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An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

## **Social Justice and Social Security Committee**

**6<sup>th</sup> Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Thursday, 29  
February**

### **Asylum Seekers and Refugees - Housing and Homelessness**

#### **Introduction**

This paper provides background information for an evidence session with:

- Graham O'Neill, Policy Manager – Scottish Refugee Council
- Phil Arnold, Head of Refugee Support for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – British Red Cross

#### **Context**

##### **Immigration and asylum**

Immigration and asylum are reserved matters. However, the Scottish Government supports asylum seekers and refugees in Scotland, as set out in its [New Scots refugee integration strategy 2018-2022](#) (January 2018). The Scottish Government has committed to refreshing the strategy in 2023 ([Programme for Government 2021-22](#), September 2021). This new iteration is due to be launched in March 2024, to be followed by a delivery plan that will be published in the summer ([Letter from Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees to Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee](#) (EHRCJ), 21 February 2024)

**Asylum seekers** are people who make a claim to the UK Government for protection (asylum) under the UN Refugee Convention 1951 and are waiting to receive a decision from the Home Office, or from the Court in relation to an appeal.

**Refugees** are people who have been recognised as having a well-founded fear of persecution in their country of origin for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion under the UN Refugee Convention 1951. They will be granted five years limited leave to remain and can apply for indefinite leave to remain after five years.

The UK can also grant asylum or other forms of humanitarian protection to people living outside the UK, who are then resettled to the UK. In recent times, specific schemes have been available to Syrians, Afghans and Ukrainians, but there are also wider schemes:

- UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) (2021 – present)
- Community Sponsorship (2021 – present)
- Mandate Resettlement Scheme (1995 – present).
- The Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (2021 – present) and Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (2022 - present)

Between 2014 and March 2021, three additional resettlement schemes operated:

- Gateway Protection Programme (GPP) (2004- 2021)
- Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) (2014 – 2021)
- Vulnerable Children’s Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) (2016 – 2021).

The UKRS and Community Sponsorship schemes are open to refugees in all parts of the world. The Mandate Scheme is for recognised refugees, anywhere in the world, who have a close family member in the UK willing to accommodate them.

The VPRS was specifically for Syrian nationals and the VCRS was for children from the Middle East and North Africa.

In response to the unfolding humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, the UK Government established three visa schemes for displaced Ukrainians. It should be noted however, that the UK Government made changes to all three of these visa schemes on 19 February 2024.

- A [Family Scheme](#) for those with family members in the UK. This was closed to new families on 19 February 2024, with immediate effect.
- An [Extension Scheme](#) for those who held a valid UK visa on or after 1 January 2022. This will now close to new applications from 14 May 2024 with one exception: children of visa holders born in the UK after 18 March 2024. Visas issued before the scheme closes are unaffected.
- The [Sponsorship Scheme](#) remains open, but visas issued under it will now be valid for 18 months (as opposed to three years previously). The Scottish

Government [acted as a supersponsor](#) for the scheme but applications have been [paused since 13 July 2022](#).

In addition to these changes, the UK Government also announced a Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme. This will allow visa holders through any of the above schemes to apply for an 18-month extension to their stay and retain the same rights they had before. Visa holders will be able to apply within the last three months of their existing visa, meaning applications will open in early 2025.

For further detail on resettlement schemes, see Box 1.1 in [New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy Evaluation report](#) (2023).

## Current numbers of refugees and asylum seekers in Scotland

There are around 5,000 asylum seekers in Scotland, most of whom are in Glasgow. Data at the end of June 2023 showed there were asylum seekers across Scotland, including in Aberdeen City (119), Aberdeenshire (39), Edinburgh (45), Falkirk (33), Inverclyde (68), Moray (38), Perth and Kinross (102), Renfrewshire (91) and South Lanarkshire (68) (see [Annexe B of EHRCJ report](#)). The data also shows that 662 asylum seekers in Scotland were living in hotels. The exact total changes, but it has been around 5,000 for several years (Scottish Government, [New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy Evaluation report](#), 28 August 2023).

