

Kaukab Stewart MSP  
Convener, Equality, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee  
The Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP

5 December 2023

Dear Kaukab

**Re: The Human Rights of Asylum Seekers in Scotland Committee Report**

Thank you again for the opportunity to give oral and written evidence to the Equality, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee in its inquiry into the Human Rights of Asylum Seekers in Scotland. We at the British Red Cross welcome the findings of the report and its reflections which echo our position that the Scottish Government can and must do more to protect people in the asylum system living in Scotland, building on its strong track record.

The report reflects many of our concerns, from unsuitable forms of accommodation, the lasting impact of the Illegal Migration Act on people seeking protection in Scotland, to concerns over age assessments. While of course, many of the levers required to make a difference sit at UK government level, we continue to call for the Scottish Government to use its devolved powers to uphold protections for people seeking asylum in Scotland. There exist opportunities for the Scottish Government to use and build on the momentum shown in tackling destitution through the Ending Destitution Together strategy and continue to support people moving to Scotland and navigating policy changes such as the Nationality and Borders Act and Illegal Migration Act through the New Scots strategy and its refresh.

We welcome the Committee's call for a Scottish Humanitarian Strategy. We believe there is a role for the Scottish Government to regulate the age assessment process in Scotland. Indeed, systemic gaps, which exist through the way Scottish public services support young people, will be heavily amplified under provisions of the IMA that extend detention powers and removal duties. There is an opportunity to support the reunion of refugee families in Scotland and I would be pleased to build on evidence submitted to this inquiry to discuss this in greater detail.

The report also notes housing pressures in Scotland, similar to the many other parts of the UK, and acknowledges that hotels and other forms of institutional accommodation are inappropriate. Our own research '[Far From Home](#)' recognises that there is not enough asylum dispersal accommodation available, nor enough flexibility within the system to cope with the increase in demand for asylum accommodation. As I mentioned in my contribution, spending long periods of time in a room, often without a window, can trigger past traumas in people who may have



experienced persecution, trauma or torture in confined spaces elsewhere on their journey to safety. The nature of trauma can lie undisclosed and unrecognised for significant periods of time, and as reflected in both the UNHCR's [audit](#) of Home Office asylum screening practices and our report, gaps in the Home Office's vulnerability assessment processes continue to amplify the risks. Therefore, we continue to believe that there is an opportunity for the Scottish Government to better monitor, inspect and regulate the use of housing in Scotland by empowering local authorities and regulatory agencies to raise standards and proactively intervene.

I would be delighted to welcome you to visit to our new refugee support office in Cambridge Street in your constituency. We would be pleased to show you first hand the work our teams do in providing assistance to refugees, using the opportunity to reflect on how we can work together to amplify the strong contributions made in your report. Please do let me know when this could work.

Yours sincerely,

**Phil Arnold**  
**Head of Refugee Support – Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland**