

TAKE ACTION

TO END ASYLUM DESTITUTION

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This action pack was produced by
Positive Action in Housing
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1. What is Destitution

Destitution (noun)

A total lack of the means of subsistence ; a state of utter poverty

A destitute asylum seeker

- ⊙ is homeless and has no right to any public housing
- ⊙ is not allowed to work and risks imprisonment if they do
- ⊙ cannot claim any benefits or tax credits
- ⊙ cannot get any support from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS)
- ⊙ will have been evicted from their home, with possibly only 7 days notice
- ⊙ may be pregnant, disabled or a survivor of torture
- ⊙ is likely to suffer from extreme anxiety and depression
- ⊙ is likely to be at risk of racial violence and sexual exploitation
- ⊙ feels safer starving and sleeping on our streets than returning to their home country

Asylum Seekers – explaining the system

- An asylum seeker is someone who has been forced to leave their country due to fear of persecution and has made a claim for protection, but whose claim is not yet decided; a refugee has had a positive decision on their claim and has been granted leave to remain.
- Whilst waiting for a decision on their claim, asylum seekers are not allowed to work and cannot claim any benefits or tax credits. They are supported by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), part of the Home Office.
- Asylum seekers get money from NASS, paid at less than Income Support levels and are provided with basic accommodation on a no choice basis; here in Scotland they are nearly always housed in hard to let high rise tower blocks.
- If the decision on an asylum claim is negative, then there is usually a right of appeal, but unlike say – a parking ticket fine, where you may get 28 days to appeal, an asylum seeker gets only 10 days to appeal.
- If an asylum seeker or their lawyer doesn't appeal in time, or if their appeal fails, then their NASS support will stop and they will be evicted from their accommodation, ie they become destitute.
- Asylum seekers with dependent children are less likely to be made destitute as support from NASS should carry on while their children are of school age.
- Other asylum seekers become destitute because of administrative delays and errors. Some refugees also experience destitution as it takes months to sort out the transition from NASS support to benefits after being granted status.

⊙ **Destitution – the lack of alternatives**

The 'official' alternative to becoming destitute is to claim what is known as Section 4 Support. The government frequently claims that nobody needs to be destitute as they can claim Section 4 support instead.

Section 4

- ⊙ Accommodation provided on a no choice basis, often sharing a bedroom with someone you don't know in housing which falls below nationally agreed standards, eg sometimes even without heating
- ⊙ Vouchers you can only use in supermarkets and other major chain stores, worth £35 per week or just £5 per day, no money for bus fares, phone calls or essential items for nursing mothers
- ⊙ Usually only available if you are willing to sign to say that you agree to make a "voluntary return" to your home country and is often not available to pregnant women until 34th week of pregnancy
- ⊙ Routinely takes many weeks or months to process claims so destitution is inevitable
- ⊙ **"stigmatising ...inhumane and inefficient ... not adequately providing for basic living needs"**
House of Parliament Joint Committee on Human Rights, March 2007

Many asylum seekers do not want to claim Section 4, because they cannot bring themselves to sign a declaration that they are willing to make a voluntary departure to their country of origin. Although their asylum claim has been refused, they do not feel safe returning to their country and become destitute rather than claim Section 4.

People kept asking me to sign – but I said no I can't do that. To do so would be to sign my death warrant. Female asylum Seeker, affected by HIV, destitute for 30 months

⊙ **Destitution - caused by unfair asylum refusals**

The standard of decision making at the Home Office is very poor. Restrictions on legal aid has lead to a shortage of immigration solicitors and increasing numbers of asylum seekers are having their claims decided with little or no meaningful legal representation. The New Asylum Model, fully operational since early 2007, has meant asylum claims are being decided within a few days or weeks of someone arriving in UK – raising concerns not only about the lack of time lawyers have to prepare cases, but fears that survivors of torture and sexual violence will not have the time needed to disclose their full stories before their claim is decided. Some may win their cases on appeal – others fight for years for justice and protection. The asylum system has become firm, fast and unfair.