There is no data on the number of refugees living in Scotland. This is because, once granted refugee status, they are free to live where they choose like other UK citizens. According to the Scottish Government, even with the number of people who have arrived from Ukraine, “it will still be the case that the majority of refugees in Scotland have come through the asylum system, as asylum dispersal has been in place in Scotland for over 20 years”.

The Home Office guidance on [UK Refugee Resettlement](#) (2021) states that it receives offers of accommodation either directly from a local authority, or on a regional basis through a regional Strategic Migration Partnership (SMP). Refugees are matched to a local authority that can provide suitable accommodation and the appropriate support for those being resettled. Research commissioned by the Scottish Government ([Refugee Integration - role of local authorities](#), November 2023) provides figures on the number of people in Scotland who have arrived on resettlement schemes.

All of Scotland’s 32 local authorities resettled refugees under the VPRS (that is for Syrian nationals), most in at least double digits. Out of a total of 3,328 refugees resettled under the VPRS since 2014, the local authorities receiving the largest numbers include Edinburgh (484 refugees), Glasgow (366 refugees), North Ayrshire (201 refugees), Aberdeenshire (176 refugees), and Dundee (170 refugees) – a mix of both urban and rural areas.

For the Afghan schemes, as at 31 March 2023, people in bridging accommodation were located in Aberdeen (143), Edinburgh (109), and Fife (56). Those in settled accommodation, were most commonly living in Glasgow (124), Edinburgh (109), and Inverclyde (78).

Cumulative arrivals in Scotland through Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme reached around 25,000 in July 2023. The research found that local authorities with the largest numbers of guests who have arrived at longer-term accommodation under the Super Sponsor Scheme include Edinburgh, Aberdeen, South Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire. The local authorities with the largest number of guests under individual sponsorship include rural areas such as Fife, Perth and Kinross, and Highland, as well as Edinburgh. The research states this may be because households in rural areas are more likely to have spare rooms to host guests as individual sponsors.

## Rise in refugees and asylum seekers in the UK

The following points are from the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice (EHRCJ) Committee report on the [Human Rights of Asylum Seekers](#) (24 October 2023):

- In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of asylum seekers requiring accommodation in the UK. The increase in applications is likely due to a continued global increase in the number of people displaced due to war and conflict.
- Annual numbers of asylum applications in the UK reached 81,130 in 2021, the highest annual number since a 2002 peak with 84,132 applications. (See [House of Commons Library Asylum Statistics](#) September 2023). As of June 2023, the total 'work in progress' asylum caseload consisted of 215,500 cases. The total caseload has more than doubled in size since 2014, driven by applicants waiting longer for an initial decision and growth in the number of people subject to removal action following a negative decision.
- For around 20 years, the UK Government has dispersed asylum seekers to different regions across the UK. Glasgow is the only dispersal region in Scotland. Before this, an asylum seeker was supported by the local authority area they made a claim in. The dispersal policy sought to spread the responsibility for supporting asylum seekers, to reduce the pressure on some local authorities.
- However, with increasing numbers of asylum seekers and a delay in processing claims, there has been an agreement to widen the dispersal of asylum seekers across Scotland.

In its [response to the Committee report](#) (21 February 2024), the Scottish Government has said it supports the widening of asylum dispersal, but to be

successful it must include “appropriate funding for local authorities as well as improved partnership working, data and information sharing. Local authorities need to be able to plan and prepare for asylum dispersal.”

## How is the UK Government addressing the backlog of asylum claims?

The [EHRCJ Committee](#) referred to Home Office data that showed the total number of people awaiting an asylum decision more than doubled between 2020 and 2022, from around 70,000 to 166,300.

The Committee heard it is taking a long time to process asylum claims. What should take 6 months can now take several years. Due to a lack of available housing, asylum seekers are now being housed in hotels for long periods of time.

