

Consultation Response

Greater London authority: public services committee scrutiny of asylum seekers and refugees.

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Shelter

Shelter's work with asylum seekers and refugees in London

Shelter

- Shelter is a national campaigning charity that every year works with over 100,000 homeless and badly housed people by providing a range of housing services.
- Our national housing services provide expert housing information, advice and advocacy. These services include:
 - A national network of over 50 housing aid centres.
 - Shelterline, our free, national, 24-hour housing advice service, which has recently received the Telephone Helplines Association Quality Mark.
 - The government-funded National Homelessness Advice Service, which provides specialist housing advice, training, consultancy, referral and information to other voluntary agencies, such as citizens advice bureaux and members of the Federation of Information and Advice, which are approached by people seeking housing advice.
 - A number of specialist projects promoting innovative solutions to particular issues. Our national Street Homelessness Project supports local authorities in developing and implementing effective strategies to address street homelessness. Our Homeless to Home projects, currently operating in Birmingham, Bristol, Nottingham and Sheffield, offer intensive resettlement support to formerly homeless families to help them settle into their new communities and to sustain their tenancies.

Shelter's experience of asylum and refugee issues

- In recent years, Shelter's housing services have advised and supported an increasing number of people who are awaiting, or have recently received, a decision on an asylum claim. Between April 2001 and March 2002 Shelter's housing services were contacted by 1,360 households experiencing housing problems because of their asylum or immigration status. Of these, almost 50 per cent (634 households) were living in London. Our Homeless to Home projects regularly work with former asylum seeking families who have been given leave to remain in the UK: a recent evaluation of the service revealed that in the 30 months to October 2001, it had worked with 271 families, 12 per cent of whom did not have British citizenship.
- Based on this experience, and following investigative work in a number of local authority areas, Shelter published *Far from Home: the housing of asylum seekers in private rented accommodation* in January 2001. This report highlighted the unacceptable housing conditions in which many people awaiting an asylum decision were living. We are pleased that many of the recommendations contained in the report

have been accepted by government and have welcomed the constructive dialogue we have had with government since the report was published.

- Shelter is represented on the Home Office's National Refugee Integration Forum Accommodation Sub-Group. This seeks to identify and address the housing difficulties faced by people who have recently received a positive asylum decision by making recommendations for the improvement of legislation, policy and practice and by identifying good practice.

Shelter in London

- Shelter's London Housing Aid Centre, based in central London, assists clients across the 33 London boroughs through comprehensive telephone advice and casework. During the year ending March 2002, this service gave information and advice in response to 33,474 enquiries from every London borough. The centre also has a dedicated caseworker based at the Bayswater Families Centre. The Families Centre provides a drop-in service for homeless families in bed & breakfast and other temporary accommodation in the Bayswater and Paddington areas. It offers a range of services including play facilities for children under 5 years, casework and counselling in mother tongue languages. In the year ending March 2002, the Families Centre worked with 462 refugee families, assisting them with cases ranging from transfers from unsuitable temporary accommodation, non-receipt of housing benefit, setting aside bailiff warrants and reviews of local authority homeless decisions.
- Shelter's Piccadilly Advice Centre in Shaftesbury Avenue is the only drop-in housing advice service for single homeless people in London. Open 365 days a year, the service deals with over 2,500 new enquiries every year from people newly arrived in the Capital or already living in a London borough. Over 90 per cent of enquiries relate to homelessness problems, from minor rent arrears and housing transfer issues, to long-term street homelessness. In addition to the drop-in service, the centre also offers a casework appointment service. This is provided throughout a range of general and specialist surgeries including a fortnightly surgery for people awaiting an asylum decision. These specialist casework services aim to take on cases that may impact on local and national policy and practice for homeless people.
- The National Homelessness Advice Service London team provides specialist second-tier housing advice, training, consultancy, referral and information to 790 voluntary advice agencies across London, including refugee agencies. In the year ending March 2002, the London team assisted other agencies with 1,524 cases.
- In May 2000 Shelter published London Solutions: housing need in London - an opportunity for action. This report highlighted the issues that should be considered by the London Mayor's Housing Commission of summer 2000 and, in turn, the housing

policies contained in the Greater London Authority's Spatial Development Strategy. One issue it discussed was the lengthy amounts of time that people awaiting an asylum decision were spending in often wholly unsuitable temporary accommodation as a result of the delays in local housing authorities processing their homelessness applications.

