1951 convention, is a controversial topic (UNHCR, 2021b).

In the field of Forced Migration Studies, legislative developments are of particular concern. This is due to their impact on all aspects of the forced migration process, including policy development, and its implementation at local levels. For example, Niemann and Zaun (2018) note that increased numbers of forced migrants prompt the enactment of policy in a manner that is stricter than it might have been in the past. In the case of the UK, policy implementation differs across its constituent countries due to devolved powers (e.g. Mulvey, 2015; 2018). Of relevance to the empirical study discussed in this paper is the scope of such powers in Scotland. Local governments in Scotland are responsible for the following: (1) provision of mandatory duties e.g., provision of education; (2) permissive powers e.g., recreation services; and (3) regulatory powers e.g., environmental health (Mygov.scot, 2017). While the issue of asylum and seeking refuge is an area over which the Scottish Government has no control (Scotland Act 1998), it does take charge of many social service provisions at local level, such as education, social care and adequate library facilities for all persons resident in their area (Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973). Through services such as education and social care, local governments in Scotland There are indications that provision related to the integration of forced migrants in Scotland may be more compassionate than is the case in the rest of the UK (Mulvey, 2018).

Prior research of relevance to public libraries and the integration of forced migrants

Migration is a growth area of library and information science research (Lloyd, 2017), covering topics such as information behaviour and needs (e.g. Hassan and Wolfram, 2019; Lloyd, 2017; Lloyd et al., 2013; Marshall et al., 2020; Martzoukou and Burnett, 2018) and public library use (e.g. Audunson et al., 2011; Salzano et al., 2020; Shepherd et al., 2018). Here all types of migrant populations - forced migrants, immigrants, international students, and migrant workers – are discussed (albeit that the first two groups are often treated as a single population (Lloyd, 2017 p. 35), despite their differences (Marshall et al., 2020 p. 849)).

In this prior research it has been demonstrated that public libraries are well situated to support integration of migrant populations (e.g., Audunson et al., 2011; Grossman, 2021; Johnston, 2016; 2018; Khoir et al., 2017; Vårheim 2014). For example, public libraries are sites for the generation of social capital between different communities (e.g., Audunson et al., 2011; Grossman, 2021; Khoir et al., 2017; Vårheim, 2014.). Here newcomers can gain familiarity with the norms of the receiving society (e.g. Audunson et al., 2011), and meet their information needs on a wide range of topics including employment, health, language, literacy, and volunteering (Appleton et al., 2018; Audunson et al., 2011; Barr-Walker, 2016; Grossman et al., 2021; Johnston 2016 and 2018; Khoir et al., 2017; Vårheim, 2014). More specifically, public libraries offer targeted services focused on improving integration, such as activities aimed at enhancing language skills (Audunson et al., 2011). For example Johnston (2016, 2018) and Johnston and Audunson (2019) have demonstrated that conversation-based programming at public libraries has a positive effect on the integration of migrants into a local community.

Library and information science researchers have also noted that public libraries are often missing in the discussions of the information needs and behaviours of forced migrants in the wider literature (e.g., Hassan and Wolfram, 2019; Martzoukou and Burnett, 2018). Such work fails to recognise that meeting information needs related to understanding the law, accessing education, social services and healthcare systems, finding employment, and overcoming language barriers (Hassan and Wolfram, 2019 p. 3), as well as the development of information literacy (Lloyd et al., 2013), can all be addressed in public library settings.

Method

Research questions

The main themes from the literature cited above were used to create a loose conceptual framework for an exploration of the role that public libraries play in forced migrant integration, particularly in the development of social capital language skills, and literacy. Given that this literature furnishes evidence that public libraries provide a range of services that can be accessed by forced migrants to support their integration, it follows that documented local government policies would be expected to reflect this in the Scottish context.

This study sought to assess this assumption through consideration of two research questions:

Research question 1: In what ways is the integration of forced migrants approached in the formal documentation of policies followed by local authorities in Scotland?

Research question 2: In what capacity are public libraries included in the formal documentation of policies followed by local authorities in Scotland which address the integration of forced migrants?

Data collection

Scotland is divided into 32 areas of local government. Each has an elected council tasked with the provision of public services (including forced migrant integration), known as a ‘local authority’ (Mygov.scot 2020). Some local authority documentation is publicly published by local authorities. The rest is unavailable unless requested through the *Freedom of information (Scotland) Act 2002*. The Act allows individuals access to any recorded information from a Scottish public authority (including local authorities) by making a ‘freedom of information request’ (Scottish Information Commissioner, 2018).

