

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

13th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday
20 September 2023

PE2028: Extend the concessionary bus travel scheme to include people seeking asylum in Scotland

Petitioner	Pinar Aksu on behalf of Maryhill Integration Network and Doaa Abuamer on behalf of the Voices Network
Petition summary	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to extend the current Concessionary Travel Scheme to include all people seeking asylum in Scotland regardless of age.
Webpage	https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PP3904

Introduction

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 5 June 2023.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
4. Every petition can collect signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 618 signatures have been received on this petition.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered. A response has been received from the Scottish Government and is included at **Annexe C** of this paper.
6. A submission has been provided by the petitioner. This is included at **Annexe D**.

Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

PE2028: Extend the concessionary bus travel scheme to include people seeking asylum in Scotland

Petitioner

Pinar Aksu on behalf of Maryhill Integration Network and Doaa Abuamer on behalf of the Voices Network

Date lodged

5 June 2023

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to extend the current Concessionary Travel Scheme to include all people seeking asylum in Scotland regardless of age.

Previous action

We have raised the issue with Paul Sweeney MSP, who submitted a [motion in the Scottish Parliament](#), which achieved cross-party support.

We also met with the then Minister for Transport, Jenny Gilruth, to highlight the need for free bus travel to people seeking asylum in Scotland.

Background information

Asylum seekers are some of the most vulnerable people in the UK. They are prevented from working, housed in hotels or private rental accommodation, often in isolated areas, and given less than £50 per week to survive.

Those in hotel accommodation are forced to live on as little as £9 a week, just over £1 a day.

Access to concessionary bus travel is viewed by us as a key social justice policy. We believe it will be positively life-changing and mentally transformative for those otherwise stuck in a dreadfully inadequate and

slow asylum system. Most of all, we believe it will enable asylum seekers as a group to become much more integrated in our communities.

Our campaign started in December 2021 with members from the Voices Network, followed by support from the Maryhill Integration Network Voices group.

Annexe B

The logo for SPICe, featuring the text 'SPICe' in white on a purple and blue gradient background.

The Information Centre
An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on PE2028, Extend the concessionary bus travel scheme to include people seeking asylum in Scotland, submitted by Pinar Aksu on behalf of Maryhill Integration Network and Doaa Abuamer on behalf of the Voices Network

Background

Scottish Ministers can establish national concessionary travel schemes under powers granted by Section 40 of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005. Scottish Ministers have the power to define who is an “eligible person” for the purposes of any such concessionary travel scheme.

The Scottish Government currently operates [two national concessionary travel schemes](#), these provide free travel on local bus and scheduled coach services within Scotland for residents aged under 22, aged 60+, or who are disabled.

People seeking asylum in the UK are usually ineligible for most welfare benefits. This is referred to as having ‘no recourse to public funds’. Paragraph six of the introduction to the [UK Government’s Immigration Rules](#) lists the benefits it considers ‘public funds’. If a benefit is not on the list, then it is not considered to be ‘public funds’ and asylum seekers are able to claim, if they meet the eligibility criteria.

Scottish national concessionary travel schemes are not on the list, meaning eligible asylum seekers (those aged under 22, 60+ and disabled people) are already able to benefit from free bus and coach

travel in Scotland. Disabled asylum seekers aged between 22 and 59 may experience some issues in accessing the current concessionary travel scheme, as their eligibility may be dependent on the receipt of certain UK welfare benefits – which asylum seekers cannot access.

There would appear to be no legislative barrier to the Scottish Government establishing a new national concessionary travel scheme that applies specifically to asylum seekers.

[Home Office statistics](#) show there were 5,323 asylum seekers resident in Scotland on 30 June 2023, of which 4,694 (88%) live within the Glasgow City Council area.

Scottish Government Action

The Scottish Government has not previously considered the creation of a national concessionary travel scheme for asylum seekers.

Scottish Parliament Action

The Scottish Parliament has not previously considered the creation of a national concessionary travel scheme for asylum seekers.

Alan Rehfisch
Senior Researcher
25 August 2023

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Annexe C

Scottish Government submission of 27 June 2023

PE2028/A: Extend the concessionary bus travel scheme to include people seeking asylum in Scotland

In the Programme for Government 2022-23, the Scottish Government committed to working with third sector partners and local authorities to consider how best to provide free bus travel to people seeking asylum.

As the Committee will be aware, asylum policy is reserved to the UK Government. People seeking asylum in the UK are generally restricted from working and have no recourse to public funds. However, in many cases they require to travel to access legal advice, social support, medical appointments and other essential services.

A short term pilot led by the Refugee Survival Trust and third sector partners commenced on Monday 30 January and will finish in July 2023 and is funded through the Scottish Government's Smarter Choices, Smarter Places scheme. This pilot is providing travel support to 150 people seeking asylum living in Glasgow through the provision of a 12-week digital First Bus pass, along with information and digital support to access and use the pass. The funding secured will also provide short term bus tickets to those in immediate need.

Participants in the pilot are being asked to provide information on how often they make use of bus travel, the reasons that journeys are made and the impact that having access to free bus travel has on their lives. This information will help inform options on how to deliver our Programme for Government commitment.

In parallel to the work on the pilot, Scottish Government officials are exploring options, including eligibility for the statutory concessionary travel scheme, to provide free bus travel to people seeking asylum in the longer term, recognising that asylum policy is reserved to the UK Government.

Officials have estimated that around one-third of people seeking asylum in Scotland are already eligible for concessionary bus travel under the

existing Young Persons and Older and Disabled Persons Schemes (by virtue of being under 22, aged 60 and over or via disability eligibility).

Transport Strategy and Analysis
Transport Scotland

Annexe D

Petitioner submission of 17 July 2023

PE2028/B: Extend the concessionary bus travel scheme to include people seeking asylum in Scotland

We thank the [Scottish Government for the detailed response](#) to the petition.

We would like to highlight the other pilots and testimonies which have been gathered across Scotland which highlight the importance of statutory concessionary travel for people seeking asylum in Scotland.

These include a pilot in Aberdeen **with First Bus which supported 80 of 91 people seeking asylum in the city** and another pilot in Falkirk which provided support for those who are currently placed in hotel accommodations. The current pilot run by Refugee Survival Trust is welcome but should not be considered in isolation. We feel strongly that other pilots which have taken place and produced a strong evidence base should also be considered by the Scottish Government as part of their work on exploring free bus travel options for people seeking asylum.

The working group formed to bring together third sector organisations, including Maryhill Integration Network, Scottish Refugee Council, JustRight Scotland, Voices Network, others, and Transport Scotland is also a vital means of gathering knowledge from the refugee sector on this issue and we would encourage the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland to continue engaging with the working group so that further valuable evidence and knowledge can feed into its work on free bus travel.