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## Micro-level Initiatives to Facilitate the Integration of Resettled Refugees

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### Abstract

*Integration, a two-way process involving refugees and the host population, is a politically contentious issue. Successful integration of newcomers in a receiving community is required to create a cohesive society. Yet, there is still little understanding of how integration strategies are employed at a community level. This paper explores how micro-level activities such as education in local schools, lifelong learning and community activities delivered within the council area influence integration of refugees. It is based on a case study of one of the Scottish councils which decided to welcome Syrian refugees in 2015 and had no prior experience of refugees' relocation. The findings showed the role of micro-level initiatives in the successful integration and proved that even a council with no prior experience of relocating refugees could build a cohesive community upon their arrival.*

**Keywords:** refugees; Scotland; integration; schools; education.

### Introduction

European states have received millions of refugees since 2015 what required communities which previously did not have an experience of resettling refugees to welcome them. This created challenges to how newcomers could be integrated. The paper presents the single case study discussing how integration is applied at a community level. Firstly, the theoretical framework of integration and micro-level interventions are discussed. Secondly, the reader is introduced to the background of the refugee situation in Scotland. Methodology, findings and discussion sections follow.

The term 'integration' remains unclear in the literature and policy (Castles et al., 2002; Spencer, 2011). Robinson (as quoted by Castles, et al., 2002, p.123) called the term 'chaotic', However, integration assumes that newcomers settle permanently in the new environment (Favell, 2001). This paper understands integration as a two-way process of change and adaptation by both refugees and the host population (Ager & Strang, 2004; Berry, 1997). The theory of acculturation (Berry, 1997, 2006) separates integration from other concepts: separation, assimilation and marginalisation. Only integration allows both groups to retain their ethnic and cultural identity and actively interact between each other (Berry, 2006).

What constitutes successful integration is still debated (Crisp, 2004). It requires 'durable solutions' (Crisp, 2004, p. 1) and change in both refugees and the host population to become a cohesive community (Ager & Strang, 2008). The United Kingdom (UK) has a long-term experience of integrating refugees, and thus over the years practitioners and academics developed a framework which acts as a middle-range theory to analyse integration (Ager & Strang, 2004; Ager & Strang,

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2008; Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019). The shaping of the framework was robust- it included four components: literature and documentary analysis, fieldwork, secondary analysis of cross-sectional survey data and verification of findings with stakeholders such as policymakers (Ager & Strang, 2008). Academics from seven different institutions have developed a recent version of the framework (Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019). It specifies four different principles of successful integration. Firstly, it is multi-directional as it requires the cooperation of newcomers, host population and service providers. Secondly, no aspect of the framework is more important than others. Thirdly, the success is the responsibility of all actors such as local authority, central government and employers. Lastly, it is context-specific- no golden rule exists to define the success of integration. Instead, this success should be measured by progressive development over time.

The integration framework (Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019) is structured around fourteen domains which are grouped in four headings: markers and means, social connections, facilitators, and foundation. Markers and means assist in exploring the context of integration. Only if refugees are employed, they can fully be independent and integrated (Ager & Strang, 2008). Good housing conditions are essential, but the quality of neighbourhoods is more relevant to newcomers (ibid). However, without secured housing refugees do not get involved in other domains of integration (Mulvey, 2015; Phillimore & Goodson, 2008). Formal education such as schools are the most important place to support refugees, especially adolescents who can improve their language skills and mix with local peers (Ager & Strang, 2008).