The UK Government has pledged to reduce the backlog by increasing the productivity of caseworker staff, hiring additional caseworkers, and streamlining the process for certain older applications (House of Commons Library, [Delays to processing asylum claims in the UK](#), 20 March 2023).

In terms of its broader policy on asylum and immigration, the UK Government has been making legislative changes to the asylum process in recent years to act as a deterrent to asylum seekers seeking refuge in the UK. These are referenced in the EHRCJ Committee report, and include:

- The [Nationality and Borders Act 2022](#) - which introduced a two-tier regime based on how asylum seekers enter the UK and whether they delay in presenting themselves to authorities. Those who entered via irregular means, including that they stopped in another country on their journey, can be removed to a ‘safe third country’. In addition, those who arrive by irregular means will receive a lower standard of protection, for example, temporary leave to remain. The intention was to discourage asylum seekers from travelling via unsafe and illegal routes.
- The [Illegal Migration Act 2023](#) - which aims to prevent and deter unlawful migration, in particular migration by unsafe and illegal routes, by requiring the removal of people who enter the UK in breach of immigration control.

There is also the UK Government’s policy to send asylum seekers to Rwanda, [announced](#) in April 2022 (see [Q&A by the Migration Observatory](#), 10 January 2024). It would mean that people seeking asylum in the UK would have their claims decided by the Rwandan government. If successful, they would be granted asylum in Rwanda and not the UK. This was to address increasing numbers of asylum seekers crossing the channel in small boats.

However, the UK’s Supreme Court declared the policy unlawful because Rwanda was not a safe country to remove asylum seekers to. In response, the UK

Government published a new [treaty with Rwanda](#), which provides for additional safeguards, and introduced a new [Bill](#), which declares Rwanda to be a safe country for asylum seekers. The Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill is currently at Report Stage in the House of Lords.

## **Rights and entitlements to housing and homelessness support**

SPICe has previously set out the [various rights and entitlements](#) (2021) for refugees and asylum seekers to the Committee. But in brief:

- Asylum seekers will receive housing and around £49 a week to support themselves. If they are housed in a hotel, they will receive around £9 a week, because their meals are prepared for them.
- The housing of asylum seekers is the responsibility of the Home Office and is managed by private contractors. In Scotland this is the [Mears Group](#).
- Asylum seekers are not allowed to work. However, there is an [exception](#). The Home Office may grant permission to work to asylum seekers whose claim has been outstanding for more than 12 months through no fault of their own. Under this policy, those who are allowed to work are restricted to jobs on the shortage occupation list published by the Home Office.
- Asylum seekers do not have access to public funds - this is known as [No Recourse to Public Funds](#) (NRPF). This means they cannot access most mainstream social security benefits, homelessness assistance and a local authority allocation of social housing, although there are some exceptions which may mean a particular benefit can be claimed by a person with NRPF.
- Asylum seekers can access health and education.
- If asylum seekers are successful in their claims, they become refugees, and then have the legal right to remain in the UK. It also means they are entitled to work and benefit from state support the same as other UK citizens.
- Those who are not successful have few options and find themselves at risk of destitution and exploitation. They become even more reliant on charities for support.

### ***Asylum seekers***

Because immigration and asylum are reserved, it is the UK Government that is responsible for the financial and housing support of asylum seekers, as well as assessment of asylum claims.

Financial and housing support is available under [section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999](#). It is available to those who are destitute or likely to become destitute within 14 days.

The [UK Government provides asylum seekers with £49.18 a week](#) for each person in the household. This is given via a debit card (ASPEN card) and can be used to get cash from a cash machine.

If a person is living in accommodation that provides meals, they will receive £8.86 a week.

There are extra payments each week for mothers and young children: Pregnant mother - £5.25, Baby under 1 year old - £9.50, Child aged 1-3 - £5.25.

