



EVENT REPORT

SYMPOSIUM ON REFUGEE POLITICS AT THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

The 'Building Futures' team, in collaboration with the German and Greek Specialist Groups of the Political Studies

Association, organised an all-day Symposium on 'Refugee Politics: Dilemmas and Trade-Offs' which took place at the Scottish Parliament on 15 June 2018. The two Specialist Groups (SG) were the recipients of a 2018 PSA 'Pushing the Boundaries' award which was used to put together a rich and varied programme with speakers and participants from academia, civil society, local authorities, government, as well as refugee communities. The Symposium was co-funded by our 'Building Futures' project (ESRC/AHRC, Global Challenges Research Fund; Award Reference: ES/P005189/1) and the University of the West of Scotland. It explored the dynamics and trade-offs of refugee policies and politics in Germany, Greece and the United Kingdom – and the implications of these for Scotland, at a time when the devolution of immigration policy is being considered.

Colin Beattie, the Member of the Scottish Parliament who sponsored the Symposium, welcomed participants in the iconic Members Room in the shadow of Arthur's Seat. The first session (*'The Problem'*) set the parameters of the debate, with three talks on key aspects of forced displacement. In the opening presentation, Frida Boräng (University of Gothenburg)



observed that there is considerable variation of migration policies between states and argued that the type and size of welfare states may be an influencing factor. Contrary to theories of welfare chauvinism, her analysis of cross-national data showed that a comprehensive welfare state can promote broad social solidarity. Next, Kristin Hermansson and Lesley Doyle (University of Glasgow) presented comparative findings from the 'Building Futures' project from face to face interviews with 1,500 young Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Greece and the UK. They demonstrated that across all three countries young refugees aspire to the employment status they held prior to leaving Syria, with language posing the greatest

obstacle to labour market access and with those in the UK, possessing, across the board, the highest levels of skills and qualifications. In the third presentation, Emilia Pietka-Nykaza and Colin Clark (University of the West of Scotland) critically explored the drivers and narratives of recent refugee movement to Western Europe. They identified five factors that need to be considered in the reception management and integration of refugees: early intervention and prevention, resilience, and agency, recognising vulnerabilities, affording and nurturing partnerships, and ensuring service sustainability.

The second session (*'The Policies'*) of the Symposium explored and evaluated how Germany, Greece and the UK are attempting to manage forced displacement on the ground, generating comparative insights on good practice and unintended consequences. Dorothee Hermanni



(University of Applied Sciences, Brandenburg and Refugee Academy Berlin) reflected on her work with refugees, calling for “eye-level” communication between refugees and citizens of the host state in order to overcome the “us” and “them” dichotomy and develop a participatory policy. Using the second Berlin Masterplan as a case study, she showed that empowering refugees and civil society to have their concerns and solutions around integration, education, and participation heard and considered, is a powerful way to foster cooperation and exchange between refugees and members of the majority society. The Greek case, discussed by Antigone Lyberaki (Panteion University and

SolidarityNow), echoed a similar message. Lyberaki argued that the current framing around refugee issues disadvantages both the host state and those forcibly displaced. Referencing her work as Director of SolidarityNow, she demonstrated that it is both desirable and possible to develop proactive and dynamic policies that empower refugees, which requires closer coordination between civil society and the state. In the third talk, Gareth Mulvey (University of Glasgow), part of the ‘Building Futures’ team, discussed the different experiences of young Syrian refugees in Britain showing that those who claim asylum upon entering the country are more resourceful than those coming through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme but receive less provisions, despite sharing the same legal status. This two-tier refugee system is potentially a significant barrier to integration. Further differences in characteristics and levels of support were noted based on where young Syrians are based, with refugees in Scotland receiving more social welfare, and evaluating key actors more positively than their counterparts in England.