**Table 1.** Integration framework by Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019

Headings	Domains				
Markers and means	Work	Housing	Education	Health and Social Care	Leisure
Social connections	Bonds	Bridges		Links	
Facilitators	Language and Communication	Culture	Digital Skills	Safety	Stability
Foundation	Rights and Responsibilities				

The domain of health explores the overall experience with health and social care services (ibid). In the last version of the framework, the domain 'leisure' was added to cover activities which allow newcomers to develop knowledge about the host community and thus build rapport (Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019). Social connections focus on relations with people sharing similar cultural and religious background (bonds), individuals from other cultural groups, (bridges) and institutions (links) developed through settling in the new environment (ibid). Facilitators are factors which remove barriers during the integration process (Ager & Strang, 2008). Understanding the language and culture of the host culture is necessary to build links with the local population (Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019). Better language skills result in more trust and better access to additional sources of support (Kearns & Whitley, 2015). Safety covers issues around trust with the police and if there are any incidents of prejudice or hate crime towards refugees (Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019). Length of residence in the area is a factor in successful integration (Kearns & Whitley, 2015). Stability of newcomers' lives ensures that they can enjoy the fruits of other domains without a regular change of their surroundings (Ager & Strang, 2008). Digital skills are a new domain. In the digitalised world,



refugees need to understand and access all ways of communication (Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019). Lastly, only rights and responsibilities are placed within the foundation which explores how refugees exercise their privileges and duties (ibid). Without understanding what their rights are, refugees cannot enjoy other domains of integration. Successful integration in any of these headings depends on cooperation between refugees, the host population and local stakeholders.

Previous research utilised and evaluated the integration framework (Phillimore, 2012; Phillimore & Goodson, 2008; Platts-Fowler & Robinson, 2015). It has some limitations. Platts-Fowler and Robinson (2015) criticised it for oversimplifying the concept of integration. Phillimore (2012) found it too poor to analyse and theorise how different domains are interrelated. Despite its drawbacks, the framework captures through its domains main concepts around the integration of refugees (Platts-Fowler & Robinson, 2015). As data for this paper was collected in the UK, the framework would also take into consideration the British context.

This paper perceives local interventions to support integration as micro-level initiatives. These can be introduced by the local authority, charities, schools, police and other stakeholders. Academics have been discussing them for a long time. Schools play a vital role in pro-refugee advocacy (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012) and have a function of explaining ‘rules of the game’, how one should behave, and what the consequences of breaking generally accepted principles are (Heyneman, 2002). When schools offer language groups for refugee pupils, it may limit their opportunity to mix with other children (Ager & Strang, 2008). Education has to be provided in an organised and right manner to speed up the integration of newcomers in society (Matthews, 2008). When there is a small number of children refugees, it may be difficult for schools to justify dedicating limited resources to a small group of pupils (Block et al., 2014a). However, Pagani (2014) argues that cohesive groups of young people are built through dialogue and acknowledgement of diversity. School-led activities include actions to welcome refugees, peer-support schemes and assisting local pupils in understanding refugees’ experiences (McBride et al., 2018). Acquiring new knowledge does not stop when one leaves formal education, but continues throughout adult life. Lifelong learning is voluntary and includes informal learning, which shapes attitudes and behaviours (Scottish Government, 2003). English language café assist newcomers in learning the language (Sorgen, 2015). Sport offers a distraction from everyday worries and thinking about the situation in their home country and gives a sense of belonging through a game (Stone, 2018). Media coverage impacts the views of host population toward refugees, for example, tabloids often run negative campaigns towards newcomers, framing them as ‘others’ and encourage hostile reactions (Matthews & Brown, 2012). For micro-initiatives it would be the coverage of local newspapers which would focus on refugees living in the area. Volunteers have an important role in delivering some of the micro-initiatives (Jones, 2014). Despite all these studies, there is still little understanding of what can be done on a micro level to support the integration of refugees (Bowes et al., 2009). This paper moves away from looking only at one initiative but shall analyse the collective impact of them on the integration of refugees within one area.

