

# Engaging with the welfare system in Scotland: Central and Eastern European migrants' experiences

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# The SSAMIS Project

## (Social Security and Migrants in Scotland)

- 4-year ESRC funded research project (2013-1017)
- Project aims:
  - to explore links between experiences and perspectives on ‘social security’ and longer term intentions regarding settlement in Scotland (→ focus on longer-term migrants/those intending to settle)
  - to deliver practical outputs, models for best-practice
- Fieldwork (completed):
  - 200 interviews with migrants across several urban and rural locations (Glasgow, Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Angus)
  - 50 interviews with experts (service providers etc.)
  - Observations in places where migrants work, gather socially etc.
  - Visual diaries (photo/video)

## Use of welfare (1)

- Benefits most frequently applied for:
  - Child Tax Credits,
  - Working Tax Credits,
  - Child Benefit,
  - Housing Benefit,
  - Maternity Allowance,
  - more recently – JSA.
- Other popular welfare provision – social housing.













## Use of welfare (2)

- Use of welfare largely dependent on:
  - family status (families with children more likely to use welfare than single persons)
  - attitudes
    - the safety net of welfare provision very much appreciated, especially by families with children (opportunity to live ‘a normal life’ esp. for single mothers)
    - generally negative attitude towards those *‘living on benefits’* and hence *‘giving all of us a bad name’*
    - but – accessing social housing generally not perceived as welfare abuse (but – resentment among the established communities)
  - personal/employment circumstances



## Access to benefits

- Barriers to accessing benefits:
  - lack of knowledge of the system and barriers to accessing formal sources of information, e.g. advice services (→ language, working hours)

*Everything spreads here by word of mouth (...). And as far as putting in the application [for social housing] is concerned, then of course it is difficult without knowing the language. When I arrived I didn't know any English so I always had to ask people for help with filling in the paperwork and every time I had a visit at the council someone had to come with me. But some acquaintances helped me and some people do that for money, they'll help you fill in the paperwork for 5 or 10 pounds, it depends. So I managed this way. (Iza, Angus)*

- ‘institutional racism’: in many cases – delayed decisions re benefit entitlements; in some cases – legally questionable refusals (sometimes putting migrants in a highly precarious position, esp. in crisis situations)

# Housing

- One of the most important aspects of welfare to CEEs (largely impacting on feelings of security/decisions about settlement)
- Access to social housing dependent on location (e.g. Glasgow & Angus vs. Aberdeen & Aberdeenshire) and need/personal circumstances (e.g. size of accommodation required)
- Other issues around social housing:
  - quality of housing
  - neighbourhood clustering ('ghettoisation')
  - neighbourhood safety



## Impact of the welfare reform on EU citizens

- Cut in CB payments (for children living abroad) and delays in receiving CB payments (→ more detailed checks)
- Issues around receiving JSA e.g. in relation to knowledge of English (→ ‘reasonable prospect of finding work’); loophole of self-employment no longer available
- Issues around other benefits related to questioning the ‘right to reside’
- Rejection of HB and CT reduction applications in the case of EU citizens

Thank you!

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**SSAMIS project**

**<http://www.gla.ac.uk/research/az/gramnet/research/ssamis/>**