- Shelter is represented on the London Asylum Seeker Consortium/Association of London Government Integration Sub-Group. This seeks to address the difficulties faced by people supported by London local authorities under the interim arrangements, who lose this support on receipt of a decision on their asylum claims. As there are still around 50,000 people supported by London boroughs under these arrangements, the need to find practical solutions to their housing needs when they lose support is a major challenge.

Shelter's submission

Shelter welcomes the opportunity to submit written evidence to the investigative review of asylum seekers and refugees in London. Our submission concentrates on the housing issues facing asylum seekers and refugees in London. Our evidence seeks to address the objectives of the review, which are as follows:

To consider the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees in London

- When seeking to review the experiences of this particular group of people it is important to challenge the myths and assumptions made about them, including the misconception that they are a homogenous group with similar reasons for arriving in the UK and similar needs. The terms 'asylum seeker' and 'refugee' are used to describe people who are more remarkable in their diversity than their similarity. For example, many people who seek asylum are well-educated English speakers who enjoyed high social status and prosperity in their home countries. Such people often originate from modern, international cities and will therefore feel reasonably comfortable in a large city such as London. However, there are also people who originate from rural villages and who, as a consequence of poverty or oppression, are illiterate in their own language. People in this position may well feel uncomfortable in London and might have very different needs from the services available to them.
- A review of the experiences of people who have sought asylum in the UK and are living in London will therefore need to gather comprehensive information about their circumstances and needs. This should include information about their household composition, nationality, language needs, religious needs and medical needs. It would also be appropriate to review the regions that people have fled from, and their reasons for doing so, to consider the implications for the services they require and how these should be delivered. For example, a man who has fled his country having been the

victim of rape whilst serving in the armed forces is unlikely to readily volunteer this information. However, if providers of housing services are unaware of this possibility, he may be offered accommodation, such a bedspace in a large hostel, which might be wholly inappropriate for his well-being.

- Gathering information on the circumstances and needs of the potential client group is therefore essential if services provided to them are to adequately address these needs. The gathering of statistical data from international, national and local sources is important. Of equal importance is training for those planning and delivering services on the human rights abuses being committed in the home countries of those fleeing to London, and the likely effects of these on the needs of the client group. It is also vital to consult directly with the client group. As their composition is in a constant state of flux and their experiences are likely to be so varied, consultation should be an on-going process.
- Having gathered information on the main circumstances and needs of asylum seekers and refugees in London, it should then be possible to consider their experiences of and need for specific public services, such as housing, financial support, social support, health, education and employment. When reviewing the housing experiences of asylum seekers and refugees in London there are a number of factors to consider. The first is that the system of housing provision for people who have applied for asylum in the UK is now extremely complex.
- People who are destitute and have recently applied for asylum are excluded from the mainstream housing and welfare benefits system. Their only option is to apply for housing and essential living needs payments to the Home Office National Asylum Support Service (NASS). Whilst their application for NASS support is being considered, they are offered emergency housing procured by one of five refugee agencies contracted with NASS. In London, the Refugee Council procures this housing, which is usually in the form of hostel-style accommodation. Once their claim for support has been approved, most people will be offered longer-term housing outside of London and the South East in one of the NASS dispersal regions. It is also possible to apply for the essential living needs component of support only. As at the end of June 2002, 33,810 destitute people in the UK were receiving this support option, preferring to make their own accommodation arrangements. This represents over 40 per cent of the total of 82,895 people receiving NASS support. Of the people receiving the essential living needs only option, 23,210 (69 per cent) were in London.
- People who applied for asylum prior to April 2000, when the NASS system became operational, are not entitled to NASS support. Instead, they must apply to local authorities if they are in housing need. Those who claimed asylum at their port of entry into the UK and are still awaiting an initial decision are entitled to make a homelessness application to the local authority. But if they are not deemed to be homeless and in priority need, they will not be entitled to an offer of accommodation.