Since its beginning, the Syrian Civil War forced over five million people to seek refuge in neighbouring countries (OCHA, 2019). In response to the humanitarian emergency, the UK government responded by promising to resettle up to 20,000 Syrians from Middle East camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt and Turkey within five years (Home Office, 2017). Local councils would volunteer to host refugees. Relocated refugees were identified jointly by the Home Office and the United Nations Refugee Agency. A local government had to consider whether they had the infrastructure and support network to provide the appropriate assistance for refugees, as there was

the limited backing offered by the central government (Home Office, 2017). Scotland was assigned 10% of the UK's total share and reached its target of receiving Syrian refugees or as they are called in Scotland 'New Scots' three years before the deadline (COSLA, 2017).

It is still not clear how relevant the local context is in the integration experience (Platts-Fowler & Robinson, 2015). Thus, this paper draws on a single case study design as it allows to conduct nuanced account of how micro-level initiatives improve integration within the local context and to analyse in-depth unique cases (Yin, 2014). Usually, researchers studied area with a high number of refugees such as Glasgow (Deuchar, 2011; Kearns & Whitley, 2015; Strang et al., 2018; Wren, 2007). Consequently, the second aim of this paper is to explore how a community, which had no prior experience of welcoming refugees, approach their integration. This is one of the first papers which has utilised the updated integration framework (Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019).

### **Research methods and participants**

A qualitative descriptive single case study approach (Yin, 2014) was utilised to provide an empirically-reached understanding of the integration process within a Scottish council area. The local authority decided to take around one hundred refugees. The area had not been traditionally a destination for refugees or asylum seekers, but it is multicultural. The council decided to approach the integration process through a partnership group involving key local stakeholders to ensure everyone's voices were heard. The Syrian refugee population included both families with children and single adults. They were of mixed ages, had varying employment experiences (coming from both labour and professional backgrounds), and their knowledge of English was limited. Refugees came from different parts of Syria and religious groups- thus, they supported opposing sides of the conflict.

Data came from three sources. The Lexis Library database was searched for articles in local newspapers which included the word 'refugee\*' and were published after the Council announced that it would invite refugees in the area. The initial search of newspapers identified 282 articles which were screened for relevance (a reference to refugees living in the area of the study) and 273 were excluded. A manual search of a community-led magazine added another article about refugees. In total, eight newspaper articles were included in the analysis. Secondly, the council website was searched for minutes of committee meetings discussing the integration process. Lastly, ten semi-structured qualitative interviews with community stakeholders recruited through snowball sampling were conducted. Each interviewee was assigned a random number. Table 2 shows interviewees' demographics. Interviews with elites such as policymakers can be challenging as they tend to exaggerate and misrepresent facts in their answers (Berry, 2002); thus, these interviews took place at the last stage of data collection. Participants needed to ensure that whatever they shared would not impact negatively on the refugees. When requested, interviewees could see their data, and on two occasions, alterations were made to ensure the confidentiality of refugees.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed or in-depth notes were taken. Interviews, media coverage and council papers were uploaded in NVivo, utilised to support the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data were coded deductively guided by the integration framework (Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019), which mapped the integration process in the studied area.

The results of this study have some limitations. As this is a single case study, the results from this research cannot be thought to adequately represent the integration strategies of all of 32 Scottish local authorities or other parts of the UK. Overall, Scotland is slightly more open to migration than



England but still faces challenges (Hunter & Meer, 2018; Trevena, 2018), so the discussed experience here may not be transferable to areas where the arrival of refugees is more contentious political issue. This research also focused only on one particular nationality of refugees, which may not necessarily be representative of the general refugee population.

**Table 1.** Demographics of interviewees

Participant number	Community role of interviewee	Ethnicity and language skills.
4	Councillor	Ethnic minority
1	Member of local planning board	British
3, 6, 8	Employee of local charity	Two British and one ethnic minority
7	Journalist and activist	Ethnic minority and speaks Arabic
2	Police officer	British
9, 10	School teacher	British
5	Interpreter	Ethnic minority and speaks Arabic

The Ethics Officer granted ethical approval for this study at the Politics and International Department, School of Social Science, University of Aberdeen. Additional ethical issues are present when researching vulnerable groups such as refugees to ensure that a researcher does no harm. (Block et al., 2014b; Jacobsen & Landau, 2003). This research took place during the first months of resettlement in the area and based on stakeholders' advice- it was decided not to interview refugees.

