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This bulletin focuses on developments in the area of no recourse to public funds (NRPF). In this issue, we announce a new project being developed by the NRPF Network and feature articles on the services of the International Organisation for Migration and the Thames Reach Reconnections Service in helping migrants return home voluntarily.

NRPF Connect – The Future of ‘No Recourse Services’

NRPF Connect will be a national no recourse to public funds (NRPF) database for local authorities to share information about NRPF clients with the UK Border Agency (UKBA) with the aim of facilitating the resolution of NRPF cases that are in limbo.

The NRPF Database will provide the necessary structure for local authorities to accurately account for the NRPF cases they support under social services legislation and share information with the UKBA over a secure intranet system by making use of the Government Connect Secure eXtranet (GCSX). The database will also provide the UKBA and local authorities with the information required to track and monitor those families and individuals that have not left the country and remain in receipt of services through local authority assistance.

For both the UKBA and local authorities, it will allow us to share intelligence regarding cases supported, identify any potential fraud and allow for joint resolution of cases. Resolution of cases includes removing individuals who should not be in the UK (but cannot be left homeless by the local authority), or granting leave to those who are entitled to remain in the UK.

There is also increasing concern among local authorities regarding the cost of providing care services to destitute people from abroad who have no recourse to public funds (NRPF). This is because local authorities are not reimbursed by central government for the costs of providing support to this client group, even where duties under social services or Human Rights legislation are defined.

What will be the benefits of NRPF Connect for local authorities and the UKBA?

- Efficiency savings through improved resolution of local authority supported cases.
- Efficiency savings through improved management of cases by individual local authority departments, enabled by a database that will provide structure to the assessment and review processes.
- Increased accountability and control of the NRPf client group; the UKBA will be provided with the facility to track asylum seekers and migrants who are supported by social services departments outside of the UKBA asylum support system.
- Improved monitoring of cases; guarding against fraud by eliminating the chance for multiple support applications being made in more than one local authority.
- Removing current barriers hindering data sharing with the UKBA by providing the necessary technical security to allow data exchange between departments.
- Informed strategic development based on real figures and real cases, enabling for the formulation of better guidance, coordination and problem solving to assist local authorities in meeting their statutory duties in the field of NRPf.

What will be the benefits for the community?

- Ensuring a fairer and more consistent treatment of clients who have become destitute in the UK on the basis of their immigration status.
- Tackling the insecurity and vulnerability of people who are left in the UK for long periods of time with unsettled immigration status.
- Ensuring that the local authorities' scarce resources are only used to support those who are eligible and that support is not long-term.
- Informed policy development at central government level aimed at reducing the

numbers of migrants and asylum seekers left destitute in the UK.

- Ensuring that the right recording mechanisms are in place to capture social services' involvement with a client group that is transient and susceptible to marginalisation.

What is GCSx?

GCSX is a secure way of sharing sensitive information between government departments and is part of the Government Secure Intranet. In order to use GCSX, all local authorities were required to be Code of Connection (CoCo) Compliant by September 2009.

What do you need to do to prepare for NRPf Connect?

- Identify a lead person in adult's and children's social services to hold a central record of NRPf cases supported.
- Ensure that financial records regarding support provision to NRPf clients are up to date.
- Check with your IT department as to your local authority's level of Code of Connection Compliance.
- Feed back to the Network on issues relating to data recording, costs and numbers and challenges faced.

Timelines

Subject to reviewing the technical options available and securing funding to develop the recommended system, we will establish GCSx data sharing between the local authorities on the NRPf Connect advisory group by March 2010. Once the agreed product has been developed and tested, it will then be rolled out nationally. Training events will be held in locations across the UK to provide NRPf Connect users with the information they need to use the database effectively.

Services provided by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM)

– Marek Effendowicz, Head of Communications IOM UK

IOM is the world's leading international migration agency, with observer status at the UN, its headquarters in Geneva and more than 400 offices in some 120 countries. Since its foundation in 1951 it has assisted over 13 million migrants in the belief that migration can be beneficial both to individuals and society as a whole, as long as: it is orderly; dignified; and voluntary. Since 1999, under two Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) programmes, IOM UK has helped more than 30,000 people to return home to 143 countries.

'Asylum Seeker' or 'Irregular Migrant'

There are two AVR programmes – the Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme (VARRP) and the Assisted Voluntary Return for Irregular Migrants (AVRIM) Programme. The AVRIM programme is for anyone who has overstayed their visa or has been smuggled or trafficked into the country; and at no stage has applied for asylum. Under this programme, unless someone is deemed to belong to a 'vulnerable' group (e.g. under 18; victim of trafficking) at the point when they reach their home doorstep IOM is unable to provide any further assistance.

Under the VARRP programme however, anyone who has ever touched the asylum system is deemed to be an 'asylum seeker' and is eligible for reintegration assistance in their home country. This assistance is mostly given in kind, not in cash. It can be used for education, vocational training or a job placement. However, 87% of all returnees like to use it to help set up a small business. Someone pursuing this option would receive £500 in the form of a cash relocation grant at Heathrow airport.

