

## Press release

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### Charities call for end to 400 mile trek for asylum seekers

Asylum seekers should have the right to lodge their claims for asylum in Scotland according to a report issued today (Friday, 25 February).

The report, *21 Months Later*, produced by the British Red Cross and the Refugee Survival Trust (RST), highlights the plight of people who currently have to travel from Scotland to Croydon, in South London, to register their claims – with no financial support from the government.

The Red Cross and the RST are calling on the UK Borders Agency to meet the travel costs of asylum seekers who have to make the 400 mile trip until the UK government agrees to allow them to claim asylum in Scotland. At the moment, the Red Cross and the RST pay for food and overnight bus travel to Croydon for claimants in Scotland.

The report is a follow-up to a document entitled *21 Days Later*, produced jointly by the organisations almost two years ago, which exposed the plight of asylum seekers facing destitution on the streets of Scotland because of a lack of support.

The latest report highlights some of the progress made since then, such as improvements to the Emergency Support Token system. There has also been a reduction in the time asylum seekers have to wait for a decision on applications for support and accommodation while they appeal an initial claim that has been refused. But it also pinpoints areas that still need drastic improvement.

In the last ten months:

- A total of 575 grants have been issued through the Refugee Survival Trust, supporting 611 individuals, including 36 children
- The British Red Cross contributed £12,000 of the total £34,643 paid out in grants
- Off all the grants paid out, 175 were to help new asylum seekers get to Croydon to register their applications and to help others travelling to Liverpool to make fresh submissions concerning their asylum claims

- A further 130 grants were for people who had signed up for voluntary return but had yet to receive support.
- Twenty-five grants were for people awaiting mainstream benefits

Launching the report, Kenny Hamilton, Red Cross refugee services manager in Scotland said: “Our *21 Months Later* report shows that some progress has been made in the last two years but there is still a long way to go. “The problem of destitution is very real and needs to be addressed urgently.

“Many refugee organisations have been hit hard by recent spending cuts. As a result, we are aware that some services are being significantly reduced. This is putting a greater onus onto the charitable sector to fill the void.

“We do recognise that these are difficult economic times but we are concerned that those who need help most are the ones who will suffer.”

Michelle Lowe, development manager of the Refugee Survival Trust also expressed fears about the public spending cuts.

She said: “This progress report highlights some successes in tackling the destitution of refugees and asylum seekers in Scotland and some simple practical steps that still need be taken to avoid people being made destitute during the asylum process. It also calls for policy changes to ensure that people are supported in an efficient, humane way from the beginning of the asylum process right to the end – until they are either given leave to remain or removed from the country.

“We are gravely concerned that the successes highlighted in this report, including in partnership working and progress in reducing administrative errors and delays, could be seriously undermined by funding cuts to the Scottish Refugee Council and other agencies which provide support. “

John Wilkes, Chief Executive of Scottish Refugee Council, added: “While we welcome the various improvements in the asylum support system that charities including Scottish Refugee Council have lobbied for, we remain extremely concerned by the unacceptable level of destitution that those seeking asylum are still facing.

“Our fear is that the situation can only get worse once the cuts – which will affect refugee and asylum services up and down the country – start to take effect in a couple of months. Together with Red Cross and Refugee Survival Trust we are calling for changes that will see an end to destitution once and for all.”

ENDS

## Notes to editors

The British Red Cross helps people in crisis, whoever and wherever they are. We are part of a global voluntary network, responding to conflicts, natural disasters and individual emergencies.

We enable vulnerable people in the UK and abroad to prepare for and withstand emergencies in their own communities. And when the crisis is over, we help them to recover and move on with their lives.