*'[To] protect their interest. There are for a start a vulnerable group and not everyone is particularly welcome. There is a lot of stigma of bad press' (Interviewee 6).*

In the future, it may be worth returning to the area and exploring the perspectives and experiences of refugees on the events and their impacts discussed here.

## Findings

All micro-level initiatives, identified in data, were mapped within the integration framework. Table 3 presents the results of these findings which will be discussed within the four headings: markers and means, social connections, facilitators and foundations. Participants themselves recognised that one intervention to improve integration is not enough but a holistic approach is required.

*'Something that is being focused on very heavily throughout the city is reducing the number of those who are experiencing social isolation, and raising the awareness of the impact this can have on people's health and wellbeing. This isolation has been evidenced to be due to a number of factors such as certain disabilities and mobility challenges, access to and affordability of transport, or even the ways in which services and partners communicate. For example, to ensure that there are translation services and other formats for those who may not be familiar with the English language or even certain forms of language such as spoken or written.' (Interviewee 1)*

**Table 4.** Micro-level initiatives to facilitate integration. Adopted from Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019

<b>Markers and means</b>	<b>Work</b>	<b>Housing</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Health and Social Care</b>	<b>Leisure</b>
	Unemployed but did volunteering.	Accommodation provided by the local authority in an affluent area of the city.	Children attended school and offered additional English classes.	Trauma and pre-relocation health issues present. Registered to and accessed health services.	Getting refugees involved in the local groups in small steps, e.g. attending a football match.
<b>Social connections</b>	<b>Bonds</b>	<b>Bridges</b>		<b>Links</b>	
	Building links with the local Muslim community. Regular city-wide events to celebrate multiculturalism. Positive media coverage.	Exhibition and theatre play to highlight the journey of refugees. Befriending with local volunteers. Football clubs for young people. Talking about refugees at school.		Local charities, religious organisations worked together with public bodies.	
<b>Facilitators</b>	<b>Language and Communication</b>	<b>Culture</b>	<b>Digital skills</b>	<b>Safety</b>	<b>Stability</b>
	English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes.	Local events to celebrate diversity.	-	Training for civil servants, police officers and teachers.	-
<b>Foundations</b>	<b>Rights and responsibilities</b>				
	Information leaflets in Arabic Drop-in sessions 24/7 phone line in Arabic Provision of interpreters so refugees can access services				

### Markers and means

When the fieldwork was conducted, none of the refugees had a job. When they were professionals, they could not prove their qualifications or their diplomas were not recognised in the UK. For others, the language barrier was a challenge in finding employment. However, the majority volunteered with local charities to have a sense of purpose and show gratitude to the community, which welcomed them. After data collection, refugees wanted to thank some of the charities which supported them during the initial relocation period, and they organised a charitable evening with Syrian food and music to raise money for these charities. Refugees were eligible for social benefits and received material support from local charities.

The council provided accommodation to refugees in an affluent area of the city to ensure that they have an adequate living standard and settle in the safe neighbourhood. Some of these houses



were rented from private landlords, and all were equipped with essential household items. All refugees were registered to primary health providers. Some of them came with pre-relocation health issues such as trauma and these used specialised services.

Refugee children were enrolled in local schools – many of them had had an extended break from formal education due to a lack of schools at refugee camps. They also attended additional English classes. The support workers tried to arrange leisure activities for newcomers, such as a one-day trip to visit another part of Scotland. Activities within the local community were taken on a small step by step basis. Firstly, they took place within Syrians only, and then refugees could have invited their local friends. Some initiative took place thanks to the support of local organisations. For example, Syrian families received free tickets to attend a football match at the local stadium. They went there as a group and were accompanied by a bilingual support worker.