Those who claimed asylum once 'in country', and port applicants appealing a negative decision, are entitled to apply to the local social services authority for housing under the interim arrangements of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.

- Young people under 18 years who arrived and claimed asylum alone, commonly termed 'unaccompanied minors', are also excluded from NASS support. Instead, they are entitled to apply to the local social services authority under the Children Act 1989.
- For people who have received a positive decision on their asylum claims, entitlement to NASS or social services support ends 28 days after the date of the decision. If their home has been provided under the NASS system, their landlord is only required to provide them with seven days written notice in order to legally evict them. People with full refugee status or leave to remain are then largely entitled to the same housing and welfare support as British citizens. If they are homeless, they are entitled to apply to the local housing authority for assistance. However, again, if they are not deemed to be homeless and in priority need, they will not be entitled to an offer of accommodation.
- This complex system of housing entitlement and provision is difficult for someone who has a good understanding of the housing and welfare system in this country to grasp. For someone who has newly arrived in the UK, with less understanding of the language and no knowledge of the various systems of social support, it can be extremely difficult to establish what options are available. And even once people have successfully applied for somewhere to live, perhaps with the help of an adviser, they may still be confused about which agency is responsible for providing their housing and who is responsible for managing it. This can present difficulties for people whose accommodation is unsuitable, unsafe or unhealthy and need to take action to remedy this.
- Indeed, the system for accommodating people awaiting an asylum decision can result in them experiencing extremely poor housing conditions. The agencies contracted to provide NASS accommodation, such as the Refugee Council, and local social services authorities have no housing of their own. Instead, they procure accommodation from the private sector: 19 percent of private rented dwellings in England are classed as unfit for human habitation and the estimated cost of remedying unfitness in the sector is £2.3 billion¹. Shelter's investigation, conducted between January and March 2000 and reported in *Far from Home*, found that nearly a fifth of the private dwellings used to accommodate people awaiting a decision were unfit for human habitation. This figure rose to 43 per cent in the case of bedsits. Over a quarter of dwellings were overcrowded. Nearly half of the children surveyed were living in one room with their families and having to share cooking and bathing facilities with other households. Of the people living in multiply-occupied houses, 83 per cent were exposed to unacceptable fire safety risks.

- Asylum seekers and refugees are more likely to experience overcrowded living conditions than other Londoners. Many of the 23,210 people in London who have elected to claim essential living needs payments only from NASS have done so because their only relatives or friends in the UK are in London. Often, they need to live nearby to give or receive support. As the NASS system does not usually entitle them to an offer of accommodation in London, they are forced to live with their family or friends, often in dangerously overcrowded conditions.
- The complexity of the system of housing entitlement for asylum seekers and refugees has also resulted in people experiencing severe hardship when they are no longer entitled to support under one system and must apply to another. For example, Shelter has advised people who have received a positive decision on their asylum claims whilst still living in NASS 'emergency' accommodation in London. Their entitlement to NASS support is terminated after 28 days and they are subsequently given seven days' notice to leave their accommodation at the end of this period. People in this position then have very little time to find a new home. If they are not accepted as being homeless and in priority need by the local housing authority, their only option is to find privately rented accommodation and apply for housing benefit to cover the rent. However, local authorities will not usually make a payment of housing benefit without proof of the claimant's income. For people who have recently applied for a mainstream welfare benefit, such as Income Support, the Benefits Agency will not usually process the claim without proof that NASS support has been terminated (the NASS Form 35) and a National Insurance number. The endemic delays in the issue of both Form 35s and National Insurance numbers have been well-documented.² The transition from one system of support to another, and the bureaucracy it entails, can effectively leave people in a limbo: they are required to leave their accommodation but cannot find a new home because they have no means to prove to the landlord that they can pay for it.