The third session (*'The Politics'*) started with Bill Niven and Amy Williams (Nottingham Trent University) arguing that memory can play a key role in shaping public attitudes towards refugees. They showed that, unlike in Britain, public art in Germany is used to actively remember the migrations associated with the holocaust, post-war expulsions, and East-West movement following the fall of the Berlin wall. Similar concrete “memory” policies, they argued, may be developed in the UK and potentially devolved to the Scottish Parliament. Next, Ian Klinke and Bharath Ganesh (University of Oxford) talked about the rise of “Generation Identity”, a pan-European ethno-pluralist movement which seeks to safeguard “the survival of indigenous Europeans against migration from Africa and the Middle East”. They showed how the movement has exploited social media to spread their message and influence the public debate. Still, they cautioned, aggressive state attempts to eliminate the online presence of the movement may backfire, providing a veil of legitimacy and a sense of martyrdom to the movement. A third presentation from the ‘Building Futures’ project, by Georgios Karyotis and Dimitris Skleparis (University of Glasgow) and Marius Mosoreanu (Babeş-Bolyai University) explored the drivers of public attitudes towards migrants in the UK. Their ‘conjoined’ experiment demonstrated that a utilitarian perspective plays the biggest influence in public preferences across the UK, with a strong public preference for those possessing high skills, especially in England. The reason for migrating is the second strongest attribute, with forcibly

displaced people preferred over those seeking economic opportunities, a normative influence that is particularly pronounced in Scotland. Overall, they concluded, the British public has only partially internalised the key norm of international refugee law, with immigration preferences closely mirroring political discourses across national (England-Scotland) and political (Leave-Remain) lines.

In the final talk, Heaven Crawley (Coventry University) reflected on how we can, and should, rethink the politics of protection. She argued that the ongoing migrant crisis, rather than inevitable, is instead fuelled by the political and policy response to immigration and the persistence of hostile media and political discourses. Research-based policy-making can help reverse this, particularly if the way evidence is utilised in discourse is flipped to highlight a positive message: “If 55% of people think immigration is too high, then 45% of people do not”. Echoing much of the Symposium’s key themes, Crawley proposed an acronym, “BREATH”, of key recommendations: **B**ring people together; **R**emember that it’s not just about migration; **E**nable Migrants to have a voice; **A**mplify the positive; **T**alk to people and build new partnerships; **H**arness technology to share information; and, **E**ngage young people.

The Symposium closed with a roundtable discussion on what a ‘better’ refugee system would look like in Scotland. Representatives of key stakeholders shared their experiences and reflections on Scottish refugee policy, from rights to work and social and economic integration, to the removal of multi-tier systems of protection and support, emphasising the challenges that still need to be addressed. Opening statements were offered by Gary Christie (Head of Policy & Communications, Scottish Refugee Council), Andy Morrison (Chief Officer, Migration, Population and Diversity, Convention of Scottish Local Authorities), Jackie Walder (Policy Manager at Connected Communities in the Scottish Government), as well as Amal Alzin (Syrian refugee) and Valsamma Kuriakose (destitute asylum seeker). Moderated by Allison Phipps (UNESCO Chair in Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts), the discussion raised issues related to the ability of the Scottish Government to legislate in certain areas, highlighting also the important role grassroots initiatives as platforms for continued discussion, such as the New Scots Integration Group, the Central and West Integration Network, GRAMNet, and Refugee Festival Scotland.

The Symposium’s Co-convenors, Georgios Karyotis (Greek Politics Specialist Group) and Hartwig Pautz (German Politics Specialist Group), brought proceedings to a close, emphasising the need to address how migration is (mis)used to leverage political support, with unintended and detrimental consequences for both host states and forcibly displaced migrants. A better refugee system is indeed possible, they noted, one that is designed to overcome the perceived antagonism between the two groups, citizens and refugees. We just need to keep pushing those boundaries.

RefugeePolitics.net

Research on Migration and Asylum

[Home](#) [Research Aims](#) [Our Team](#) [Events](#) [Research News](#)



Building Futures: Aspirations of Syrian Youth Refugees and Host Population Responses in Lebanon, Greece and the UK

Political Studies Association
German Politics

Political Studies Association
Greek Politics

#RefugeePolitics