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Scottish Refugee Council

**Preventing Destitution – paper for the
COSLA Strategic Migration
Partnership Scottish Strategic
Coordination Group
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1. Introduction

1.1 Between 19 November and 14 December 2007 Scottish Refugee Council took part in an Asylum Support Programme Inter-Agency Partnership (IAP) research project to record the proportion of people using One Stop Services across the UK who are destitute. Destitution was defined as 'currently with no access to benefits/BIA support/income and are either street homeless or staying with friends only temporarily'. The results of this exercise are contained in *The Destitution Tally* (attached) dated January 2007. Subsequently, Scottish Refugee Council analysed the results of this project for Scotland, which produced the following information.

- The number of cases who are destitute as a percentage of total cases is 10% lower for Scottish Refugee Council than for other agencies across the UK.
- Over 35% of the people using the services of Scottish Refugee Council are destitute - 442 people of the total of 1,245 seen in the four week monitoring period fell within the definition of destitute.
- Over 42% of these destitute clients are entitled to some form of support, whether it is asylum support or mainstream benefits because they have been granted some form of leave to remain.
- 94 cases were destitute despite having an ongoing claim for asylum. They make up 21.26% of all destitute cases and 7.55% of all cases seen.
- In addition, a further 21% or 93 cases of destitution involved people who have been granted status in the UK and are eligible for mainstream benefits.
- This means that, during a four week period, nearly two hundred cases of destitution were seen where the person or family had an underlying entitlement to support.

2. Key messages for the COSLA Strategic Migration Partnership Scottish Strategic Co-ordination Group

2.1 Although the percentage of destitute refugees and asylum seekers as a proportion of total clients in Scotland is 10% lower than in England and Wales, there are still a large number who are destitute. Of the 1,245 people seen in four weeks, 442 were destitute. More than 35% of refugees and asylum seekers using Scottish Refugee Council services had no access to any means of support and were either street homeless or staying with friends temporarily. People sleeping on the streets is a potential problem for local authorities and the police and can be damaging to community cohesion, so this is an issue for the (CSMP).

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- 2.2 Over 42% of Scottish Refugee Council destitute clients are entitled to some form of support, either asylum support or mainstream benefits because they have been granted some form of leave to remain. People not receiving support to which they are entitled is clearly an issue of concern for the COSLA Strategic Migration Partnership (CSMP).
 - 2.3 CSMP has already established an Asylum Operations Group which is working well. Scottish Refugee Council welcomes the commitment in the 2008/2009 Business Plan to establish an Asylum Casework Stakeholder's Group and suggests that both groups consider destitution issues.
 - 2.4 The evaluation of the work of the CSMP's Move On Group shows that the Group has been effective in preventing destitution among people coming through the case resolution process. This provides a good foundation for further joint working to prevent destitution.
 - 2.5 The work on destitution suggests that there are three groups of destitute people whose needs should be considered in order to prevent and reduce destitution: asylum seekers who are entitled to asylum support; people who have been granted some form of leave to remain and are entitled to mainstream benefits; and refused asylum seekers who have exhausted their appeal rights. Scottish Refugee Council suggests that CSMP should take the following action to reduce destitution among these three groups.
- 3. Asylum seekers who are entitled to asylum support**
- 3.1 Through the Asylum Operations Group and the Asylum Casework Stakeholders Group, CSMP should encourage the UK Border Agency (UKBA) to explore ways of resolving asylum support issues using feedback from key partner agencies such as local authorities, target accommodation providers and Scottish Refugee Council. Examples would include ensuring that emergency support processes work and that UKBA better communicates and jointly plans any changes to work streams to ensure other key stakeholders can adapt their own services and can contact UKBA staff who are responsible for resolving issues.
- 4. People who have been granted some form of leave to remain and are entitled to mainstream benefits**
- 4.1 The CSMP Refugee Integration Group should consider how to fill the gap in service provision between referrals ceasing on 31 January 2008 to the Sunrise pilot and the anticipated start of the new Refugee Integration and Employment Service on 1 October 2008. This should build on the successful joint working between Scottish Refugee Council, UKBA and Job Centre Plus to provide group briefings to clients who would otherwise have been eligible for Sunrise.

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- 4.2 The CSMP Refugee Integration Group should establish a system for monitoring of destitution among people granted leave to remain is established to identify persistent or new barriers to claiming benefits.
- 4.3 Membership of the CSMP Refugee Integration Group should be widened to include key strategic partners such as Glasgow Community Planning Partnership, Community Health and Care Partnerships and Glasgow Works to ensure that there is a focus on employability.

5. Refused asylum seekers who have exhausted their appeal rights

- 5.1 At a policy level, Scottish Refugee Council in partnership with key refugee organisations is campaigning (through the Still Human Still Here campaign) against government policies which result in destitution. One recommendation includes continuing financial support and accommodation to refused asylum seekers as provided during the asylum process and granting permission to work until such time as they have left the UK or have been granted leave to remain. CSMP should consider supporting this recommendation.
- 5.2 CSMP should encourage partner agencies to make early referrals to the International Organisation for Migration and Scottish Refugee Council of refused asylum seekers to ensure that service users are advised of their options, including voluntary return, at the earliest opportunity.
- 5.3 CSMP should support the regionalisation of section 4 support.
- 5.4 The CSMP Asylum Operations Group should ensure that Section 4 accommodation providers are more closely monitored regarding facilitation of access for clients to their full rights and entitlements.
- 5.5 CSMP should clarify the position to member local authorities on provision of support to vulnerable/ special needs clients as per the NASS Policy Bulletin and legal advice obtained by COSLA dated June 2005.
- 5.6 CSMP should commission a review of support arrangements for refused asylum seekers.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 The action proposed in this report will enable CSMP to assist in preventing destitution among asylum seekers and refugees and is therefore commended for consideration.

Susie Parsons
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