⊙ **Destitution – a deliberate government policy**

.. the Government is practicing a deliberate policy of destitution we believe that the deliberate use of inhumane treatment against asylum seekers is unacceptable and falls below the requirements of the common law of humanity and of international human rights law...
House of Parliament Joint Committee on Human Rights, March 2007

Could you survive on £6 per day?

**This is how much a single adult asylum seeker has to live on.
It is £6 more than someone who is destitute has.**

2. Destitution frequently asked questions

How many destitute asylum seekers are there?

Nobody knows the precise number. Scottish charities are seeing ever increasing numbers, including many who are pregnant, disabled or in poor mental health. Refugee Survival Trust give out around 100 destitution grants per month to people in crisis in Scotland. The National Audit Office estimates that there are 283,500 refused asylum seekers living in the UK, so the scale of the problem is huge.

Why can't destitute asylum seekers just go back to their home country?

Many refused asylum seekers are too afraid to go home voluntarily, not least as they are from countries - such as Iraq, Zimbabwe or Somalia - torn apart by conflict or where human rights abuses are rife. They consider starving and sleeping on the streets in Britain to be a safer option.

Mary from Uganda was destitute for three months with twins aged 3, after fleeing a dawn raid. Eventually she won leave to remain – just one of the many refugees who faced injustice.

Why are refused asylum seekers not removed?

In many cases it is simply not possible to remove people back to their home countries – for example there may be no safe route, no functioning airport or it is impossible to get travel documents from their country of origin. This raises the question, if it is not safe or possible to remove someone, why was their claim for protection refused?

How long are people destitute for?

Refugee Action recently interviewed 125 destitute asylum seekers in England. On average people had spent 21 months being destitute.

Where do most destitute asylum seekers sleep?

We've met asylum seekers who have slept in parks, phone boxes, behind bins, in doorways or just travel on night buses. Others are taken in by friends who are mainly fellow asylum seekers; moving from floor to floor so that they don't become too big a burden. What makes things even more difficult is that asylum seekers aren't allowed to have people staying in their NASS flats so by helping they are running the risk of having all their own support stopped as well.

During 2007 the government started a review of a backlog of cases (known as legacy cases) and many asylum seekers are being granted leave to remain. Won't this solve the problem?

The review of old cases is certainly a welcome development, but it is going to take at least five years to clear the backlog. Five years is a long time to survive with no money and nowhere to live. Also the review will do nothing to stop more recently arrived asylum seekers from being made destitute. As the New Asylum Model makes decisions so quickly, the people made destitute now haven't had time to build up any support networks and so are even more vulnerable.

3. Practical Support

There are many ways you can provide practical support to destitute asylum seekers. Here are some of the best ways to alleviate their suffering.

🕒 **Donate to organisations helping destitute asylum seekers**

Positive Action in Housing – Destitution Fund

Money donated directly benefits destitute asylum seekers, either by paying for food or emergency accommodation. The fund relies entirely on donations. Individuals can donate in many different ways including by cheque, online or regularly via standing order or payroll giving.

Make regular donations

Are you able to give a small but regular donation to Positive Action in Housing's Destitution Fund? Why not set up a standing order so that you can help people every month? As little as £5 per month, will make a real difference. Just complete the standing order mandate on page 15.

What your donation will mean

£5 food for one day, £15 one night in a hostel, £25 food for five days, £75 a week in a hostel.

For more information telephone 0141 353 2220 or visit www.paih.org

Refugee Survival Trust (RST)

The Refugee Survival Trust currently give out grants to around 100 people each month who are experiencing destitution, including people who experience terrible delays in the Home Office processing applications for Section 4 Support.

Case Study

J's new baby was in intensive care. Her application for "section 4 accommodation" was taking many weeks to be processed by the Home Office. In the meantime she had to stay in hospital to avoid homelessness. Although social work was able to provide a small income for her 2 year-old child, she had no money with which she could buy food for herself. RST supported J. for four weeks with a grant of £40 per week while she was awaiting section 4 accommodation. They also provided her with a maternity grant of £150 to enable her to buy blankets, nappies and other essentials for her new-born baby.

