

Press release: Embargoed until 00.01 Thursday 26 June 2014

How are Scottish Local Authorities dealing with immigration policy?

New research from the ESRC Centre for Population Change (CPC) has been examining how Local Authorities in Scotland plan for and respond to international migration. With the Scottish Government making it clear that it is keen to attract migrants to Scotland, this research looks at the Local Authorities' responses in terms of service provision and community integration. It has found that Local Authorities generally feel confident and better equipped to deal with immigration, however it has uncovered concerns that insufficient resources could limit their capacity to welcome migrants to their communities.

The research, undertaken as part of the ESRC Future of the UK and Scotland programme by Helen Packwood, Professor Allan Findlay and Dr David McCollum at the University of St Andrews, focused on 16 Local Authority areas, ranging from cities to remote regions. It raises questions about how the concerns and arguments of local policy-makers can be better represented in national debates about immigration policy.

The 2011 Census data shed fresh light on the increase of the foreign-born population in Scotland, with urban areas in particular, such as Aberdeen and Edinburgh, seeing a rapid growth since 2001. However in other areas, such as Inverclyde, North and South Ayrshire, only a small proportion of the population was born abroad.

The research has found that:

- Local Authorities viewed immigration as a means of stabilising demographic challenges, such as ageing and population decline, but some expressed concerns about community cohesion and long term integration.
- Only a minority of Local Authorities viewed immigration as purely a means of addressing local labour shortages.
- Insufficient resources were cited by all Local Authorities as a constraint on their capacity to welcome migrants to their communities.
- There is great variation across the country in terms of how local government plans for and responds to migration. Local Authorities were found to respond to immigration in one of three ways; being proactive, reactive or less active.

“The ability of local authorities to manage migration is of significance because it will be a key determinant of whether Scotland can successfully attract and retain the immigrants it needs to grow its population and economy,” says Ms Packwood. “This study highlights the challenge of devising national immigration policy without adequate dialogue with local policy and decision makers.

Although the Local Authorities in this study generally felt more confident and better equipped to deal with an increase in immigrants than previously, they were conscious of balancing the needs of existing communities with the opportunities created by new

arrivals. Enhancing communication within tiers of government could ensure that migration policy is more responsive, reflective and better informed. This may also ensure greater consistency of approaches, ensuring all Local Authorities exceed their statutory obligations in relation to immigration. “

- Ends -

The research findings will be published as part of the CPC Briefing Paper series ‘Engaging with immigration policy on the ground: A study of Local Authorities in Scotland’ on 26 June 2014 and can be downloaded for free at http://www.cpc.ac.uk/publications/cpc_briefing_papers.php

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About the ESRC Centre for Population Change

- The ESRC Centre for Population Change was established in January 2009. Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council it is the UK's first research centre on population change. Based jointly at the Universities of Southampton, St. Andrews, Edinburgh, Strathclyde and Stirling, in partnership with the National Records of Scotland and the Office for National Statistics, it aims to improve the understanding of the key drivers and implications of population change. The Centre is directed by Professor Jane Falkingham, with co-investigators Professor Maria Evandrou and Professor Elspeth Graham. www.cpc.ac.uk
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- The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) is the UK's largest organisation for funding research on economic and social issues. Details about the ESRC's Future of the UK and Scotland activities are available at the websites <http://www.futureukandscotland.ac.uk/> and <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/scotland>
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