To access policies related to forced migrant integration that were not yet publicly available, in June 2021 all 32 local authorities of Scotland were approached with the request below. This used the wording *refugees and asylum seekers* to avoid potential confusion of recipients unfamiliar with the term *forced migrants*.

I am requesting documents which have information about the integration of refugees and asylum seekers into [local authority name]. This includes, but is not limited to, the Syrian Vulnerable People Resettlement Scheme and the UK Resettlement Scheme. I will be using this information for my PhD research. Textual analysis will be used to help provide a clear picture about how local authorities serve refugees and asylum seekers, and what specific services are mentioned. This will help to provide context for interviews of individuals who provide services for refugees and asylum seekers. If clarification on my request is needed, please contact [email].

It is acknowledged that there are drawbacks to attempts to access information from local authorities by freedom of information requests. For example, the material returned may be incomplete or irrelevant. However, in the face of a lack of readily available documentation relevant to this study on the local authorities’ public-facing web sites, this approach for data collection was deemed the most appropriate. The pattern of response as follows:

- 15 authorities responded within the 20-day deadline set by the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002
- 12 responses were returned within two months, the delay attributed to decreased availability of staff during the COVID-19 pandemic
- 1 response came in November 2021, 5 months after the request was made
- Total 28 responses from 32 local authorities

The final response was received when data analysis was already in process. It was included in analysis, and marked the cut-off for any further responses.

Five responses indicated that the requested information had already been published, with a link to the appropriate repository. These repositories were then searched for the relevant files. Three local authorities replied that they did not hold the requested information. In one case the information was withheld on the grounds of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 exemption: Section 38(1)(b).

The initial data set included 149 files from 23 local authorities, the distribution of which is given in Table 2. In addition to these, two further files related to national and global policies on the integration of forced migrants were discovered, one from the United Kingdom and one

from the UNHCR. These were added to the data set, bringing the total to 151 files. The initial review of the data set revealed that 10 files were duplicates. This meant that the final data set for analysis comprised 141 files, dating from 2013 to September 2021.

Number of documents returned	Number of authorities returning this number
0	7 authorities
1	5 authorities
2	7 authorities
3	4 authorities
4	1 authority
5	1 authority
6	1 authority
10	1 authority
13	1 authority
20	1 authority
23	1 authority
32	1 authority

Table 2: Results of the Freedom of Information requests

Most of this local authority documentation about the integration of forced migrants takes the form of reports about current provision (76 documents), rather than policy or guidance documents to detail processes that should be undertaken to support integration (11 documents). The remainder provide information for forced migrants (14 documents), or are meeting minutes (12 documents). As a result, their content is largely descriptive.

Data analysis

Before files were examined in detail, document subject codes were developed for each file to indicate the theme of the document (see Table 3).

Document subject code	Number of files	Sample file name
Report	76	Syrian Refugee Resettlement Programme Report 29 January 2020
Documents FOR forced migrants	14	Map of [authority area]
Meeting minutes	12	Executive Committee - Minutes
Guidance documents	8	New Scot Resettlement Guidance
Integration	6	SRS typical journey
Housing	5	Housing Newsletter
FOI request responses	4	Letter of Response_FOI 21_2450348
Legal document	4	UK Home Office 2021_Funding_Instruction
Risk management	4	Audit and Scrutiny Committee
Education	3	Teaching asylum seeker and refugee CYP
Policy	3	UNHCR Resettlement Document
Related to conferences ¹	2	COSLA Annual Conference 2016 – Appendix2

¹ The two documents classed under ‘Related to conferences’ were generated from an event hosted by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA). The first was a presentation about the provision of a digital literacy class, the second an agenda that showed presentations about the reform of forced migrant integration policies. The agenda is included

Table 3: File subject codes

Inductive thematic analysis using NVivo was then conducted on the content of each file using data-derived codes and complete coding (i.e. every instance of the relevant topic was coded) to address the broad nature of the research questions. This exercise generated 47 codes. (It should be noted that in the majority of cases, if the words *asylum seeker*, *refugee*, *unaccompanied asylum seeking children*, or *UASC* were not explicitly stated, data were **not** coded. This also applied for terms such as *the most vulnerable in our community*, *black and ethnic minority backgrounds*, *victims of bias or hate crime*, *migrants*. The only exception was when *migrants* was used. Since this term encompasses all the different types of migrants - forced migrants, economic migrants, and international students - the code *not explicit* was deployed.)