For more information telephone 0131 554 6776, visit www.rst.org.uk or email info@rst.org.uk

🕒 **Raise funds**

As well as making an individual donation, it would be great if you could raise funds to help organisations who are supporting destitute asylum seekers. This doesn't have to be too complicated and we would be happy to discuss and help with any ideas you have. Here is just a few possibilities:

- ✓ Organise a collection in your church, place of worship, workplace
- ✓ Get your school or university involved, e.g. get students to bring in loose change and foreign currency that often lies around the house
- ✓ Get sponsorship, e.g. fast for 24 hours
- ✓ Get work colleagues to donate a percentage of their day's wages
- ✓ Talk to your Trade Union about what they could do
- ✓ Ask your family not to buy anything for 24 hours and donate money saved
- ✓ Organise a fundraising event, e.g. Friends of Ayrshire Refugees organised a music night and raised several hundred pounds

🕒 **Offer somewhere to stay**

Can you, or someone you know prevent a destitute asylum seeker from rough sleeping? Can you offer shelter to someone who, by sleeping rough, is at risk of racial violence or sexual exploitation? Do you have a spare room, even a spare bed - anything, so long as it's safe and warm?

We are in urgent need of more people to join our register of housing volunteers.

If you think you might be able to help and would like to know more call Positive Action in Housing on 0141 353 2220 or complete the supporters registration form

I have stayed in twelve different places over a four month period. Moving around so much was really hard, but I am so grateful for the generosity of the Scottish people. Without them I don't know how I would have survived. [Hua Qin, asylum seeker from China, 8 months pregnant](#)

🕒 **Offer other practical support**

There are a number of churches and community organisations who give out clothes, hygiene packs or food parcels to people who are destitute. So if you cannot afford to make a monetary donation, then why not help out by donating unwanted clothes or organise a collection where you work, study or at your place of worship. Get in touch on 0141 353 2220 to find out more.

4. Campaign

Join us in campaigning
for an **end to destitution** and
in restoring full rights for all asylum seekers.

Here's what you can do to help :

⊙ Protest

One of the best ways to bring about change is to protest. You can protest in many different ways – it doesn't have to be big, just needs to have a focus, a target audience and an impact. A soap box, a megaphone and a busy high street may be all you need!

Types of protest include:

direct action	giving out leaflets
information stall with petition	marches
picketing	public meeting
publicity stunt	sit in
rally with speakers	sleep out
street theatre	vigil

During the summer of 2007 there were a series of national sleep-outs which was a great way of raising awareness about destitution as well as raising funds. Let us know if you want more information about organising a protest or to share ideas.

⊙ Write to your MP

House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

You'll find a template of a letter you can use on page 9; but to make it have more impact its best to personalise your letter rather than use our template word for word. This is because MPs get lots of campaign letters, so they probably pay less attention to what they think is a standard letter. If you are not sure what to write, get in touch and we will be happy to advise you.

How to find out who your MP is:

Visit www.parliament.uk and follow link to *MPs and Lords*.
Alternatively contact the House of Commons information desk
by phone 020 7219 4272 or email hcinfo@parliament.uk

🕒 **Contact your MP in person**

Personal visits can have more impact than a letter, so why not pay your MP a visit – or if there are a couple of you from the same area, contact their constituency office to request a meeting? If there are a group of you, you can also lobby your MP whilst they are at House of Commons – you can find out more about how to lobby by going to www.parliament.uk and entering 'lobbying' in their search box.

How to find out details of your MP's constituency surgeries

Most MPs have their own website with details of their constituency surgeries. So once you know their name you can follow the links on the House of Commons website or do a quick google search to find out where their surgeries are based. If you don't have internet access, you should be able to find details of their surgeries at your local library or Citizens Advice Bureau.

How to get the most out of your meeting with your MP:

- ✓ be realistic about how much you can cover in one meeting.
- ✓ read this campaign pack carefully before your visit and contact us if you need more information
- ✓ pick out three main points that you want to get across
- ✓ be clear about what you want your MP to do as a result of the meeting, such as writing to a minister or asking a parliamentary question
- ✓ try and predict some possible responses and rehearse your arguments
- ✓ organise a follow up visit in a few months to see what action they have taken.

