

Destitute asylum seekers face eviction in Glasgow, Scotland

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Around 80 destitute asylum seekers face eviction from a tower block asylum hostel in Glasgow, Scotland. If forced out of their Glasgow refuge, they will have no home, no money, will be entitled to no social support and will not be allowed to work legally.

Their terrible circumstances highlight once again the calculated brutality of the British government's asylum policies, fully supported by all the main political parties.

The asylum seekers, all of whose cases have been turned down, live in the partly demolished Red Road housing scheme run by the charity Y People (formerly the YMCA Glasgow). Y People maintain asylum accommodation on behalf of the UK Border Agency (UKBA).

Under current legislation, people who are refused asylum lose all accommodation and financial support 21 days after the rejection of their claims. They can have no further "recourse to public funds". Yet none can return to their country of origin for fear of the same circumstances that drove them to leave in the first place. Many are also ill, elderly or disabled.

Until this April, Y People did not enforce immediate evictions on those who had come to the end of the protracted asylum process. The charity allowed destitute individuals to stay on, offering them shelter, while local charities, refugee support groups and friends provided food hand-outs.

The pressures on people whose claims have been rejected were highlighted in 2010, when Sergei Serykh, his wife Tatiana, and their 21-year-old son jumped to their deaths from the hostel's 15th floor following the final failure of their bid for asylum.

Y People, however, recently lost its contract with the UKBA to the giant services transnational Serco.

Serco has demanded that the tower block be handed

over vacant or only accommodating asylum seekers who are still entitled to state support.

Y People dutifully sought to comply with this, and issued eviction notices to a number of extremely vulnerable people. Residents of the hostel reported Y People staff as having turned off electricity, changed locks and barricaded flats.

Following a public outcry involving demonstrations and public meetings, Y People backtracked, claiming that they would follow due legal process to gain control of the contested flats, but the end result would be the same. Y People chief executive Joe Connolly said that the charity would have continued to allow destitute residents to remain had they retained the UKBA contract.

The eviction threats have drawn attention to a number of reports pointing to the depths of misery and despair into which increasing numbers of "failed" asylum seekers are plunged. Research by Glasgow's Caledonian University conducted in March suggested that of 364 asylum seekers who contacted a number of support agencies in the city during one week, 88 were completely penniless. The average duration of destitution was 18 months. One person had been completely destitute for six and a half years.

Not all were at the end of the asylum process. Such is the complex, punitive, and bureaucratic nature of the system that one third of those interviewed were destitute while still pursuing their claims. They came from 29 countries, mostly Iran, Iraq, Sudan and Zimbabwe.

Another recent report made clear that the UK's asylum policy is systematically victimising women who have gone through the most appalling experiences.

"Refused: the experiences of women denied asylum in the UK," is written by Women for Refugee Women

and surveyed those whose asylum applications were rejected in 2010. Across the UK, some 18,000 people applied for asylum in 2010. Of these, only around 33 percent were women. Yet 74 percent of rejected cases were female.

The researchers interviewed 72 women. Of these, 49 percent had been imprisoned in their country of origin. Fifty-two percent had suffered violence from police, soldiers or prison officers, of which 32 percent had been raped. Twenty-one percent had been raped by a family member.

Following refusal of their application, 96 percent reported they were unable to work and 67 percent were completely destitute. Of these, almost all relied on food handouts, 56 percent had slept rough and 16 percent had experienced sexual violence while destitute. All reported they were unable to return to their country of origin for fear of much worse.

Figures for the total number of destitute asylum seekers are difficult to come by. In 2010, the Red Cross estimated that 200,000 people refused asylum remained in the UK. These were mostly being supported by friends, but as many as 20,000 were wholly dependent on charities and many of them were sleeping rough.

These numbers are growing all the time.

According to the Refugee Council in 2011, 19,804 people applied for asylum in the UK, with the greatest numbers from Iran, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan.

Over the same year, 17,496 initial decisions were made, of which 68 percent were rejected. 10,521 appeals were heard of which 67 percent were rejected and 8,869 people were deported.

While a number of people choose to go on “Section 4” support pending deportation, many prefer to stay on, choosing destitution in the desperate hope that something will turn up.

Managing this misery is very profitable.

Y People’s Connolly told the *Herald* that the annual £12.5 million contract that covered Scotland and Northern Ireland was won by Serco, undercutting a joint bid by Y People and transport company Stagecoach. Connolly complained that contracts were designed by the UKBA to be won by the large service companies.

This March, the UK government handed £620 million worth of transport and accommodation contracts to

Serco, G4S and Reliance.

All three already process, detain and deport immigrants on behalf of the British government. They run prisons and prison transport systems and are hoping to increase their stake in the rapid expansion of private prison and policing operations being instigated by the Conservative/Liberal Democrat government, under the guise of “austerity”. G4S made £532 million profit last year on a £7.5 billion turnover, while Serco made £290 million on £4.6 billion revenue.

G4S is the world’s second largest employer and also runs security, prison and detention services around the globe. The company will provide security for the London Olympics. Three G4S staff are currently facing charges over the 2010 death of Angolan Jimmy Mubenga, who was killed while being forcibly deported.

Serco runs most of Australia’s immigration detention camps and has been the target of repeated protests for its callous treatment of residents. It runs Yarl’s Wood detention centre in the UK, and Doncaster prison. The company is positioning itself to win further control of UK education contracts.



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