### **Social connections**

Sport, next to music, is a universal language which can bring diverse communities together. A local football association offered a range of youth activities in the region. The additional group was set up after school and at school grounds for refugee children to play, with an instructor and an interpreter assisting with communication. Initially, it was a Syrian only group, but that soon changed.

*'After a few sessions they brought their pals from school. At the start, locals and refugees were standing at the opposite sites, but as soon as the game started they mixed.'*  
(Interviewee 3)

As the research was conducted, local coaches were invited to attend equality courses to learn how to work with diverse communities, especially obstacles they may face when training refugees. It was intended for Syrians to join their local teams within their age groups so they could participate in local competitions.

In the neighbourhood areas, there were activities targeting the adult population. Media reported how a local charity organised an exhibition to highlight the journey of refugees on how and why they had to leave their homes. It included images capturing civil war to help the host population experience what newcomers went through. Furthermore, a play about the political situation in Syria and the lives of refugees was played at local festivals. Initiatives targeting the host population aimed to explain and show an identifiable story behind the arrival of refugees. Thus, this allowed the local population to connect with their new neighbours.

In the area, there was a limited number of Arab interpreters, so refugees kept seeing similar faces during appointments. Refugees mostly did not know each other (except their own family), so they felt isolated. Many interpreters and volunteers involved in the local Mosque came from the same region and shared similar experiences with refugees; thus, they started spending time together. This was easily facilitated as they shared the same mother tongue. These befrienders had been living in the area for a long time and were able to provide some useful tips from basic information about the neighbourhood to advice on public services.

*'I walked with families around [area] and showed them streets and interesting places.'*  
(Interviewee 7)

With time, there was also a growing number of volunteers and befrienders coming from non-ethnic minority group who engaged with and supported refugees.

Schools were used as first-line of influencing negative views and stereotypes towards Syrian refugees. Young people often have the same perspectives as their parents.

*'Often the young people in class have the wrong impression of refugees and have the narrow-minded opinion that these people are "coming over here, stealing our jobs and claiming benefits". They have no idea of the terrible situation that is going on in their home country. They often get confused between refugees and migrant workers, thinking that they are all the same.'* (Interviewee 10)

As the teaching curriculum was not specifically designed to assist teachers in discussing these refugees' relocation, additional training for teachers was offered. This was delivered by a local charity specialising in development courses for teachers and youth workers. Sessions were free of charge and open to anyone interested. Learning activities depended on the age groups teachers worked with, for example, primary or secondary school.

*'As for an activity, as it is not a focus of the topic we generally have a class discussion where I highlight the differences between refugees and immigrants. I often remind the pupils that these people are escaping war and trying to keep their families safe and are nurses, doctors, teachers etc.'* (Interviewee 10)

Participants spoke about how they used case studies from training, such as racial diversity in the US, to initiate a discussion with their pupils about Syrian refugees. These activities had an impact on pupils.

*'The pupils are surprised to hear about the terrible conditions [which Syrian refugees endured]'* (Interviewee 10)

Youth-led activities were supported by a local charity which delivered equality workshops to schools and encouraged young people to set up their own equality projects. These would be run within a school and results of projects (from research to artistic work) were shared with colleagues. Young people could present their work at the award ceremony organised by the charity. The aim of this event was to celebrate youth achievements.

Participants pointed out that no matter how much work was done at schools, these positive messages were undermined by some national media. However, local press ran very positive coverage around Syrian refugees resettling in the area. Newspapers focused on fundraising to support newcomers organised by local schools and churches, as well as the successful work of charities and volunteers who support refugees. Media also reported appeals from elected politicians to praise people who raise awareness of why Syrian refugees had to come to Scotland.