🕒 **Contact your MSP**

Destitution is not just a reserved matter for the Westminster Parliament – so it is wrong for an MSP to say that destitution is not something they can do anything about. Many destitute asylum seekers suffer from severe mental health problems and others are at risk of being attacked whilst sleeping rough. Health, housing and community safety are all devolved matters.

How to find out who your MSP is

Visit www.scottish.parliament.uk and follow link to *MSPs*. Alternatively contact Scottish Parliament Public Information Office by phone **0131 348 5000** or **0845 278 1999**, or via email sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk

If you are living in Scotland, its just as important to lobby your local MSP as it is your MP. We need to put as much pressure as possible on all our elected representatives to end the suffering of destitute asylum seekers. You can contact your MSP in much the same way as you do your MP – the address for writing to them is **The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP.**

**Destitution is a matter for the Scottish people.
People should not walk away but listen to what is happening
and do something to help us. We are suffering so much.
Lorraine – destitute asylum seeker**

Template of letter to send to MP

Add MP's name
House Of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

*(don't forget to put your full address on letter
as MPs can only deal with people in their constituency)*

Dear

I am writing to bring to your attention the growing number of people seeking asylum who are being left homeless and starving in *my local area/ across Scotland/ UK* as a result of the removal of their support when their asylum claim is refused.

(Add in paragraph to explain any personal involvement with destitute asylum seekers or a quote from within this action pack)

I believe that it is inhuman and unacceptable that people who have come to the UK to seek protection are left homeless, unable to work and unable to claim any support from the state. Every major city in the UK has many vulnerable people including pregnant women, survivors of torture and people in poor mental health who are left to starve on our streets. *(add in details of what is happening locally if you know it)*

Most of these people come from war torn countries or countries with terrible human rights records. They often feel that they have not had a fair hearing on their asylum claim and cannot access Section 4 support because they do not want to sign to say it is safe for them to return to their country of origin.

If it is not possible for someone to be removed from the UK, should they not be allowed to remain here lawfully and encouraged to contribute to society by working?

Charities who are supporting destitute asylum seekers are struggling to cope with level of need and I would urge you to make a public statement in support of their work.

I would also ask that you urgently raise this matter with the Home Secretary and join me in campaigning for a change in the law. We need a fairer asylum system and to ensure that all asylum seekers are given a fair hearing as well as the right to work and claim benefits whilst they remain in the UK.

Yours sincerely

NB If writing to MSP also add a paragraph to explain why destitution isn't a solely reserved matter

5. Raise Awareness

People don't know what happens to me and others in my situation, I just want to make people understand.

Blanche, destitute asylum seeker from Congo

Many destitute asylum seekers have told us that if the Scottish people knew what they were going through, then they wouldn't let it happen. We need your help to raise awareness and here's what you can do:

🎯 **Invite us to talk to your group**

Nearly all of us belong to one sort of organisation or another. Do you think the other members of your organisation know what is happening to destitute asylum seekers? Do you think they would be interested to find out more or may be interested to see how they can help?

Examples of groups who may want a talk

Church, Mosque, place of worship

College or University

Community Centre

Local Authority, social work etc

Neighbourhood Group

Pensioners Group

Rotary Club

School

Social Club

Tenants Association

Trade Union

Workplace

Why not arrange for one of our campaigners to come out and give a talk – this would be arranged to suit the needs of your group. Contact us on 0141 353 2220 or fill in the supporters registration form at the end of this pack to arrange this.

🎯 **Train to be able to give talks on destitution**

Better still, why not train to be able to give talks on destitution yourself. The more people who go out and give talks, the bigger the momentum we can build behind our campaign. It's not as hard as you think and we will support you along the way. Sign up to get more information on our next training sessions by completing the supporters registration form.

🎯 **Organise your own screening**

Alternatively you may want to organise your own screening of *Welcome* or *Taking Action* and let the voices of the asylum seekers in the film do the talking for you. We can guide you as to how to get the most out of your screening. Get in touch with us to find out more.

🕒 Use the media

One of the best ways of influencing public opinion is using the media to get your message across. Here are a few suggestions of how to do this.

Write to your local newspaper

Most local newspapers are in need of items to include and using the local letters page can be a good way of engaging with local people. Or if you've made a donation or organised a public event, why not let the local paper know and encourage other people to do the same?