[Section 98 of the 1999 Act](#) provides that the Secretary of State may provide or arrange for the provision of support for asylum seekers or dependants of asylum seekers who appear to the Secretary of State to be destitute or likely to become destitute pending the consideration of their support application under Section 95 of the 1999 Act.

It is temporary full board or self-catering accommodation and is intended for short term use. It is usually in a hostel-type environment or can be a hotel.

The provision of initial accommodation is a temporary arrangement for asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute and:

- are supported under Section 98 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 and awaiting a decision from the Secretary of State on whether he may provide asylum support under Section 95 of that act; or he may provide asylum support under Section 95 of that act; or
- are supported under Section 95 and are awaiting transportation to their dispersal accommodation.

The amount of time spent in initial accommodation can vary before moving onto dispersal accommodation.

For further detail on asylum accommodation journey, see the Home Office guide on [Living in Dispersal Accommodation](#) (updated 25 May 2023).

## ***Refugees***

Once an asylum seeker has received refugee status, they have the same rights to access housing as those considered to be permanently residing in Scotland. This also applies to those who have been given Humanitarian Protection and Discretionary Leave to Remain. The [Welcome Pack for New Scots](#) provides information on accessing social housing, owner occupation or private rented housing.

## Previous Committee Consideration

### Social Security and Social Justice Committee

The committee had a session on 1 February 2024 on [homelessness and temporary accommodation](#). Glasgow and Edinburgh Councils both mentioned pressures with refugees / asylum seekers.

These pressures were highlighted in a [report by Glasgow City Council](#) (November 2023).

“Since the start of the year (until 21st November 2023), the Asylum and Refugee Support Team have received 1,000 referrals from Mears for asylum households in Glasgow who have been granted leave to remain, with an increased scale of decision-making since August 2023. These figures have translated to increased homelessness applications resulting in an increase in the use of hotel and B&B placements, particularly for single males...”

A table in the report shows the scale of change since August 2023:

2023	Mears Referrals received		
	Single	Family	Total households
JANUARY	28	17	45
FEBRUARY	63	31	94
MARCH	39	18	57
APRIL	34	18	52
MAY	28	15	43
JUNE	44	21	65
JULY	53	16	69
AUGUST	90	21	111
SEPTEMBER	128	28	156
OCTOBER	137	39	176
NOVEMBER (1/11/23 - 21/11/23)	97	35	132
DECEMBER	0	0	0
TOTAL	741	259	1000

The report sets out what happens when refugee status is granted:



“When a person receives a positive decision, they are given 28 days to leave the accommodation that is provided by Mears. At that point, any household that has received leave to remain in the UK can seek assistance from the Local Authority under homelessness legislation.”

The report also referred to the growing number of asylum seekers with negative decisions which may lead to an “increased pattern of people with no recourse to public funds (NRPF), rough sleeping requiring outreach capacity from third sector, health and social care support for those who are deemed most vulnerable. For those families with children the council retains a statutory role in providing accommodation through Section 22 of the Social Work Scotland (1968) Act.”

The Council was projecting an overspend in homelessness budget. Based on the current rate of decisions, as at 22 November, the best-case scenario for the homelessness overspend is projected to increase from £10.1m to £14.7m in 23/24 as a result of positive asylum decisions. This is based on receiving 373 applications by the end of the financial year. This number currently does not reflect positive decisions taken elsewhere in the UK but with service users presenting in Glasgow City. Further work was required to determine the impact of this.

Jim McBride of Glasgow City Council told the committee that there had been a “dramatic and substantial increase in positive leave to remain cases from Mears and from the Home Office backlog.” The change in ‘[local connection rules](#)’ was also having an impact, meaning that the council was looking at an additional 20 presentations per month on average. There are also further presentations from those who have leave to remain who have come from the north of England, London boroughs and Northern Ireland.

Nicky Brown of Edinburgh Council reported a similar increase in the last three months with the local connection rule change and people moving to the city after a positive asylum decision.