Sayed, Fatima and Soraya's story

Sayed, Fatima and Soraya are a brother and two sisters in their 20s who approached the Bayswater Families Centre in summer 2002. They arrived and claimed asylum in the UK in April 2002 having fled from Afghanistan. Sayed in particular suffers from a number of medical problems, including psychological trauma, as a result of his experiences at home. They applied to NASS for assistance with their essential living needs only, as they had relatives in London who could accommodate them temporarily. In June 2002 they were informed that they had been granted exceptional leave to remain in the UK and their NASS payments subsequently stopped 28 days later. They applied to an East London borough as homeless and, because they were considered to be vulnerable, they were quickly offered accommodation in a bed & breakfast hotel in central London. They also

made a claim for Income Support. However, the Benefits Agency was unable to process their claim because they had not received their Form 35 confirming that their entitlement to NASS support had ceased. This meant that they had no income whatsoever. Their family and friends had lent them some money but they were suffering extreme hardship. The Shelter caseworker at the Families Centre provided advocacy with NASS and the Benefits Agency and, finally, in early September they received their back-dated benefit.

- The transition from NASS support to the mainstream housing and welfare system on receipt of a positive asylum decision is not the only occasion on which people find themselves in a limbo between two systems of support. Shelter has also advised a number of individuals who applied for asylum in the UK as unaccompanied minors. As such, they were entitled to support from the local social services authority until they are 18 years. However, upon reaching their 18th birthday they are given notice to leave the accommodation provided to them by social services and must either apply to NASS for support (if still awaiting a decision) or apply for mainstream welfare benefits and housing. In most cases of this nature, the young people concerned have been daunted by the prospect of having to leave their homes and negotiate an entirely new system of bureaucracy in order to obtain new housing and financial support.

To investigate how London can benefit from the contribution of asylum seekers and refugees, and to look at what additional steps, if any, should be taken by the GLA and other bodies to support the engagement of asylum seekers and refugees in London's economy and culture.

- An investigation of the benefits brought to London by people who seek asylum in this country should certainly consider the large contribution they make to the capital's workforce and economy, including the illegal economy. Again, to thoroughly investigate this issue, it is important to challenge the myths surrounding the needs and experiences of people who seek asylum here. For example, it is commonly assumed that most people who have been in receipt of NASS support will need to claim mainstream welfare benefits once they receive a positive decision. However, reports Shelter has received from agencies in the NASS dispersal areas suggest that it is wrong to make this assumption.
- It is problematic to illustrate this issue statistically because it would involve tracking people's movements post-decision. However the anecdotal evidence suggests a significant proportion of people leave the dispersal region and often head for London. This may be for a number of reasons, including the lack of an established refugee community or racial harassment in the dispersal area. However, agencies report that

the main priority for many people is the desire to obtain employment. The NASS dispersal system was established to remove people from London and the South East to other areas of the country where there is a more plentiful supply of housing. But often there is less demand for housing in these areas because there are poorer employment prospects. If employment is one of the main factors driving people to leave the dispersal areas, even though it might be easier to obtain housing in these areas, this is an indication of their determination to find work and positively contribute to the economy.

- It is also important to investigate the contribution made by refugees in advising, advocating for and supporting other new arrivals to the UK. There are several hundred refugee community groups operating in London offering a wide range of services from befriending and social support through to highly specialised legal advice. They play a vital role in supplementing statutory public services, which are often overstretched and ill-equipped to provide for the specific needs of asylum seekers and refugees. They offer help in a familiar language and play a vital role in the provision of formal and informal translation services. Having experienced the asylum system first hand, their workers have empathy for the difficulties faced by others in a similar position. People who have fled from persecution often have understandable difficulty in approaching national or local government agencies for help or advice and therefore find it much easier to trust voluntary refugee agencies when they need help.
- Voluntary refugee agencies play an important role in the provision of advocacy and advice to people in housing need. However, this is a specialist area of work and it is often difficult to give people the correct legal advice without comprehensive training and back-up. Shelter attempts to assist voluntary refugee groups in the provision of housing advice via its volunteer programme, training programme and the National Homelessness Advice Service. However, many groups have few financial and human resources, which effectively excludes them from gaining access to adequate training and systems of referral to specialist advice agencies.