We pay for the maximum excess baggage allowed on that particular airline or route.

Most returnees join their family when they get back but for those who have nowhere to stay we will provide up to three month's accommodation. Then with the offer of business training and an allowance during it, we make £1500-worth of assistance available. This is paid directly to suppliers of equipment or material which the returnee requires to help set up his business. After six months we will conduct a review of the business and make a further £500-worth of assistance (again, not in cash) available. We will conduct final review at the end of a year. IOM has found that if reintegration assistance is given in this targeted manner it does have a real effect as a 'pump-primer' or 'foundation stone' to make a contribution to a more 'sustainable' return.

IOM will only provide assistance to voluntary return to the families with one single parent after comprehensive (CAFCAS) checks are carried out by the responsible Government authority (UKBA) to ensure that both parents give consent for children going abroad.

IOM also helps Unaccompanied Minors (both irregular and UASC) with assisted voluntary returns. We work closely with Local Authority Social Services departments to determine that the return is always 'in the best interests of the child'. To that end, a detailed 'Family Assessment' is carried out (in accordance with Social Services' requirements) in each case.

Non-EEA only

We do not have the funding under the AVR programmes to assist citizens from the European Economic Area (EEA).

We are however aware that many migrants in the UK at the moment are from EEA countries and we have been working recently to improve our contacts with organisation that work with homeless people; as well as with government departments such as the Greater London Authority; Communities and Local Government; and of course the NRPF Network in the hope that we can devise cross-referral mechanisms and a safety net with a 'finer mesh'. It is quite possible that someone who starts by declaring that they are Polish (to appear legally resident and to get a job) may reveal that they are in fact Russian when they have decided that life in the UK has become too harsh for them and they would like to return home.

The downturn in the economy is hitting the building and catering sectors first. Many irregular migrants and failed asylum seekers have been finding work until recently on building sites and in restaurant kitchens, but the recession – in combination with increased enforcement action in relation to those who employ migrants illegally – is depressing already exploitative wages or pushing people into destitution. It is very important that there is widespread awareness of the alternative of an assisted voluntary return home.

Travel to the home doorstep

Under both AVR programmes the process of the journey home is the same. If someone is currently living, say, in Hull and needs to obtain a travel document from their embassy or high commission, IOM will pay for the return coach journey

and for any fees associated with the provision of the document. If all goes well with the application then IOM will pay for the coach trip to Heathrow airport. There the returnee will be met by one of IOM's 11 airport staff and handed a ticket which is exactly like that of any other passenger on the flight: there is no sign that the traveller is a beneficiary of voluntary return. This is a very important point for many returnees. They want to travel as far 'below the official radar' as possible. The UK government will not place a stamp in their passport or travel document and neither they nor IOM will be in direct communication with the returnee's home government.

IOM has more than 400 offices around the world and it can often meet and assist individuals in the airport at the other end, but only if the returnee requests such assistance. Most do not, because they want to remain as inconspicuous and 'normal' as possible. Whether we meet someone or not we make sure that they have the resources to get *all* the way home. This may not sound very significant but for some people it certainly is. A Brazilian visa overstayer who is compulsorily returned by the UK Government would probably be dropped off in Rio de Janeiro or Sao Paulo. If their home happened to be in Manaus – more than 1000 miles inland – that would just be tough. However, if IOM had helped them to return we would make sure that they were booked on an internal flight and had the resources for a train, bus, etc ...to get them to their home doorstep.

Medical assistance on the journey

We have assisted a range of people – from someone who just needed a wheelchair at the airport to a terminally ill returnee who wished to go home to die – for whom we booked nine seats on the plane and arranged for a doctor and AVR officer to

accompany them all the way home. Being 'fit to travel' means being fit – with all appropriate help – to meet IOM's own criteria and that of the airline. IOM will welcome a medical assessment prepared by a local authority or local health authority and it will often be sufficient for one of our own doctors simply to review the paperwork.

In London, the Thamesreach Reconnections Service helps individuals with severe drink or drugs problems to return home by driving them in a minivan to, say, Poland or Estonia and then registering them with relevant support services at the other end. IOM cannot offer this sort of support service and airlines must be certain that any passenger will not be a danger to themselves or their fellow passengers. There can also be particular difficulties with applicants with mental health problems.

We are very careful to establish that (whether based on the push or pull factors of migration) the decision to return is voluntary. Any applicant must have the capacity to decide for themselves. It is possible for individuals to change their mind about a return as late as the bottom of the steps to the plane. They can then apply a second time. However, if someone has changed their mind twice it is only possible to apply for a third time if exceptional, valid and documented reasons can be presented to account for the first two occasions. Irrational or whimsical changes of mind will invalidate a third application for AVR.

