Meeting basic needs? The welfare of dispersed forced migrants in Leeds

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Aims

To highlight the main findings of a study, ‘Meeting Basic Needs?’, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, on the basic welfare of forced migrants in Leeds.

Methodology

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 23 forced migrants [5 refugees, 7 asylum seekers, 6 people with humanitarian protection and 5 failed asylum seekers] and 11 key respondents involved in the delivery of welfare services.

Key issues

Despite political debate that sees asylum seekers as taking jobs and exploiting welfare systems, many forced migrants in the UK routinely face poverty and social exclusion in everyday life. Changes to national policy over a decade have focused on deterrence, exclusion of forced migrants from mainstream welfare systems and reduction in welfare rights. Dispersal to Leeds, numbers and housing provision are outlined. Benefits available to forced migrants are set at levels that promote poverty: basic needs of many forced migrants are not being met. Destitution is a real but hidden problem. Other issues to emerge are homelessness, very poor standard housing, hostility and a desire to work and contribute.

Conclusions

In the short term improvement in the welfare available to forced migrants in the NASS system or who have been refused is unlikely, and the basic needs of forced migrants will continue to be marginalized.

Recommendations

The article recommends an end to ‘Section 55’, which denies access to welfare for anyone who does not make a claim for asylum within 72 hours of entering the UK; and enhanced support for asylum seekers who receive a positive decision.

Migrant Group
Asylum seekers
Refugees

Topic
Housing and welfare
Dispersal
Welfare entitlements
Place
Leeds
West Yorkshire
Year
2005
Resource Type
Journal article
Resource
The Yorkshire and Humber Regional Review
Volume
15
Number
1
Pages
21-22

Source URL: *https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/research-entry/meeting-basic-needs-welfare-dispersed-forced-migrants-leeds*