Berhane's story

Berhane is a refugee from East Africa. He had been in the UK for a number of years but had been unable to secure employment. Through Shelter's volunteer involvement programme, he obtained a position as a volunteer adviser at the Piccadilly Advice Centre. He volunteered for Shelter for ten months after which he secured employment as a housing adviser at a day care centre. When he left his position at Shelter, Berhane reported that he had gained a number of benefits from the volunteering work, including increased confidence in his abilities, particularly as an adviser, new social contacts and improved planning skills. He also reported he had benefited

from the housing advice and other training that Shelter had offered him. Berhane is now in full-time paid employment at an employment access scheme, where he assists others, including refugees, to secure employment.

- Another area worthy of investigation is the contribution that asylum seekers and refugees can make to the development of public services via consultation. When undertaking its investigation for Far from Home, Shelter held a series of local seminars to generate discussion about the main issues facing asylum seekers living in private rented housing, anticipate likely future difficulties and suggest models of good practice. The contribution made at these seminars by workers from voluntary refugee groups led to a number of the report's recommendations, which have now been acknowledged by government. The lesson learned from this experience is that any organisation seriously wishing to improve the delivery of public services must consult with its user group.
- Shelter suggests that the GLA and other bodies should take additional steps to recognise and support the valuable work of voluntary refugee organisations in supplementing the capital's public services. This should include an audit of the services they provide, greater financial support, greater access to specialist training programmes and the development of their role in referring their clients to specialist agencies. Their breadth and wealth of experience should be harnessed in the development of a strategy to recognise, welcome, encourage and publicise the contribution of refugees to London's economy and culture.

To consider the access of asylum seekers and refugees in London to public services, and to examine how this might be improved

- When considering the access that asylum seekers and refugees have to housing in London, it is important to recognise that all Londoners are facing a profound reduction in their housing options. As Shelter identified in its report London Solutions, house prices have escalated out of the reach of many people wishing to own their own home. The booming housing market, along with the inefficiencies and restrictions of the housing benefit system, have also made private rented housing inaccessible to many people on low incomes. In fact, many private landlords and letting agents in London now refuse to let to housing benefit claimants. Meanwhile, a long-term reduction in public housing investment and policies such as the Right to Buy have meant that the availability of public housing has failed to keep pace with demand. At the end of 2001, over 211,000 households were registered on London housing authority waiting lists. This represents over a fifth of all the households on council lists in England.
- The difficulties faced by many Londoners in accessing any form of housing have resulted in an increasing number of households making homelessness applications to

London boroughs. At the end of March 2001, London housing authorities accepted over 31,000 households as homeless and having a priority need for housing. Facing a shortage in the availability of their own housing, authorities are usually only able to place these households in temporary accommodation. In June 2002, over 48,000 homeless households were living in temporary accommodation provided by London boroughs. This represents nearly 60 per cent of all the households in such temporary accommodation in England.

