



# EVIDENCING THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL BENEFITS AND COSTS OF MIGRATION IN SCOTLAND

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **Introduction**

This pilot study was developed as a collaboration between COSLA Strategic Migration Partnership (CSMP), Glasgow Refugee Asylum and Migration Network (GRAMNet) and the Centre for Russian, Central and East European Studies (CRCEES), University of Glasgow. The project partners were interested in exploring the extent to which localised social and cultural impacts of migration can be evidenced and mapped in order to contribute to policy debates at local, regional or national levels. The project focused on Glasgow and as such is not representative of Scotland as a whole. What is more, it did not focus on one particular group of migrants, although it is acknowledged that there are important differences between groups and it may also be pertinent to study these separately in future.

### **Methodology**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with stakeholders from organisations and services representing a range of areas of policy and practice which involve regular contact with or consideration of issues relating to migration. These included Glasgow City Council Education Services, Glasgow Housing Association, Scottish Government, Scottish Refugee Council as well as other migrant, refugee and community based organisations and initiatives. Interviewees offered their insights, views and experiences from their particular perspectives and areas of expertise. The research culminated in a facilitated workshop involving the interviewees and a number of other practitioners and policy makers who engage with migration from a variety of perspectives. The workshop sought to provide participants with an opportunity to explore means of better informing policy and public debates, decision-making and practice regarding migration and its impacts. This was done with a view to creating opportunities for new and more substantive collaborative research opportunities going forward.

### **Key Themes**

A number of key themes were identified during the course of the research. Emerging in many of the discussions was a sense that cultural diversity and an openness to people coming from other parts of the world were inherently beneficial for Scotland and Scottish society. This reflects the policy stance and approach taken by successive administrations at Holyrood which have sought to attract migrants as a means of growing the economy, tackling the country's acute demographic challenges and creating a more culturally diverse and cosmopolitan society. Experiences of migration, including the opportunity to face up to and find ways of dealing with some of the challenges that migration might bring, were also seen as important ways for Scotland, and cities such as Glasgow, to demonstrate their place in the world. This, it was argued, is necessary and advantageous, not only in terms of facilitating trade links, opening markets and gaining access to the kinds of expertise, skills, talent and experience that migrants might bring, but also in order to

increase qualities of tolerance, inclusiveness and openness to intercultural learning amongst Scottish citizens.

However, alongside this enthusiasm for the benefits that migration can potentially bring, notes of caution were also sounded regarding the sometimes more challenging experiences of migration in practice. Interviewees warned against complacency or overly optimistic assumptions that Scotland or Glasgow are 'naturally' open or welcoming places for new arrivals. On the contrary, they pointed out that especially when migrants or asylum seekers move into or are placed in areas with little former experience of migration and/or where there are pre-existing issues of deprivation, social exclusion and anti-social behaviours, the challenges for both local residents and migrants themselves can be substantial. In such areas, migration is often seen to be at least as challenging as it is beneficial although the vibrancy and multicultural diversity envisaged at the higher levels of policy making are still an aspiration.

There were a range of areas where wider positive impacts and knock-on effects to the benefit of others in an area, community or institution were identified.

- Schools were a setting where this was felt to be particularly noticeable: as well as the development of international links, opportunities for intercultural learning and extracurricular activities, there were felt to be advantages and benefits relating more broadly to teaching practice and schools' openness to learning from one another and from the expertise developed in specialist support units.
- A number of interviewees mentioned that increased cultural diversity in certain parts of Glasgow had changed the 'feel' of the area, softening a tendency for outsiders of any kind to feel vulnerable to attack or harassment and increasing the range of retail and leisure outlets, thus turning rather grim and forbidding streets into much more welcoming places.
- The potential for services to be revitalised or even saved due to their use by migrant communities was an interesting counterbalance to frequently expressed concerns that migrants overburden services and take away resources from local residents.
- Cultural and artistic engagements were viewed as particularly fruitful ways of working across divisions, be they between new migrants and host communities, or older and often deeper divides that migrants by their very presence might help to soften or dilute.

### **Policy Lessons**

There was a general sense, both in the interviews and the workshop discussions, that a positive discourse on migration, recognising the contribution that migrants make, as well as highlighting positive outcomes and impacts at the local level, is required as a means of countering rhetoric which often focusses on the negative impacts and problems associated with migration. It was suggested that more positive interventions, particularly from politicians and the media, could help minimise tensions within communities, whether between various migrant groups and the 'indigenous' population, or between 'old' and 'new' migrants.

The types of interventions adopted 'on the ground' were also discussed by research participants. It was suggested that service providers had, in the past at least, introduced initiatives that seemed to be for the benefit of new migrants only, thus causing resentment from 'host' communities which often felt undervalued and neglected as a result. Interventions that would create benefits for the widest possible range of groups within a particular area or community were therefore perceived to be more appropriate. Similarly, involving the whole community in discussions around migration and its impacts was seen as important, allowing local residents from a range of backgrounds to openly debate and discuss community interests in the context of more nuanced understandings of the differing interests and needs of others.

There was a call for strategic leadership and coordination that would allow the different spheres of government (local, Scottish and UK) to engage and interact with each other and with the third sector and the communities concerned in a coordinated manner. This, in turn, would allow for

more effective planning for, and responses to, migration. It was argued that this had worked best when senior officers from key organisations, together with senior politicians, had taken ownership of issues and provided oversight on an ongoing basis. While it was argued that the positive stance of both the Scottish Government and Scottish local government, through COSLA Strategic Migration Partnership, had provided a political basis for a more coherent approach to migration in Scotland, it was felt that more could be done to ensure that examples of best practice were shared and experiences learned from effectively, both within Scotland and by linking to and learning from examples elsewhere in the UK and beyond.