Jim McBride also told the Committee:

“Prior to Christmas, the city administration committee’s report clearly highlighted the pressures, and we had identified the fact that this would present an almost impossible challenge for us in managing the alternative accommodation options. Just now, we are trying to accommodate 10 households daily, but we are also finding that our ability to identify hotel accommodation within the city is extremely pressed. All that it takes is a particular event and/or seasonal planning around hotel capacity to bring us to a stretching point, and we find it difficult to continue to manage”

Michael Cameron of the Scottish Housing Regulator told the committee:

“Put simply, the demands on the homelessness system—the number of people becoming homeless and the level of need that they have— exceeds the system’s capacity to respond. For some councils, the increase in capacity that is needed to respond to the current demands goes beyond that which they can deliver, which is why we have made the judgment call that there is systemic failure in the homelessness system in Scotland.

The most acute impact of that failure is where a council does not have suitable temporary accommodation available when a person needs it. That results in the council breaching its statutory duty by having to place a person in temporary accommodation that does not meet the Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2014 criteria or, in more extreme situations, in its being unable to meet its duty to provide temporary accommodation at all because it does not have any temporary accommodation available. In that context, it is difficult to see how there can be a universal enforcement of rights when there is not sufficient capacity in the system.”

Both councils said that they would write back to the committee with more information - this has not been received at the time of writing.

The Committee has previously held two sessions on refugees and asylum seekers on:

- [3 February 2022](#)
- [10 February 2022](#)

It heard from a range of stakeholders representing local authorities and third sector and focused on:

- No-recourse to public funds (NRPF)
- The Afghan Citizen Resettlement Scheme
- The UK Government’s Nationality & Borders Bill

## **Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee**

The recent inquiry by the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice (EHRCJ) Committee on the [Human Rights of Asylum Seekers in Scotland](#) (24 October 2023) presented a complex landscape in how to support asylum seekers in Scotland. It focused on the use of hotels to temporarily house asylum seekers.

The Committee heard:

- Concerns that the use of hotels to house asylum seekers is becoming normalised.

- Asylum seekers said that hotels are challenging places to live for lengthy periods. It affects access to education, transport, health. It impacts on mental health especially not knowing how long asylum process will take and how long the hotel stay will be.
- Each person will have their own trauma to contend with and will face different issues, for example a young male asylum seeker compared with a family living in one room.
- Some people are not happy that asylum seekers are housed in hotels in their communities for lengthy periods of time, and there have been local protests.
- On the other hand, there are many people and charities who provide support to asylum seekers and want to be able to do more.

The Committee's report considered the lack of affordable and appropriate housing across Scotland and the rest of the UK, including for those who have received their refugee status. It noted there was no easily identifiable solution to the housing crisis.

A [Committee debate](#) on the report was held on 12 December 2023. The Committee highlighted the following that could help improve the lives of asylum seekers in Scotland:

- Extra resources for third sector organisations
- Providing better access to interpreters and ESOL classes
- Better access to mental health support
- Providing access to free transport, allowing asylum seekers to get to appointments and not feel so isolated
- Addressing the housing crisis, so that there is suitable housing available to those who need it.

In the debate Emma Roddick MSP, Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees said:

“Some of the issues that I have focused on in my dealings with the UK Government have included urging UK ministers to uphold the UK's moral and international obligations under the 1951 refugee convention; asking it to invest in the UK asylum system to increase the quality and speed of asylum decisions; and calling on it to ensure that newly recognised refugees are not at risk of homelessness or destitution, by extending the move-on period from 28 days. During a call yesterday, I suggested a 90-day period, in line with the notice that was given to Afghans who were moved on from hotels, or, failing that, 56 days, which would be in line with homelessness policy here.”

The [Scottish Government responded to the Committee's report](#) on 21 February 2024.