- However, local housing authorities are under no duty to offer even temporary housing to people who apply as homeless but are not deemed to be in priority need. Most childless people are not in priority need unless they are deemed to be vulnerable or fall one of the new categories of people qualifying for priority need. These include 16-17 year olds, care leavers under the age of 21 years and people who are vulnerable as a result of having an institutionalised background or fleeing violence. Childless applicants who are not, in the view of the housing authority, deemed to be vulnerable or fall into any of the new categories of priority need have very few housing options. If they are unable to secure their own housing they must rely upon the charity of family or friends, religious organisations and other voluntary-sector agencies to avoid having to sleep rough.
- The difficulties experienced by many Londoners in accessing accommodation are often compounded for asylum seekers and refugees. As outlined above, the complexity of the system of housing entitlement and provision can mean that people are unsure of their rights or where to go for help. This is often exacerbated by a lack of information, language difficulties, poverty, medical conditions, lack of support and worries about approaching people in authority.
- To make matters worse, people often find themselves confronted by discrimination and a culture of disbelief. It is likely that some of this prejudice is influenced by the insistence by sections of the media and some politicians that the UK should only assist people who can prove they are 'genuine' asylum applicants. It might also be related to the government's policy of excluding people from the mainstream welfare system to ensure that, if people 'benefit shop' when choosing where to apply for protection, they will be discouraged from applying in the UK. As asylum seekers are excluded from the mainstream system, former asylum seekers must prove their rights to assistance. It may also be a consequence of guidance aimed at tackling benefit fraud: one of the reasons for the introduction of the Form 35 was to prevent failed asylum seekers from fraudulently accessing the benefits system. Whatever the cause, Shelter has found that asylum seekers and refugees are often viewed with greater suspicion and consequently required to produce more proof than others about their personal circumstances and legal status in order to gain access to housing and other public services.

- Shelter has advised a number of clients who have been denied housing assistance because local authorities and other agencies have refused to accept official documentation from the Immigration and Nationality Department (IND). One London social services authority in particular regularly refuses to assist unaccompanied minors under the Children Act 1989 because of 'age disputes'. This is despite the young person concerned having IND papers clearly stating they are under 18 years. Other authorities have questioned the validity of official documentation because it is 'too tatty' and have required a letter of verification from a solicitor. Another problem is that agencies refuse to accept new forms of IND documentation, such as the new photographic identity cards, because they are not aware that the system has changed.
- The suspicion, discrimination and lack of understanding that confronts people who have sought refuge in this country can effectively exclude them from accessing public services to which they are legally entitled. One example of this is the assessment made of childless applicants by local authorities to determine whether they are vulnerable and therefore in priority housing need. Recent research by Shelter³ shows that some local housing authorities turn such applicants away without making a proper assessment of their vulnerability. A significant proportion of refugees are single, young men who would not be deemed in priority need without some form of vulnerability. They may in fact be suffering from medical conditions, such as post-traumatic stress, having experienced or witnessed human rights abuses such as torture, rape or the killings of others. However, they may be reluctant to disclose this information, particularly if they are unaware of the difference it might make to their housing options. Shelter's research shows that when local housing authorities fail to sympathetically encourage people to provide all relevant information about their circumstances as part of a comprehensive assessment, some vulnerable and traumatised people will be faced with having to sleep rough.
- Discrimination and lack of awareness can also prevent asylum seekers and refugees from accessing housing assistance as rough sleepers. Shelter has worked with a number of clients who have not been offered assistance by the contact and assessment teams (CATs) established by the Rough Sleepers Unit of the Homelessness Directorate. Shelter's caseworkers have found that this happens for a number of reasons. Firstly, asylum seekers and refugees do not usually fall into the categories of rough sleepers targeted by the CATs: long-term rough sleepers, young care-leavers and people with drug and alcohol problems. Secondly, they do not always sleep in the same places as other rough sleepers, where outreach teams concentrate their services. Thirdly, because the CAT workers do not usually have access to interpreters and may be confused about the housing rights of asylum seekers and refugees, they are sometimes unsure how they can give advice and assistance to this client group.

Mohammed's story

Mohammed is an Afghani-Kurdish man in his 30s. He approached Shelter's Piccadilly Advice Centre in August 2002. He fled from Afghanistan after all of his close family were killed. He suffers from a number of medical problems as a result of the torture he suffered in Afghanistan, including hearing problems and constant nightmares. He applied for protection in the UK and had recently been given leave to remain. As he was destitute when he arrived, he had applied to NASS for assistance. NASS dispersed him to the West Midlands but he was offered no advice about his housing options on receipt of a positive asylum decision. Consequently, when he was given leave to remain in the UK and lost NASS support he decided to leave the Midlands where he felt isolated and had nothing to do. He headed for North London where he has friends, but he was unable to stay with them long-term and had been sleeping rough. He had seen a GP in the Midlands, who had prescribed him with medication to help him sleep, but he had received no medical care since arriving in London. The Shelter adviser gave Mohammed information about where he might obtain medical care so that he could obtain a medical report for a homelessness application to the local authority. Shelter also advised him on his likely entitlement to Sickness Benefit and put him in touch with appropriate refugee agencies.

