

Meeting of the CPG on Migration

Topic: No Recourse to Public Funds

Date: Tuesday 25th March 2025

Location: Committee Room 4 at the Scottish Parliament, with the option to join remotely.

MSP attendance:

Paul Sweeney MSP

Bob Doris MSP

Maggie Chapman MSP

Non-MSP attendance:

British Red Cross

C4C

Citizens Advice Edinburgh

Community InfoSource

EVOC

Fair Way Scotland

FOSS (Friends of Scottish Settlers)

Freedom From Torture – Scotland

GLA-DAN

Glasgow Asylum Destitution Action Network

Glasgow Caledonian University

Govan Community Project

Heriot-Watt University

Homeless Network Scotland

Institute of Social Policy, Housing and Equalities Research (I-SPHERE)

Integravia Foundation

Lawmanity

LGBT Health and Wellbeing
Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees
Scottish Refugee Council
The Wise Group
University of Birmingham
University of Edinburgh
University of Glasgow
University of the West of Scotland
Members with lived experience

Speakers

1. Beth Watts-Cobbe | Heriot-Watt University

Beth presented on the drivers of destitution and homelessness within the UK's immigration system, drawing attention to the long-standing impacts of the hostile environment policy. She highlighted that individuals without recourse to public funds (NRPF) are denied basic rights such as work and access to benefits, leaving them reliant on limited support. Through the Fair Way Scotland partnership, targeted support is offered to three primary groups: people whose asylum appeals are exhausted, EEA nationals without settled status, and other individuals subject to visa restrictions. Beth shared survey data indicating that 93% of respondents were homeless and that 14% had experienced forced labour, many also faced hunger, lack of weather-appropriate clothing and hygiene poverty. She emphasised the increased risk of exploitation and the essential role of caseworkers in delivering life-saving support, even as funding struggles to meet demand. Beth also shared data that showed those who are NRPF are 8.5 times more likely to access accident and emergency care, and described how not providing support can lead to inadvertent costs and strains in services such as A&E. She concluded that rough sleeping in Scotland cannot be eradicated without addressing the needs of this group.

A video from this project was shown, it can be found here: [Fair Way Scotland - Homeless Network Scotland: we are all in](#)

2. Jen Ang | Human Rights Lawyer, Fair Way Scotland

Jen expanded on the concept of destitution by design, focusing on the structural policies that lead to systemic exclusion. She challenged the assumption that devolved governments are powerless in this area, citing Scottish Government precedents like discretionary housing payments. Jen mentioned the urgent need for political clarity: while immigration remains a reserved matter, universal services like education and healthcare fall within devolved

competencies and can be made more accessible. She gave examples of how the Scottish Government has acted within its devolved powers to mitigate other UK policies, such as the bedroom tax, and argued the same approach should be taken to support destitute migrants. She called for a comprehensive review of devolved policy and a scaling-up of parallel financial and legal support. She addressed misconceptions around NRPF, stating that social work services are not considered public funds and should therefore remain accessible to migrants. She also noted that some statutory benefits such as Statutory Sick Pay and the State Pension do not fall under the NRPF umbrella. Jen also noted that many aspects of the hostile environment had been deemed unlawful and could be reversed.

Read Jen's Report here: [Fair-Way-Legal-Briefing-12.2.25.pdf](#)

Other relevant work: [Destitution by design: righting the wrongs of UK immigration policy in Scotland | Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#)

3. Esther Muchena | Scottish Refugee Council

Ester discussed her work supporting people who are appeal rights exhausted or in the process of submitting fresh claims, describing the extreme vulnerability of people awaiting or recovering from asylum decisions. She noted that those with refused claims often struggle to understand legal processes and that referrals frequently occur at crisis points. She also highlighted the lack of emergency support systems as after 21 days, individuals are evicted from their accommodation and left with no income. She outlined SRC's holistic model, which includes assistance with legal advice, food, clothing, and mental health support. Demand on services is overwhelming, and some clients have been destitute for 5 to 10 years. The failure of the system to allow work exacerbates isolation and poverty.

4. Mhari Love | Scottish Refugee Council

Mhari addressed the structural limitations of the asylum system, describing it as outdated and in need of significant reform. She highlighted the ongoing gap between policy developments in Westminster and the lived reality in Scotland. Mhari also noted that even after receiving leave to remain, many individuals fall into homelessness due to a lack of transition infrastructure. She argued that while Scotland is doing better in some areas, reforms must be systemic rather than piecemeal. She echoed calls for direct funding responses and long-term housing and mental health provision.

5. Meneesia | Govan Community Project

Meneesia provided insight into a lived experience-led project focused on ending destitution. She described how people affected by NRPF often lack access to culturally appropriate food, housing, and clothing, and are routinely given vouchers that restrict their ability to shop where they need to. The project highlighted the importance of employing refugees directly and ensuring community-led information and support are available. She emphasised that isolation, poverty, and policy barriers remain key issues and called for better partnership and resource-sharing to meet demand.

General Discussion

Becky Macfarlane (GLADAN) contributed to the general discussion, highlighting ongoing misinformation around NRPF. She reported that social workers and GPs continue to incorrectly deny support to destitute individuals, especially refused asylum seekers, by citing NRPF as a disqualifier. Becky clarified that according to COSLA's Migration Scotland guidance, social work services are not public funds and should still assess those in need, including families with children. She also expressed concern that employers on the Immigration Salary List are not providing entitlements such as sick pay, exposing workers to exploitation. She urged for greater awareness of what benefits are not considered public funds, including Statutory Sick Pay, Statutory Maternity Pay, and the State Pension.

Yuri Komplan (Integravia Foundation) asked whether employers offering food bank vouchers or financial assistance could negatively affect a migrant's immigration status. Jen Ang responded that support not drawn from excluded public funds is legally acceptable and does not harm someone's status. However, the hostile environment creates a chilling effect, deterring both migrants and service providers from taking action, even when lawful.

Fatma Elaraby (Maryhill Integration Network) raised the need for more accessible opportunities for children of asylum seekers, such as vouchers for sports activities and inclusion in community programmes. She noted the harmful impact that policy exclusion has on child development and integration.

Bob Doris MSP reflected on how political will is critical in navigating reserved matters. He stressed that small, targeted forms of support (such as discretionary cash funds) can be transformative. He noted the burden placed on Scottish resources by people with leave to remain who still fall into homelessness, many of whom did not originate in Scotland. He warned that current funding models are being stretched to their limit. Paul Sweeney MSP also commented on Glasgow's housing pressures and the inefficiencies of placing people in hotels rather than investing in long-term accommodation. He suggested resources could be redirected from short-term contracts (such as with Mears) into infrastructure and capacity-building.

Meenisia (Govan Community Project) reiterated the trauma caused by current transitions from asylum to homelessness, highlighting that many newly granted refugees are placed in hotels rather than appropriate housing, with 54% of all people in temporary accommodation having positive decisions. She called for the Home Office to redirect funding to local authorities and cities to manage transitions more effectively.

Maggie Chapman MSP supported proposals for a parliamentary debate on Jen Ang's report and stressed the need for action on policy areas that are currently within the Scottish Parliament's power. She acknowledged the valuable work already being done and encouraged further scrutiny of what can be implemented immediately.