- On the announcement of the UK Government's maximisation policy, which requires unrelated adults to share rooms in contingency asylum accommodation, a letter had been written to then Immigration Minister, Robert Jenrick MP, (25 September 2023)
- This letter raised issues with the funding model for local authorities here asylum accommodation has been procured and called for the UK Government to urgently address the gap in resource.
- On addressing the backlog, a letter had been sent to then Immigration Minister, Robert Jenrick MP, (28 October 2023) stating the Scottish Government's long held position that the UK Government needs to invest in the UK asylum system to increase the speed and quality of asylum decisions.
- Confirmed that there are no Mother and Baby Units in operation to provide asylum accommodation in Scotland (the use of such units was flagged as a concern during the inquiry). A unit previously used in this way by the Home Office asylum accommodation contractor stopped operating as a Mother and Baby Unit in 2022.

On homelessness:

"The Scottish Government remains absolutely determined to address levels of homelessness and improve the supply of social and affordable housing. The Minister for Housing has been meeting with housing convenors across the country since last summer to discuss challenges and will continue to do so. We have invested over £90m in Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) in 2024-25 which is an increase of over £6m on 2023-24. We spend more per person than any UK nation on DHPs and these payments mitigate the worst impacts of UK Government welfare reform, reducing poverty and helping struggling households to remain in their home. In addition to this, we have committed £35m for specific action to end homelessness and reduce the number of households living in temporary accommodation, over and above the funding provided to local authorities through the local government settlement to deliver homelessness services. We will also invest £556m in 2024-25 to increase the delivery of more affordable homes."

## Scottish Government

The Scottish Government has limited powers in terms of asylum seekers, because immigration is reserved. Housing asylum seekers in the UK is the responsibility of the UK Government.

## New Scots strategy

However, the Scottish Government sets out how it supports both asylum seekers and refugees in its [New Scots strategy](#). As indicated above, this is due to be updated in March 2024.

A [recent evaluation of the New Scots strategy](#) came to the following conclusions:

- There was consensus amongst research participants that the Strategy has made a positive impact overall and has made considerable progress in relation to its main outcomes.
- The main challenges have been a lack of funding to support the implementation of the Strategy, and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on implementation and the restrictions associated with asylum and immigration being a reserved policy matter.
- Incremental progress has been made through each iteration of the Strategy and there is a willingness among stakeholders to continue this progress with the next iteration.
- There was a view that refugees, people seeking asylum, host communities and the general public have not been engaged sufficiently in the development and implementation of the Strategy. This engagement was perceived to be critical in ensuring that refugees and people seeking asylum are welcomed and supported in Scotland.
- It was felt the next Strategy should focus on what more can be achieved within devolved powers. This would include focusing on improving investment in, and access to, consistent, coordinated and high quality services, support and information sources across all geographic and policy areas, such as ESOL support, housing, employment and education.

## New Scots Funding

On 5 February 2023 the Scottish Government [announced](#) an additional £1.6 million funding to focus on the development of a refreshed New Scots Refugees Strategy ensuring refugees and asylum seekers are supported to make their new communities their home. This funding includes:

- the award of small grants to enable wide-scale public engagement across Scotland for the refreshed New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy
- the extension of University of Glasgow's international research into New Scots integration for Afghan and Ukrainian Nationals focussing on efforts made by SG, local authorities and the third sector to support integration

- Refugee Festival Scotland providing small grants to organisations to enable them to host events as part of the Festival
- £500,000 in targeted funding for two of the highest priority areas ESOL and employability.

## Ending destitution strategy

The Scottish Government and COSLA's [Ending Destitution Strategy](#) (31 March 2021) aims to improve support for people with NRPF in Scotland.

The strategy takes a human rights-based approach, "including recognising the fundamental right to an adequate standard of living – in particular the right to food, housing and social security, which is essential to ending destitution".

The strategy is initially for three years, and includes 13 actions across three areas:

- Essential needs – access to housing, food and financial support, via local authorities and the third sector, and removing barriers to health services.
- Advice and advocacy - increase access to specialist advice and advocacy, including legal advice, to help people to navigate immigration and asylum systems.
- Inclusion - support inclusive approaches to the design and delivery of support, including through Scotland's extended social security powers and employability. People with lived experience will continue to inform and shape the strategy.

