



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Social Justice and Social Security Committee

Shona Robison MSP,
Cabinet Secretary for Social
Justice, Housing and Local
Government
Scottish Government

Social Justice and Social Security
Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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Via email only

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13 April 2022

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

Refugees and Asylum Seekers: Under 22s Bus Travel

On [10 February 2022](#), the Committee held an evidence session with stakeholders on refugees and asylum seekers. During the meeting Members raised concerns about the accessibility of the Scottish Government's Young Scot/National Entitlement Card (NEC) under 22s Bus Travel Scheme to young refugees and asylum seekers.

It is our understanding that the Scheme does not prohibit young refugees and asylum seekers from taking part in the Scheme, but that there are barriers to accessing the Scheme. Following the evidence session, the Committee wrote to stakeholders asking for further details on the type of issues arising.

A response from the British Red Cross (BRC) is attached. It sets out the main difficulties being experienced by young refugees and asylum seekers. BRC has also identified some recommendations which could improve these issues.

The Committee asks the Scottish Government to consider the recommendations outlined and to make clear the criteria for free bus travel to councils and to encourage them to make uptake as straightforward as

possible because young refugees and asylum seekers should have equal opportunity of access the scheme. In addition, the Committee is interested to know how many refugees and asylum seekers have a free bus pass and if it will set a target for uptake.

It would be helpful to receive a response on what actions the Scottish Government plans to take by 13 May 2022.

I am copying this letter to Jenny Gilruth MSP, Minister for Transport, and to Dean Lockhart MSP, Convener of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elena Whitham', written in a cursive style.

Elena Whitham MSP
Convener
Social Justice and Social Security Committee

British Red Cross

Background

Almost any young person aged 22 and under in Scotland **can** access the Young Scot/National Entitlement Card (NEC), regardless of immigration status.

Our Youth Refugee Service have provided us with insights into their experiences of support young refugees and asylum seekers to apply and this has been included within the British Red Cross submission to Holyrood's Social Justice and Social Security Committee in February.

Our services have found that whilst it is possible for almost all our young people to access the NEC, it has been almost impossible for them to do so without at the very least guidance from us, and in some occasions a considerable amount of support. Between getting the form, understanding it, finding out what types of proofs they can provide, getting passport photos, getting someone to act as a Photo referee, and knowing where to take all their documents, there are barriers to doing this independently.

Barriers to access

The application forms are not always accessible:

- The online form is only available if you have access to a passport or driving license, which for young people going through the asylum process is incredibly unlikely.
- When a young person is applying without a passport or driving license, they must use the paper form. **They can access this from their local authority, but the route to access this, and submit their form, is different at each local authority.**
- *Good practice:* In Glasgow this can be done at any public library, without appointment. Glasgow Life have been helpful and have circulated information to all library staff to ensure they are aware of the forms of ID/proof of address most commonly held by young people who are in the asylum process.

While the requirements for proving age are fairly accessible, many are unaware of this.

- For example, ACR or BRP from the Home Office are accepted, and if a person does not have either of these, any document from a public authority showing the young person's full name and date of birth can be used.
- Where a young person has no ARC/BRP and are relying on a document instead, their application form will need a photo referee to complete a section of the form, and sign and date the back of their photo.
- However, young people out of education, isolated and may not be receiving support from any organisation find it difficult to provide a photo referee to complete a section the form.

Lack of knowledge among staff on eligibility

- Our young refugee team have noted that it appears colleges in Glasgow are no longer providing First Bus passes to young people who are within the NEC bus pass age remit. This will be a barrier to accessing education for those who have not applied/received their NEC bus pass yet.

Delays in receiving the NEC

- Glasgow Young Refugee team have made approx. 20 applications since January and none of these young people have received a bus pass yet.

Recommendations

As a result of the above barriers, the team have identified a range of recommendations, these include:

- Adding other forms of Photo ID to the online application, i.e. BRP and ARC
- Standardising where young people need to go across Scotland to have paper forms verified/sent to Young Scot. This would allow for clearer messaging to be created for young people and families, rather the current practice of providing a link to their local authority's websites
- Offer clear advice, and online training to third sector and education staff (including colleges and Universities) on how to support with applications
- Increase the number of 'trusted verifiers' and offer this more broadly to community organisations (this is where an organisation can send their forms directly to Young Scot and bypass the local authority)
- Continue to circulate information to all local authorities and schools, to make sure they know that this provision is not dependent on immigration status, and they know the many alternate forms of proof of age and address that can be accepted
- Create clear guidance on how to apply for those without passports/driving licences. This should be translated into community languages.