The engagement with refugees was coordinated by the partnership of local charities, religious organisations (not only Mosque but also churches were involved) and the public bodies. These shared experiences of engaging with the hard to reach groups and the good practice. Members of the community were consulted on regular basis, for example, when community events were organised. These good links with local Muslim community were key to ensure this event was successful as council employees asked for advice on how to arrange the evening.





*“And then she went to speak to the refugees themselves and we realised that it wasn’t so good idea to do it that time as it was in the middle of Ramadan... and it would be one of the longest days.” (Interviewee 6)*

However, this advice was not always appropriate. During the first event, which brought all newly arrived Syrians, there were two rooms arranged: one for women with children and second for men. Refugees found it unacceptable and decided to be together as one group.

### **Facilitators**

Arabic is the first language spoken by Syrians, and their English skills were described as ‘*not fantastic*’ (Interviewee 5) and ‘*very limited*’ (Interviewee 2). To remedy this, the council arranged weekly, free of charge classes of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). There were separate groups for men and women to respect cultural differences.

Local charities organised yearly events to celebrate diversity through international food, music and dance. A similar idea was employed by the council as Syrians arrived. The event was on a smaller scale and by invitation only. It was mostly attended by people who would work and support refugees in the following months, for example, council employees and volunteers from the local mosque. Volunteers were invited to share their stories of their journey to a new home.

*‘Fascinating, as we spoke with one of the refugees at the table and he was talking about the situation in Syria, and we realised that we don’t know a lot of... to understand their perspective... how they feel.’ (Interviewee 8)*

The evening included traditional Scottish and Arab dances. The former was taught by professional Scottish dancer and the latter by refugees themselves.

Arrival of refugees in the area for the first-time created new challenges for social workers, NHS staff and police officers who had no or limited knowledge of supporting refugees. Thus, civil servants attended internal and external courses. For example, police officers attended intensive diversity training on current equality and hate crime legislation. At a regional level, police designated an officer with in-depth knowledge who could be contacted for advice. External training was provided by a local charity which specialises in working with diverse ethnic and religious groups. The focus of the course was to provide practice examples of how to deal with challenging scenarios.

*‘We were given discrimination case studies (...) one of the cases was of female refugee, who complained to be discriminated by a receptionist because she didn’t cover her face. It was interesting to see that discrimination can be wrongly perceived, as she wasn’t discriminated. It told us equality and mutual understanding needs to work in both ways’ (Interviewee 9)*

This one-off training was perceived by participants as an opportunity to broaden their horizons. It also taught how to avoid cultural misunderstandings and build trust with refugees.

### **Foundations**

Both according to interviewees and official documents, the language barrier was the main challenge for refugees, for example, to access services, thus the local authority provided them with qualified interpreters free of charge. Also, the majority of support workers, who were employed by

the council, spoke Arabic. Upon arrival in the UK, leaflets providing basic information about life in the host country were distributed to refugees. A typical example would be '*Welcome to Scotland. A Guide to Scots Law*' jointly designed by Police Scotland, the Procurator Fiscal Office and New College Lanarkshire (2016). The translated booklet provided an overview of the Scottish legal system, from family and criminal law to where victims of crimes can look for support. However, participants mentioned that not all of the refugees were confident readers and writers in their mother tongue, so they were not convinced that this information was helpful for everyone.

Ongoing support for refugees was arranged through regular drop-in sessions, which were supported by a professional interpreter. Sessions offered the opportunity to not only bring Syrians and their support workers together, but also to raise and discuss challenges faced by newcomers. Syrians were encouraged to bring any materials such as letters or leaflets (including not translated materials) which they were not sure about. For example, some of the refugees brought a letter informing them that they are responsible for obtaining a TV license and should answer to the message or face legal consequences. The less official way of offering advice was set up in partnership with a local Mosque. Volunteers fluent in Arabic run 24/7 phone line for refugees who could call and ask any question on the topic of their choice. Some participants felt that Syrian refugees often trusted their peers more than council employees.