A [progress review of the strategy](#) was published in December 2022.

The Ending Destitute strategy was drawn up in response to the former Equalities and Human Rights Committee's report on [Hidden Lives - New Beginnings: Destitution, asylum and insecure immigration status in Scotland](#) (2017). The inquiry considered the needs of asylum seekers as well as people who have no recourse to public funds (NRPF) because of their insecure immigration status.

## Research on refugee integration in local authorities

The Scottish Government [commissioned research](#) (9 November 2023) to explore and assess the role of Scotland's 32 local authorities in supporting the integration of refugees and people seeking asylum.

This report made the following conclusions:

- Over the past eight years, there has been a transformation in the work of local authorities supporting refugee integration - many of which previously had little experience of supporting refugees and asylum seekers.
- Local authorities and partners told the research project how they had scaled up their efforts over this period to deliver wide-ranging support for refugees and people seeking asylum, including ESOL and employability training, temporary and long-term accommodation, welfare and housing advice, registration with GPs and dentists, access to travel and leisure activities, and help connecting with other members of the community. This has involved considerable partnership working.
- During the Covid-19 lockdowns, early 2020, resettlement numbers ground to a halt at the same time as it became more challenging to deliver many of the services and support that refugees and people seeking asylum require. Since mid 2021, this situation sharply reversed as the pandemic receded and major new routes for Afghans and Ukrainians have opened up. This placed unprecedented pressures on local authority resettlement teams. Local authorities have responded as best they can, and many have had less time to invest in longer-term strategic thinking to support refugee integration.

The research notes important lessons for future policy:

- Local authorities have highlighted the benefits of a community-based partnership strategy for supporting refugee integration. Integration activities were most effective when they involved regular and sustained collaboration with local services and charities and community groups.
- A number of research participants spoke of the need for a renewed focus on ESOL and employability support in the coming years, at both the local and national level.
- Participants often called for more joined-up thinking within their local authorities. To make integration work effectively across Scotland, every local authority should, at a minimum, have its own permanent team for refugee resettlement.
- However, some reflected on the need to avoid siloed working.

On areas for improvement:

- the next New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy could be more ambitious and outcome-oriented in different policy areas, setting out clear targets to drive forward improvements in provision.
- there is a critical need for the strategy process to involve comprehensive consultation with local government, who are often at the heart of refugee integration work taking place on the ground.

- there were concerns about disparities and inequalities for refugees and people seeking asylum across different routes: there could be a role for the next New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy in emphasising equity for all.
- a number of participants urged that the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy should be matched appropriately with adequate resources, in order to allow local authorities and their partner organisations to deliver on the strategy.

## Witnesses

Evidence from the Scottish Refugee Council and the Maryhill Integration Network encouraged the EHRCJ Committee to undertake an inquiry on asylum seekers. They suggested the Scottish Government could do more within its own devolved powers to assist asylum seekers to integrate into communities.

Both the Scottish Refugee Council (SRC) and British Red Cross provided oral evidence ([25 April 2023](#)) as well as written submissions to the EHRCJ inquiry ([Scottish Refugee Council](#) and [British Red Cross](#)).

The EHRCJ Committee has now reported, and the Scottish Government has responded (see above).

For a Scottish Government debate on the [Impact of UK Government Asylum policy and legislation in Scotland](#) (10 January 2024), the SRC sent a briefing to all MSPs. which included the following:

- Sought MSP support for the [Fair Begins Here](#) campaign, launched late last year, calling for the UK Government to introduce A Fair New Plan for Refugees. This would ensure protection for asylum seekers and scrap the Rwanda policy. It would provide a strategy for integration and forge global cooperation to tackle the root causes that force people to flee their homes and provides positive solutions when they do.
- Urged the Scottish Government to make sure the next iteration of the New Scots Strategy “maximises devolution powers to protect not penalise refugees and support their human rights and integration into our communities”.
- The revised Strategy should adopt the recommendations made in the EHRCJ Committee report.