Individuals with medical/care needs - What IOM can do

- Help anybody with medical needs as long as: they wish to return; they are eligible for voluntary return on one of

IOM's programmes; they are fit to travel (with any required assistance)

- Try to find out if there are appropriate medical services and medication available in the country of return
- Try to locate the family in the country of return if needed
- Provide help and advice on obtaining appropriate travel documentation
- Arrange and pay for an appropriate, IOM trained medical escort (doctor or nurse) to assist the returnee during the flight, depending on the nature of the incapacitation and the language requirement.
- Make sure that there is appropriate assistance from the airlines during the flight (wheelchair, stretcher, oxygen supply, additional leg room, etc.)
- Arrange and pay for the most appropriate transportation to the airport in the UK (currently IOM uses London airports only) and from the airport to the final destination in the country of return (bus, train, taxi or ambulance)

Individuals with medical/care needs – What IOM cannot do

- Pay for long-term medical treatment in the country of origin. However, most returnees are eligible for Reintegration Assistance from IOM, which can be used to establish an income-generating project. If the returnee's medical condition prevents them from operating the business themselves this assistance can be provided to the returnee's family. However IOM London office must approve the venture and must be satisfied that the share of the income generated will be going to the returnee.

Time-frame

For many people who have valid and up-to-date travel documents we can arrange

an AVR in 1-2 weeks. For some the arrangements can take a month or more. If we need to obtain an affidavit attesting to identity from a tiny south Indian village to convince the Indian High Commission that an applicant is actually one of their citizens that can clearly take time. So too can a complicated medical case like the one described above. We have to be especially careful with single parent families. We must carry out comprehensive (CAFCAS) checks to ensure that both parents give consent for children going abroad, although the findings of a Human Rights Assessment, conducted by Social Services departments will be considered. We also seek written confirmation from social services that the minor is not at risk and there are no further concerns in regard to the minor returning back with their parents. It is therefore very difficult to give an average time for a return. And an applicant has the right to keep his AVR open for three months.

Support pending departure

Recent changes to the Section 4 regulations mean that Section 4 support is

only possible during the period (max three months) of the first application for AVR. IOM cannot pay for accommodation and subsistence (provided either by local authorities or charities) to support applicants waiting more than 3 months to leave under AVR.

How to make a referral

IOM has offices in seven UK cities: London, Glasgow, Bristol, Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham. To access the contact details of these offices, please see:

<http://www.iomlondon.org/contactus.htm>

IOM's Local Authority/Social Services/UAM focal point is Yana Koltsova:

Tel: 020 7808 1087

E-mail: ykoltsova@iom.int

IOM's operational focal point is Ewa Hussain: Tel: 020 7808 1034

E-mail: ehussain@iom.int

More information on the IOM can be found at: www.iomuk.org

Thames Reach Reconnections Service for Accession 8 and Accession 2 Nationals

- Petra Salva, Outreach Services Manager, Thames Reach

The London Reconnection Project, run by Thames Reach is a new project that has been in operation for seven months. The scheme helps destitute migrants from Central and Eastern Europe who are sleeping on the streets of London to return to their home countries. It does not only provide a ticket home, but will actually link people up with support services that can help them get back on their feet.

The project aims to ensure that people get the services they require to help them into accommodation or with health problems such as alcohol dependency when they return home. During the last seven months over 100 people have been supported to return home, many have been reunited with their families, supported to access alcohol and drug treatment, linked into mental health support and assisted to find accommodation.

The project is funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government until March 2010.

Who we help

The London Reconnection Project helps destitute Central and Eastern European adult men and women who are sleeping rough in London. They must have support needs and have expressed a wish to return to their home countries of Poland, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia or Hungary.

What we do

Workers will engage with and assess an individual's support needs. Staff are mobile, flexible and will meet with clients where required, including on the street and at day centres.

Staff provide advice and information about support services available in home countries. Staff will support and assist people to return home, which also includes

accompanying people when this is required.

How to make a referral

Visit the website:

www.londonreconnect.org.uk

Email us at:

londonreconnect@thamesreach.org.uk

Referral forms are available in various languages.

Main Number: 07590 440302 (enquiries and referrals)

National Reconnections Service

The National Reconnections Service, initially based in Peterborough, has been established on a temporary basis to provide support to destitute A8/A2 migrants outside of London accessing the labour market or returning to their home countries. Referrals to this service can only be made by local authorities. To make a referral, please email Rebecca Pritchard on:

Rebecca.Pritchard@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Dates for your Diary

East Midlands Regional NRPF Network meeting

Thursday 29th October 2009 (10.00 – 12.30), Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire.

For more details, please contact

Kirsty.Davies@lg-em.gov.uk

London Regional NRPF Network meeting

Wednesday 9th December 2009 (14.00 – 16.00), Westminster City Hall, London.

For more details, please contact

simon.wadsworth@croydon.gov.uk

East of England Regional NRPF Network meeting

Wednesday 20th January 2010 (11am start), EERA Offices, Flempton House, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk.

For more details, please contact

pamusa@menter.org.uk

For more details on the regional networks, including who can take part, see:

<http://tinyurl.com/5uz9v9>

The NRPF Network is committed to supporting and working with local authorities, the voluntary sector and central government. The Network has over 1400 members and our website attracts over 1000 web hits per month.

The NRPF Network is funded by the UK Border Agency (UKBA) and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

For further information or to unsubscribe, please contact: nrpf@islington.gov.uk or tel 020 7527 7107

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