

INTRODUCTION

The Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 has for the first time introduced a policy of national dispersal for asylum seekers and refugees across mainland UK. As a result asylum seekers and refugees are sent to contracted local authorities where they settle into communities. For some cities including Glasgow, the experience of receiving asylum seekers and refugees is not a new one. For many years Glasgow has been the new home to people seeking asylum from various different countries around the world, such as the Irish, Polish and Jewish communities. More recently the Kosovan Humanitarian Programme gave Health Boards, Trusts and Local Authorities an insight into the particular difficulties that face asylum seekers and refugees. Our experience with this programme has helped in developing and coordinating services for asylum seekers and refugees who have been received under the new National Asylum Support Service (NASS) contract.

In April 2000 in North Glasgow seen the first group of asylum seekers to arrive from London under the National Asylum Support Services (NASS) contract with the Home Office and Glasgow City Council. Glasgow NHS Primary Care Trust as part of a multi-agency working team provides general medical and nursing services for these communities.

A Home Office Online report [Asylum Seekers in Dispersal - Healthcare Issues - Mark R D Johnson 13/03](#) calls for good practice guidelines to be developed on health issues for asylum seekers, living in accommodation provided through the National Asylum Support Services (NASS). As part of the ongoing development of this nursing service provision a briefing report for all staff working within asylum seekers and refugee communities has been developed to provide information and guidance.

DEFINITIONS

Who are Asylum Seekers?

An Asylum Seeker is a person who has submitted an application for protection under the Geneva Convention and is waiting for the claim to be decided by the Home Office.

Who are Refugees?

Under international law, the word 'refugee' has a very precise meaning, as set out in the [1951 United Nations Convention Relating to Refugees](#). In the Convention, a refugee is defined as someone who:

- has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion;
- is outside the country they belong to or normally reside in, and
- is unable or unwilling to return home for fear of persecution.

The Convention was drafted in the context of the millions of refugees in post-war Europe, and only applied to European nationals. In 1967, a UN protocol extended the convention to cover any person, anywhere in the world, at any time. The UK, along with over 130 other countries, is a signatory to the Convention and its protocol. These two documents remain the foundation of refugee law today, committing signatories to certain obligations. However the interpretation of these international instruments varies from country to country.

Whilst someone is waiting to their application to be considered by the Government, they are known as an 'asylum seeker'.

Some refugees have fled from countries where they may have been persecuted simply for being a member of a religious or ethnic group. Some have taken a deliberate stand against an oppressive government; others have already been in the UK as visitors or students when political changes in their home country made it extremely dangerous for them to return.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Where are Scotland's asylum seekers from and who are they?

- 30 different nationalities are represented amongst asylum seekers in Glasgow.
- As of July 2003 there were 6000 asylum seekers living in Glasgow in housing provided by NASS.
- The main countries represented in Glasgow are:
 - Turkey (which accounts for 14% of the asylum seeking population).
 - Somalia, Iran and Pakistan (9% each).
 - Iraq (7%),
 - Afghanistan (6%)
 - Democratic Republic of Congo (4%)
 - Other refugees have come from places such as Algeria, Russia, Albania, China, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone, Israel, Zimbabwe and the former Yugoslavia (NASS figures as of 7.7.03).
- The above list shows that the arrival of refugees in the UK is linked to ethnic and religious strife, civil war, political repression and human rights abuses.
- An estimated 45% of Glasgow's asylum seekers are males over the age of 6, 40% are females over the age of 6 and approximately 15% are under 6 years old.

Asylum seekers come to the UK from the world's trouble spots. The numbers of asylum seekers arriving in the UK inevitably reflects the international situation at any one time. In 2001, the highest number of asylum applications came from nationals of Afghanistan (13% of applications), Iraq (9%), Somalia (9%) and Sri Lanka (8%) and Iran (5%).

Why should the UK support people asylum seekers and refugees?

Like all other signatories of the 1951 Convention, the UK has an obligation under international law to protect people fleeing persecution. The UK has also committed itself to the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which includes the right to seek and enjoy asylum in other countries. As a signatory to the Convention, the UK is responsible for guaranteeing that those with refugee status enjoy equal rights to UK citizens.