Since the publication of the EHRCJ Committee report, the SRC said there has been a ‘hardening’ policy on asylum from the UK Government. Reference was made to:

- Forced bedroom sharing in institutional accommodation across the UK, including Scotland. This policy has been rolled out in Scotland since September 2023. If residents refuse or do not meet the high vulnerability threshold then they are at risk of breaching the conditions of their asylum support.



- The ‘escalating housing emergency’. The SRC is concerned for all those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, so settled residents and citizens as well as newly granted refugees. The SRC said the emergency needs to be widely acknowledged and be made a spending priority throughout 2024.
- Described the refugee homelessness situation in Glasgow as ‘perilous.’
- The Home Office ‘move-on’ notice period of 28 days was shortened to under 14 days and in some cases less than 7 days. Under pressure, this shortening of the ‘move-on’ period was reversed from New Year.
- The SRC has seen a sharp and sustained increase in referrals to its Refugee Integration Service, which works with newly granted refugees. It is expected this trend will continue throughout 2024.
- There is a danger that the combined impact of domestic and new refugee homelessness may ‘break accommodation provision in Glasgow’, with potential rises in rough sleeping. “We are deeply concerned that we will witness not only escalating street homeless in Glasgow but loss of life.”

The [SRC is calling for the ‘move-on’ period to be extended](#) from 28 days to 56 days (news release, 16 January 2024). Reference is made to a [British Red Cross report](#) (2018), which shows that 28-day move-on period often leaves people at risk of homelessness and in extreme poverty. A [further British Red Cross report](#) (2020) demonstrated how extending to 56-days could result in net annual benefits of up to £7 million to the UK.

## Suggested themes

Members may wish to ask questions on the following themes:

### Impact on individuals and families

1. How do you think the wider dispersal of asylum seekers across Scotland will impact on individuals and families when granted refugee status?
2. What is the impact on those whose asylum claim is refused and how can they be supported?
3. The Scottish Refugee Council has referred to the Home Office maximisation policy, where unrelated adults are required to share rooms in contingency accommodation. How widely is that happening in Scotland and what impact is that having on people?
4. There are different groups of people and families who require housing and homelessness support, either because they have been granted refugee status after seeking asylum or because they are in Scotland

under a UK resettlement scheme. How does the impact on them vary depending on their refugee status?

5. Research commissioned by the Scottish Government suggests that local authorities have built up expertise in supporting refugees in recent years. What is your experience of local authorities building capacity to support refugees?

#### Impact on council statutory homelessness services

6. What is your experience of the impact on statutory homelessness services, and whether there are specific issues depending on the type of refugee status a person or family has?
7. Could you explain what happens to people in that 28-day period and explain why you think it should be longer? What would the advantages and disadvantages be of extending the move-on period?
8. What good practice are you aware of in terms of local authorities re-housing refugees?

#### Impact on third sector organisations

9. The UK's asylum policy appears to constantly change and evolve. How does this affect the type of support that organisations like yours can provide to refugees?
10. What are the main pressure points for third sector organisations that support refugees and asylum seekers?
11. What differences do you see in how you support people who are granted refugee status, compared with those who are in Scotland under a UK resettlement scheme? Are there also differences between those who are here on different resettlement schemes?

#### What further support from Scottish and UK Governments might be useful?

12. How do you think the UK Government should be addressing the backlog in asylum claims?
13. What more could the UK Government do to ease the pressure on local authorities and third sector organisations?
14. What has your involvement been with the refresh of the New Scots strategy? Are you content with how it has been developing and what are you hoping to see in the refreshed strategy?

**15. What more could the Scottish Government be doing, that it is not already doing, to support refugees in Scotland?**

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