Tips on writing to local press

First paragraph : sum up the article and try and grab the reader's attention. If possible try and find a local angle or news story to hook your article on to.

Second and third paragraphs : go into more detail, include some background information and something to personalise the story, such as a quote from a destitute asylum seeker, how it has affected you personally or what you are doing to help.

Fourth paragraph : explain why destitution matters to the local community and what you are doing to help.

Final paragraph : sum up and explain how other people can help or find out more.

Join a Campaign Group

Scottish Refugee Council's electronic campaigning group will keep you up to date with the latest issues affecting asylum seekers and refugees in Scotland. We will contact members to highlight negative press coverage of asylum seekers; changes in policy or legislation that will affect asylum seekers; and campaigns Scottish Refugee Council and our partner agencies are involved in. If you would like to join the campaigning group then please email campaigning@scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk

Complain about national newspaper coverage

If you see an article in a newspaper that is inaccurate, misleading or encouraging racism, then make a complaint to the Press Complaints Commission (www.pcc.org.uk). Making a complaint is free, quick and effective, but you may sometimes need to complain directly to the newspaper first. You can get advice as to what to do via the Press Complaints Commission's helplines:

England: 0845 600 2757-**Scotland:** 0131 220 6652-**Wales:** 029 2039 5570




Contribute to Radio Phone-Ins

Asylum seekers are often debated on radio phone-ins, both local and national. Most people who phone in don't know anything about the real situation faced by asylum seekers. For the price of a phonecall, you could reach a wide audience and let them know about the suffering experienced by destitute asylum seekers.

It is not as scary as you think to take part. Its best to concentrate on getting just 2 or 3 key points across – for example asylum seekers cannot work or claim benefits; many asylum claims are refused even when its not safe for them to return to their country of origin and pregnant women and survivors of torture are being made destitute as the government wants to starve them out of the country.

6. Contact Us

Positive Action in Housing

 98 West George Street, Glasgow, G2 1PJ
 0141 353 2220
 www.paih.org

Camcorder Guerillas

 Room 17, Glasgow Media Access Centre,
3rd Floor, 34 Albion Street, Glasgow G1 1LH
 0141 553 2551
 www.camcorderguerillas.net
camcorderguerillas@talktalk.net

How can I find out more about destitution?

Positive Action in Housing www.paih.org

Asylum Destitution Support Network www.destitution.net

Information Centre about
Asylum and Refugees in the UK (ICAR) www.icar.org.uk

How can I keep up to date with your campaign?

To be kept in touch with what is happening with our campaign you can join our mailing list. All you need to do is complete the supporter's registration form at the end of this resource pack and then post it to
Destitution Campaign, Positive Action in Housing,
98 West George Street, Glasgow, G2 1PJ

Are there any other destitution campaigns I could join?

As well as our campaign, it would be great for you to also support the following national campaigns to end destitution.

Still Human Still Here www.stillhuman.org.uk

Bringing together over 20 organisations to campaign to end destitution. Still Human Still Here calls for the restoration of the right to work & financial support, and full access to health care and education.

Living Ghosts www.church-poverty.org.uk

....a Living Ghost is neither asylum nor refugee; they exist without recognition or basic living needs. They are human; need shelter and food and the right to work....

7. Supporters Registration Form

Contact Details

Name.....

Organisation (if any)

Address

..... **Post code:**

Email

Phone

Mailing List

✓ if you want to be added to our email news lists

Destitution Newsletter
to be kept informed of destitution campaigns and events

Quickmail
for a weekly news digest on general asylum issues and events

Volunteer Housing Register

If you are interested in finding out more about joining our register of volunteers who offer space in their home to destitute asylum seekers then tick (✓) here

Raising Awareness

⊙ If you would like us to give a talk to your organisation or group about destitution then please tick here

⊙ If you would like to receive training so that you could deliver your own talks then please tick here

⊙ If you want help in organising a screening of Welcome or Take Action then please tick here

Order more copies of Welcome DVD

The Welcome DVD is free for asylum seekers/refugees and people on low incomes. Otherwise we ask for a donation. Suggested donations are £15 for individuals and £75 for organisations. **£15 will pay for one night hostel accommodation and £75 will help pay for a week's accommodation.**

Money raised will directly support destitute asylum seekers. For multiple copies please telephone 0141 353 2220 to discuss, before ordering.