Why do all asylum seekers come to the UK?

In fact, they do not. The Home Office received 71,365 applications for asylum in 2001; this may seem like a lot, but not when compared with the number of asylum seekers (over 900,000) and refugees (over 12 million) worldwide*. In fact, most people seek asylum in neighbouring countries. Guinea, which has a population of under 7 million, supports over 420,000 refugees from Sierra Leone and Liberia - a ratio 50 times that of the UK. Some of the poorest countries in the world support the largest numbers of refugees.

A person who formally applies for asylum in United Kingdom is entitled to NHS treatment without charge for as long as their application (including appeals) is under consideration.

In common with those normally resident, they will have to pay certain statutory NHS charges, unless they also qualify for exemption from these, and will go to NHS waiting lists.

The Scottish Situation

The government's dispersal policy introduced in 1999 was intended to relieve pressure on housing and social services in the South of England by providing accommodation for asylum seekers in other parts of the UK. This has led to large numbers of asylum seekers and refugees settling in Scotland over the past few years, mainly in Glasgow. The Home Office pays to support asylum seekers through NASS, the National Asylum Support Service. The following is an outline of the main facts on refugees and asylum seekers in Scotland.

Glasgow is currently the home of 10,500 asylum seekers and refugees. We are in a unique position, at present we are the only city in Scotland to contract with NASS.

A multi-agency approach was taken by the Health Board and Trust to provide each person under the NASS contract to be registered with a GP. There are 35 General Practitioners Groups and associated staff providing primary care throughout the city.

Why do asylum seekers come to Scotland?

- 1000 asylum seekers come directly to Scotland to claim asylum each year.
- The Home Office's dispersal initiative means that asylum seekers are sent to Scotland on a 'no-choice' basis - they are simply told that they will be housed here. Most of Scotland's asylum seekers have come to the country because they have been dispersed to Glasgow.
- Glasgow City Council entered into a five-year contract with NASS in April 2000 to provide 2000 units of family accommodation and 500 units of accommodation for single people. These homes are used to house asylum seekers dispersed to Glasgow. Glasgow is currently the only Scottish local authority that accepts asylum seekers through this programme, and therefore Scotland's asylum seeker population is

mainly concentrated there. The Home Office pays for all accommodation and financial support.

In which parts of Scotland do asylum seekers live?

- Most asylum seekers in Scotland live in *Glasgow*. Asylum seekers are spread across 22 different neighbourhoods, but 40% of asylum seekers coming to *Glasgow* are housed in the North of the city, mainly the Sighthill and Red Road areas. Kingsway, Castlemilk, Toryglen and Cranhill are some of the other parts of *Glasgow* with a high proportion of residents who are asylum seekers.
- Asylum seekers who choose not to live in government funded accommodation can access vouchers to buy food and other necessities. Some asylum seekers choose to reside outside *Glasgow*, often staying with friends and family. 112 seekers live in Edinburgh City, 18 live in Aberdeen city, 10 have settled in Dundee and around 50 live elsewhere in Scotland. (NASS information as of 30.6.03)

What benefits do asylum seekers arriving in Scotland receive?

- Asylum seekers are housed in void housing - in other words housing that the council has been unable to let. This means that refugees and asylum seekers who are sent to *Glasgow* will not have an effect on the housing waiting lists.
- Housing is made wind and water tight and furnished and decorated to the same standard as a flat that would be offered to a homeless person.
- A single asylum seeker receives £37.77 a week - 70% of the amount that someone on income support receives.

What proportion of asylum seekers in Scotland are recognised as refugees?

- The majority of nationalities that are dispersed to Glasgow are particularly likely to receive a positive decision.
- More than 80% of asylum seekers dispersed to the city who have had a decision on their asylum claim have received a positive decision and have been recognised as refugees. (Glasgow City Council)
- As of July 2003 1700 positive decisions had been made. (Glasgow City Council)
- Approximately half of asylum seekers who receive a positive decision on their asylum application choose to remain in Glasgow. (Glasgow City Council)