### **Discussion**

These findings showed that micro-level initiatives assisted as a basis for a successful integration process. These could not have happened as a single initiative, but only together acted as the right approach to the successful integration when charities, community and public bodies worked together. This proved that the principle of shared responsibility was vital in achieving integration (Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019). However, this shared responsibility had to be set up and supported by the council officers – thus it would have not developed on its own. These findings presented the captured point of time in the integration process of Syrian refugees. With time, challenges around integration transform but do not cease to exist (Kearns & Whitley, 2015). Stakeholders have to continue these initiatives but also develop new interventions to continue the integration process.

The integration framework (Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019) was a useful tool to map the micro-level initiatives. It was designed for both practitioners and researchers (Ager & Strang, 2008). If more academics start to use this framework, the data around integration initiatives could be more comparable. However, mapping some of the activities was challenging as they overlapped within different domains. Consequently, assigning some of the interventions within the framework was subjective. For example, multicultural events were assigned to both bonds and culture. The latter factor looked at how these events celebrated diversity in the community, whereas the former brought people of similar cultures together. Similarly, receiving free tickets to the football match were assigned to leisure as it was a spare time activity but could have also been in social connections. When refugees watched and cheered on the local team, they built rapport with the host population.

Overall, the framework was appropriate for the analysis as it not only mapped the micro-level initiatives within this case study but also identified what local community failed to address. No interventions were identified within the domains of digital skills and stability. As these were first months since refugees relocated in the area, it was no possible to locate any initiatives within the stability of their integration. Interviewees did not mention how refugees improve their digital skills.



The reason behind could have been that language barrier, and literacy issues were seen for the support workers as priority before moving to modern technology.

The underperforming domain was work as none of the refugees managed to secure employment. Previous studies showed that refugees wanted to be active (Williams, 2006) but experienced lengthy returns to professions they practised in their home countries (Kum et al., 2010) and responded differently to these structural barriers (Piętka-Nykaza, 2015). In this case, local support managed to arrange volunteering opportunities. Thanks to volunteering, refugees found their own way to contribute to the community and thus became ‘good citizens’ (Yap et al., 2010). Successful integration requires not any employment but one which suits the skills of newcomers (Smyth & Kum, 2010). Longer Syrians will rely on social support, less independent and thus cannot fully integrate into the local community.

These findings confirmed some results from previous studies. Keeping links between refugees and social workers and holding regular consultation was essential for successful integration (Phillips, 2006). In contrast to other interventions, some mistakes were avoided. For example, refugees were not settled without prior preparations (Wren, 2007) neither were placed in low-income areas (Kearns & Whitley, 2015). The possible explanation behind avoiding these errors was that previous experiences and advice from national bodies were available (e.g. by the Scottish Refugee Council) to local civil servants who successfully utilised it.

Future research should focus on the comparison of approaches to integration in areas with small and large influxes of refugees. This comparison should utilise both qualitative and quantitative methods collected over long periods to register progress of integration. It should explore differences between male and female refugees as Cheung and Phillimore (2017) pointed out gender impacts the integration process. Literature utilising the integration framework needs to be reviewed to examine if academics always assign similar interventions to the same domain.

## Conclusion

This paper showed that micro-level initiatives were an important factor in the integration process of new refugees in the local community. Local charities, culturally close communities, social workers were vital actors in delivering the initiatives. The strength of these interventions was particularly visible within the heading of social connections where the local community had the leading role. However, other dimensions could not have been successful within the right approach of the local community.

Even a modest number of newcomers required extensive actions taken by a local council to ensure their successful integration. The relocation of Syrian refugees in the area was a learning curve for local officers and policymakers. This case study proved that even a local council which did not have prior experience of welcoming refugees was capable of successfully integrating refugees. However, it required bringing multiple partners and community onboard. Without a proactive and successful strategy at the council level, refugees would not integrate successfully.

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## 580 *Micro-level Initiatives to Facilitate the Integration of Resettled Refugees*

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