### **Current and Further Research**

In considering possible avenues for further research, it was recognised that much research contributing to the evidence base on the social and cultural impacts of migration is already planned or underway. These projects include:

- A four year ESRC-funded project focussing on the particular **experiences of migrants from Central Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union in various rural and urban locations across Scotland**, including Glasgow. This will explore the different kinds of resources, networks, structures and services which migrants draw on in order to make themselves materially and emotionally secure within the places where they live and work (*University of Glasgow / University of Swansea, commencing November 2013*).
- A similar smaller scale project focusing on the ways in which **Czech- and Slovak-speaking migrants living in Glasgow** use, interact with and relate to statutory services, support and assistance provided by NGO's and charities, as well as personal networks and more informal forms of support (*University of Glasgow / Glasgow City Council Collaborative PhD, 2010-14*).
- A project investigating the idea of **a new type of 'problem' neighbourhood in European countries where long-settled black minority ethnic and white communities live alongside new migrants escaping persecution and extreme poverty**. This Glasgow-based research will focus on the nature of social contact in these communities and the associated implications for public policy (*University of Glasgow PhD, 2011-15*).
- A small scale project, developed as a direct outcome of the pilot research, will consider the **impact of migrant children in Glasgow schools**. It has been suggested that the presence of migrant children has influenced the approach of teachers and students alike with regard to issues of tolerance and cultural diversity, and has had a direct impact on school attainment levels. This research will consider such assertions and seek to build a picture of the actual impact that migrant children and families have had in the city's schools (*GRAMNet Collaborative Masters Dissertation – University of Glasgow / COSLA Strategic Migration Partnership / Glasgow City Council, Summer 2013*).
- Research on the **impact of migration on children who have moved to Scotland in recent years**. This ESRC-funded project has considered the particular life experiences of Eastern European migrant children in Scotland and explored their experiences, adaptation and coping strategies in their new country of residence. The research also looked at their experiences of service use and the barriers that they faced in this regard and particular recommendations for improving policy and practice going forward are currently being disseminated (*University of Strathclyde, since 2008*).
- AHRC-funded research into **the way in which different migrant populations use interpreting services in health care settings**. This small scale qualitative research project brings together the experiences of health care practitioners, migrant services users and interpreters and aims to improve practice by identifying underlying communication issues in a range of settings. It is hoped that it will also provide a useful case study into diverse migrant groups and their needs, and the manner in which they interact with different services and with other communities (*University of Glasgow, 2012-13*).

It is hoped that projects such as these will inform any further research that is conducted in this area and, indeed, that these projects might even be informed by the findings from this pilot

research. There may also be scope for interested parties to commission shorter term studies which might piggy-back on these ongoing projects, reducing costs and set-up times and mutually enhancing both pieces of research.

Aside from such ongoing research, it is clear that there are still gaps in the evidence base and a more complete picture of impacts across Scotland is required. As such, the research partners have also identified specific areas where further research and collaboration would be welcome. These include:

- **Research with a more explicit focus on rural areas.** Perhaps unsurprisingly, research on the impacts of migration often tends to focus, either partially or completely, on urban environments because that is where most migrants are to be found. However, it could be that small numbers of migrants are having a considerable impact on rural areas and that this is being overlooked. Detailed qualitative research into more remote, rural case studies could produce important insights into the realities, challenges and benefits of migration in such contexts for both migrant and host communities. We therefore highlight this as an opportunity for targeted PhD scholarship funding under the ESRC/Scottish Government Collaborative Studentships Scheme.
- **The analysis of various secondary data sources in order to obtain a more coherent understanding of the impacts of migration on our communities.** There is a wealth of data that points to the impacts of migration in and across particular communities and localities, including research undertaken by academics, think tanks, public, private and third sector organisations. However, there has been limited work to map such work as a means of informing future research projects. It is therefore proposed that one or more small scale research projects, perhaps undertaken by Masters students under the GRAMNet Collaborative Masters Dissertation initiative, or by a GRAMNet intern, are developed which seek to consider the secondary data sources that could inform research into the impacts of migration. Such research could be undertaken in conjunction with external bodies such as the Scottish Government or the Migration Advisory Committee, both of which may well have an interest in such a baseline being established.

The research partners would also welcome increased engagement between politicians, policy-makers and practitioners regarding the various impacts of migration in our communities and have been exploring the possibility of developing **a series of 'working breakfasts' and briefings** focussing on different aspects of the migration debate. Further to GRAMNet's successful hosting of a Migration Dinner involving politicians from across the political spectrum in October 2012 there would seem to be an appetite for such initiatives to be developed, while initial discussions have also taken place regarding the possibility of **a migration conference** later in 2013. Developments such as these are likely to be particularly beneficial in the light of the forthcoming referendum on Scottish independence in 2014 and could provide an opportunity for informed debate and discussion on the role that migration is likely to play in the country's future.

## **Conclusion**

This project was viewed, from the outset, as providing a stepping stone to further research that the research partners hoped would inform future policy discussions, approaches and interventions at a local, national and UK level. As such, options for future research have been suggested, from small scale projects conducted by students or interns through to much more detailed qualitative research, while options for positive engagement and discussion have been highlighted too. There is also much research already underway and this too has been highlighted. It is hoped that the gaps identified in this research can both inform such existing projects and build momentum which will lead to the commissioning of further research projects in future. In developing these options, it is hoped that research into the social and cultural impacts of migration will play an increasingly important role in informing the migration debate going forward.