- Please send me copies of the Welcome DVD.
- I enclose a donation of **£15 / £75/ £** **per copy**
- I also enclose an additional donation of **£** towards your destitution fund
- If you are an asylum seeker/refugee or on a low income and want us to send you a free copy then tick (✓) here

Please make cheques payable to Positive Action in Housing

Share your ideas, comments and activities

We would love to hear your comments on how useful you have found this campaign pack and any other suggestions you have as to how we can campaign to end destitution. It would also be great if you could let us know of any activities you undertake or are planning, so that we can share them with other campaign supporters.

Comments (continue on separate sheet)

Send completed forms to

Destitution Campaign, Positive Action in Housing,
98 West George Street, Glasgow, G2 1PJ
Tel 0141 353 2220 Fax 0141 353 3882

**DESTITUTION FUND
STANDING ORDER MANDATE**

To the Manager
 Name of Bank:
 Address

 City & Postcode

Please pay: Clydesdale Bank plc, 30 St Vincent Place, Glasgow G1 2HL

For the credit of: Positive Action in Housing Ltd Charity Reg No: SCO27577
 Sort Code 82 20 00 Account Number 00447398

The sum of : (in words) _____ Pounds (£ _____)
 On the _____ (day), _____ (month), _____ (year)
 And thereafter every month until further notice and debit my account accordingly.

Name of account-holder to be debited:
Account Number:
Sort Code:

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Your Address
Tel Number:
Email address:

giftaid it

I would like tax to be reclaimed on my donation under the Gift Aid Scheme. I am a UK tax payer and pay an amount of income tax and/or capital gains tax at least equal to the tax that can be reclaimed on my donation. *Please tick.*

YES NO

Please call 0141 353 2220 if you have any queries.

When completed, please return to
 Positive Action in Housing, 98 West George Street, Glasgow G2 1PJ.
 We will then send this form onto your bank. Thank you.

8. Destitute asylum seekers in their own words

To staff of Positive Action Housing

Hello

I am writing to you to thank you for everything you have done for me. I have never imagined in my life that I would sleep rough but the power of life is huge.

I keep asking myself what I would have done without your help, assistance, what could I have done during that time, without a shelter, with no means to survive.

I am grateful and will not easily forget your help and assistance. I wish that my God assist you and give you what you need to keep on supporting people in the same situation as I was. It is not easy to explain; only the one who lived that situation knows and understands.

Thank you for saving my life, maybe I could have died because the idea of killing myself was always in my mind.

I personally chose to thank you in writing for it to be used as a testimony, archive and evidence of your work.

One more time, thank you for everything. I thank the whole team of Positive Action in Housing without exception. I also thank R. who accepted that I stayed with him on the night of 17 November and also K. who made his house available to me for a considerable time.

Fabrice

TRANSLATION OF DESTITUTE ASYLUM SEEKER'S THANK YOU LETTER

For 12 months I had NASS Support of £38 per week and then it just stopped. On February 13th I got a letter saying that the £38 I had just received was going to be my last and I also had to leave my house. Three years later I can still remember the date that I got the letter.

I was scared and did not know what to do. I went everywhere for help and asked everyone – I tried everything. I got told that I could only get support if I signed a statement to say I was willing to go back to my country. People kept asking me to sign this – but I said no I can't do that. To do so would be to sign my death warrant. The Home Office is acting like God, they are deciding if I can live or die. People's lives are in their hands.

My mental health has suffered and it got so bad I have even been in a psychiatric hospital. The consultants have written really strong letters to the Home Office, but they just ignore them. My health has suffered so much because of what I have been through with the Home Office.

Female asylum seeker, affected by HIV, destitute for 2 and a half years

The Home Office came to my house last week and they ask me to leave the house. I'm in a situation that I don't really know what to do. My fear to be returned to my country is killing me and all the hope I had about study and a brilliant future in Scotland is gone. After graduating on Saturday with my HND, I'm left homeless without any knowledge of where to go or what to do. Male asylum seeker from Angola