Following initial review of the coded data, the 47 codes were consolidated into 44. From these, six candidate themes were developed, then revised further to ensure the themes related to the research questions (as per practice advised by Braun and Clarke, 2013 p. 234) and to the theme of the conceptual framework described above. After further revision, four candidate themes were confirmed, three of which relate to Research Question 1, i.e. that on the ways in which the integration of forced migrants is approached in the documentation gathered:

1. Roles
2. Identification of need
3. Characteristics of forced migrants

The fourth theme - Libraries and integration – relates to the second research question on the inclusion of public libraries in the local authority documentation on the integration of forced migrants in Scotland.

The codes for each theme were grouped into topic areas. As illustration, Table 4 shows the topic groupings for the theme of Roles.

in the total number of files returned. However, it did not provide enough detail for further analysis.

Topic	Codes within the topic
Asylum process	Asylum process
	Region of origin
	Family reunification
	Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children
Future	Adjustments to current provision
	Adjustments to current provision - COVID-19 specific
	Feedback measures
Listed organisations	Listed organisations
Provision by local authorities	Criminal justice support
	Diet
	Education
	Employment
	Family services
	Finances
	Further education
	Health
	Housing
	Integration
	Language
	Leisure
	Social Services
	Transportation
	Volunteering
Welcoming	
Resettlement area	Resettlement area
UK law	Law-UK
	Asylum Process
	Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

Table 4: Roles - topics and codes

Results

Provision of support for the integration of forced migrants evident in the documentation (research question 1)

The analysis of the data shows that local authorities have an expectation that the integration needs of forced migrants relate primarily to housing, education, and health (including physical and mental needs that resulting from experiences of war). The importance of education and health is further underlined in the frequency with these codes were allocated to the data set: both terms were in the top five for the topic of 'Provision by local authority'. Less frequently mentioned, but also important, are needs related to employment, and diet. Forced migrants' expectations of the provision that can be offered by the receiving country is also an integration need. For example, one document states: *'The model of health care in the UK is very different to that experienced by our families in Syria...Developing an*

understanding and managing the expectations of the health service in the UK has been a key issue'. It is worth noting that information needs are not explicitly discussed in the documentation, although they are implied in some text, particularly in respect of education, language, health, and literacy.

The count of references for public services (Table 5) is indicative of bodies expected to meet these integration needs.

Service	Number of references to the service	Types of references
Housing	376	Current provision Information FOR forced migrants Orientation Required provision Resettlement area
Health	250	Current provision Differences between region of origin and Scotland Information FOR forced migrants Orientation Required provision
Social Services	235	Benefits rights Current provision Orientation Required provision
Employability support	187	Connection to integration Current provision Employed forced migrant statistics Information FOR forced migrants Required provision Training Volunteer
Education	174 ESOL 84; school 47; further/higher 43	Advice for service providers Connection to integration Current provision Differences between region of origin and Scotland Funding Information FOR forced migrants Orientation Required provision Team members
Libraries	11	Leisure Orientation Volunteer

Table 5: Reference to public services

According to the analysis, the key integration need related to the education of forced migrants is competence in English. References to the differing levels of English language attributed to forced migrants regularly co-occur in the data set with identified needs of language support, education, employment, and health. For example, one extract reads: *the skills and experience that our families bring are transferable and it is hoped that improving English language skills will enable many to be able to find work opportunities*'. Discussions of modes of language training acknowledge the extent of this educational need. For example, in one document it is noted '*...some Syrian refugees may not be literate in their own first language and may benefit from picture-based information*'. This indicates the importance of literacy to integration.

The legal requirement of local authorities to ensure that the integration needs of forced migrants are addressed is evident in the code most frequently applied to the whole data set: Law-UK. Legal obligations include, for example, educational provision such as at least 8 hours per week of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) tuition for those over 18, and dedicated school support materials, such as translated teaching resources, for children.

Since UK Law determines the asylum process, and the provision of services to forced migrants differs according to their status (refugees, asylum seekers, and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children), it should be noted that local authority responses to integration needs are not the same for every forced migrant. Key to this is the question of region of origin. In the documents accessed, region of origin is often offered as an explanation for an individual's stage of the asylum process.

Much of the documentation analysed focuses on one particular population: those from Syria who have come to Scotland as part of the Syrian Resettlement Programme (adopted in 2015 as an expansion of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme). Indeed, the number of references to these 'Syrian New Scots' in the data set is approximately four times that for forced migrants from other regions of origin. Since the legal route to settlement in the UK for Syrians is not the same as others, services for this population of forced migrants must take account of this. The large amount of attention paid to one subset of the forced migrant community in Scotland indicates that there may be a lack of balance in integration efforts for forced migrants from other regions of origin. Insufficient guidance to local authority staff on meeting the integration needs of forced migrants from regions other than Syria may risk unserved or underserved communities.

