Background information

Scottish Refugee Council Refugee Integration Service (RIS) provides advice, information and advocacy to newly granted refugees. The service is based on a Personal Integration Plan which covers homeless, housing, education, employment and health issues.

20% of refugees who receive support from RIS are aged between 18 to 24 years old.

While waiting for a decision on their asylum claim, asylum seekers, aged over 18, are provided with accommodation on a no choice basis by the UK Borders Agency and receive financial support equivalent to 70% of the level of income support. Asylum seekers are generally not allowed to work\(^1\). Young people who arrive in Scotland unaccompanied and separated from their families are looked after by the social work services and will access similar support that other children in care receive.

The asylum process is designed for asylum claim to be processed quickly. In practice, Scottish Refugee Council sees a significant number of people who receive leave to remain 4 or 6 weeks after they arrived in the UK.

When granted leave to remain, refugees are entitled to access social housing and private rented housing, have access to public funds and are eligible to claim mainstream benefits and to receive homelessness assistance. They are also entitled to work.

Main cause of homelessness amongst refugees

When granted leave to remain, refugees receive notification from the UK Border Agency that they must vacate their property within 28 days, this period is commonly called the “move-on” period.

Being on very low income, private rented accommodation is not an affordable option. They have difficulties to raise a deposit and rents are too high. In relation to social housing, the “move-on” period is too short to allow refugees to apply and be registered on waiting lists. Homelessness will often be the only option for newly granted refugees as a result.

Due to time constrain it is extremely difficult to develop activities to prevent homelessness of newly granted refugees during the “move-on” period.

Scottish Refugee Council’s response to tackle homelessness of refugees and of others is to focus on:

- Early intervention by providing a holistic advocacy service to assist newly granted refugees around housing, welfare rights, employment, education, and health issues; and

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\(^{1}\) Since February 2005, they are allowed to apply for permission to work if they have waited for over a year for an initial decision on their asylum claim. However since 2010 these jobs have been limited to those on the UK skills shortage list.
• Increasing access to suitable housing options in order to reduce the period of time spent in homelessness.

**Difficulties experienced by young refugees throughout the homelessness route**

We know from research\(^2\) and from Scottish Refugee Council advice services that difficulties experienced by refugees are due to:

• Lack of advice and information on the system – this is exacerbated for young refugees who have less understanding of how some of their choices regarding work and education may impact on their income and capacity to sustain their tenancy and manage their budget.

Access to translated information and interpreters is essential to improve this.

• Lack of support need assessment – this lead to young refugees not often accessing the support they need from gaining independent living skills to receiving support with mental health issues.

• Unsuitable temporary accommodation – young refugees will often be placed in hostel accommodation having to share with older people and people with very different support needs. It is essential that young refugees can access good quality temporary accommodation where culturally sensitive support is provided.

• Lack of safety (i.e. hate crime) – this is exacerbated for young refugees who will have less knowledge of how to report incidents and may have less confidence in the police.

• Difficulty to access suitable settled housing – this is exacerbated for young refugees who have less knowledge about the system and when they secure permanent housing will have, like other young people, little or no experience of managing budget and a home.

• Lack of family support, restricted social network. Most young refugees will have no relatives living in the UK and due to the short period of time they may have been in the UK, they will have had little opportunities to create a social network.

**Example of best practice**

• Saffron project – supported temporary accommodation

Developed by Southside Housing Association, Saffron Project offers temporary supported accommodation for young people from BME communities aged 16 to 25 years old. The project has the capacity to support 22 young people and have been working with many

\(^2\) [http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0101/Navigating_the_maze_refugee_routes_to_housing_support_and_settlement.pdf](http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0101/Navigating_the_maze_refugee_routes_to_housing_support_and_settlement.pdf)
young refugees. Young people can remain in the project until they are ready to move on to their own tenancy. The average time spent at the Saffron project is 2 years.

- Scottish Refugee Council partnership with social housing providers

Scottish Refugee Council develops partnership agreements with social housing providers in order to increase access to social housing for refugees. Such agreements include protocols for sharing information on support needs of refugees referred for housing and for joint working to implement adequate support.

Such agreements have been very beneficial to young refugees who feel more comfortable to engage with either their landlord or Scottish Refugee Council when their circumstances change and may create difficulties for them to sustain their tenancy.

- Scottish Guardianship Project (partnership between Scottish Refugee Council and Aberlour Scotland)  

Scottish Guardianship Service works with children and young people who arrive in Scotland unaccompanied and separated from their families. The service will support unaccompanied asylum seeking and trafficked children and young people.

Guardians will support young people, helping them to navigate through the immigration and welfare processes, feel supported and empowered throughout the asylum process, access the help they need when they need it and help them to make informed decisions about their future.

Although Scottish Guardianship project focuses on supporting young people during the asylum process, the type of support it provides is an excellent example of what could be done with young refugees to assist them to understand better the homelessness route and their housing options.

Elodie Mignard
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3 http://www.aberlour.org.uk/scottishguardianshipservice.aspx