- Even people who are accepted by London authorities as homeless and in priority need are experiencing difficulties in accessing accommodation in the capital. This is because some London boroughs conclude that the applicant has no local connection with the area but has formed a local connection with the area to which they were dispersed by NASS. The Housing Act 1996 states that a person has a local connection with an area if they were normally resident there of their own choice. The Local Authority Association Joint Local Connection Agreement interprets the working definition of 'normal' residence as living in an area for at least six out of the previous 12 months, or for not less than three out of the previous five years. It also interprets that time spent in hospital, emergency accommodation, the armed forces or prison may be disregarded. Shelter has advised a number of clients whom London housing authorities are refusing to accommodate because they were living in a NASS dispersal area for at least six months prior to receiving a positive asylum decision. Instead, the boroughs concerned are referring applicants to the dispersal authority on the basis that this is the area of the applicant's normal residence of choice.

To scrutinise the role and work of the GLA and other relevant bodies in relation to asylum seekers in London

- Shelter suggests that the GLA has a role in developing a London-wide strategy for responding to the housing needs of asylum seekers and refugees. This strategy should be developed in partnership with the Association of London Government and the London Asylum Seekers Consortium. The strategy should seek to identify and address the specific difficulties faced by asylum seekers and refugees. These include:
 - Lack of awareness of and information about their housing rights.
 - Lack of awareness and understanding amongst agencies delivering public housing services of the reasons people might have fled their countries of origin, and the implications this might have for their needs.
 - Poor standards of private rented accommodation provided by either NASS contractors or social services, partially caused by the lack of a universally adopted protocol between these agencies and local authority environmental health departments responsible for enforcing standards in such dwellings.
 - Difficulties in accessing social rented housing because of the need to prove a local connection or vulnerability.
 - Difficulties in accessing private rented housing because of housing benefit restrictions and the need to pay a deposit.
 - Difficulties in accessing assistance when sleeping rough because they fall outside the remit of outreach teams.
- The GLA could also have a role in gathering and disseminating information and good practice on asylum seeker and refugee housing issues. This would be helpful to London boroughs when planning their strategies for accommodating and supporting asylum seekers and refugees. Information should include:
 - Details of voluntary refugee organisations in the capital and the services they offer.
 - Details of interpreting services available in London.
 - Up-to-date information about the numbers of people claiming asylum in the UK, their household composition, nationality, language, religious and cultural requirements, and the estimated proportion likely to settle in London.
- The GLA could also play a role in a London-wide campaign to raise awareness of the reasons that people seek asylum in the UK and the positive contribution they make to London. This may help to address the suspicion and lack of understanding that asylum seekers and refugees sometimes face when they attempt to access public services. Such a campaign should seek to make the link between human rights abuses in other countries and the number of people seeking refugee in the UK. It should also publicise the historical contribution that asylum seekers and refugees have

made to London society. The campaign could include training courses, conferences and the support of cultural events, as well as work with the media.

- As stated in point 2.2.5, the GLA could play a role in recognising and supporting the work of voluntary refugee agencies in supplementing public services.
- The GLA could use the evidence it gathers from this scrutiny in its work with central government departments, such as the Home Office and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, to undertake reviews of their policies and procedures in relation to the services they provide to people seeking refuge in the UK.

End Notes:

1 Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1996), English House Condition Survey

2 National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux (February 2002), Process Error: CAB clients' experience of the National Asylum Support System

3 Shelter (February 2001), Singles Barred: the Homes Bill and the rights of non-priority homeless people