A further artefact of the data set is the expression of negative opinion of UK legislation related to the forced migrants. For example, one excerpt reads:

'Under successive pieces of UK legislation, basic rights and entitlements to public services have been restricted for people with insecure immigration status... This approach... is at odds with the Scottish Government and Local Government's aims, including to eradicate child poverty and create a fairer Scotland.'

The presence of such sentiment indicates a willingness of Scottish local authorities to address comprehensively the needs of forced migrants. This furnishes an example to support the contention that the welfare outlook of Holyrood differs from that of Westminster, allowing the Scottish government to adopt a more compassionate approach to meeting the integration needs of its forced migrant newcomer community (Mulvey, 2018).

The role of public libraries in supporting the integration of forced migrants (research question 2)

The conceptual framework developed from lessons of previous literature (as noted above) influenced the focus of analysis. Thus, the established role of public libraries in supporting the generation of social capital, language skills and literacy guided the generation of the results presented here.

As can be seen in Table 5, public libraries feature at the bottom of the list of public services mentioned in the set of documents. Just five local authorities made the 11 references to public libraries in 10 documents. Three local authorities highlight public libraries as resources of orientation information for forced migrants; one notes that they can provide access to leisure activity as part of a personal integration plan; and the fifth refers to the employment of a local forced migrant as a volunteer within a public library service. On the basis of this analysis, it would be difficult to argue that public libraries are viewed by local authorities as one of the main supports of forced migrant integration in Scotland.

This finding is at odds with the messages of the growing body of research on migration in the library and information science literature, in which a large range of public library services are forwarded as valuable supports of migrant integration (as cited above). However, it reflects

the lack of attention to public libraries in the wider literature on migration, as noted by library and information science researchers such as Hassan and Wolfram (2019) and Martzoukou and Burnett (2018). Similarly, the finding that the epistemic function of public libraries is not acknowledged in the documentation might initially come as a surprise, not least because the provision of information services is readily regarded as their primary function (e.g. Appleton et al, 2018). However, this finding from the empirical study is consistent with the treatment of integration needs throughout the data set, as noted above. Information as an integration need is merely implied in the context of other needs (such as education, language, health, and literacy), rather than made explicit as a standalone requirement. Also of relevance here is that public libraries are not included in discussions in the documents of strategy to support integration, unlike schools, English for Speakers of Other Languages provision, and the National Health Service. As local authorities are responsible for provision of adequate library services to all persons in their authority area (Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973), it would be expected that they would feature in a similar manner to other local authority provisions, such as education.

Taking into account the integration needs identified by the Scottish local authorities from this analysis, and in light of the extant library and information science literature cited above, there are indications that public libraries in Scotland may be under-exploited as services that can contribute to meeting forced migrants' integration needs. For example, throughout the documentation, differing levels of English language proficiency and literacy are identified as characteristics of forced migrants that prompt a need for language and literacy support. The extant literature includes examples to show how such needs can be met by public libraries: see for example the initiatives for language development (e.g. Audunson et al., 2011; Johnson, 2016; 2018; Johnston, and Audunson, 2019); information literacy and health literacy (e.g. Appleton et al, 2018; Barr-Walker, 2016; Grossman, 2021).

Conclusions

This analysis has revealed that Scottish local authorities focus mainly on housing, education (in particular, literacy and language acquisition), and health, with close attention to the legal context, in efforts to address forced migrant integration needs, especially for New Syrian Scots. The message from the library and information science literature that public libraries are key to the integration of forced migrants is not reflected in these findings. Here public libraries merit a few mentions as a resource, rather than as a key service that can meet the integration needs of forced migrant communities. In addition, there are indications that they may be under-exploited as far as provision for forced migrants is concerned.

It should be borne in mind, however, that this analysis has been limited to an examination of documentation from just one set of actors with interests in the integration of forced migrants. On the basis of the research reported here, it would be erroneous to claim, for example, that Scottish public libraries do not play a role in the integration of these populations.

For the larger study to which this analysis of documentation contributes, two further data sets are currently being explored. These comprise interview data with 30 individuals who provide support to forced migrants (including library staff), and focus group data from discussions with forced migrants. The findings from these two further data sets will provide a more rounded view of the role of public libraries in the integration of forced migrants, adding to our understanding of the contribution that public libraries can make to addressing one of the most pressing, and controversial, issues faced by society in the early twenty-first century.

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