

Monitoring in Marabastad:

CoRMSA and the Coordinating Body of Refugee Communities (CBRC) conducted a three day visit at the Refugee Reception Office in Marabastad/Pretoria to monitor service delivery.

Monitors came across applicants from as far as Mpumalanga, North West province and Johannesburg who had visited the Office on many occasions but had never been able to secure any service. Some of them had visited the office for two consecutive weeks without any success.

Some applicants allegedly claimed to have paid money for services but this did not guarantee them any service. At most, the money they paid either to police officers or security guards facilitated them to enter the lines that were heading into the office premises. It was not a warranty to receive any service. On average, an individual could pay up to R350 in the endeavour to access the Office. Sadly, some applicants, mostly from Zimbabwe, take advantage of this confusion to extort money from their desperate fellow countrymen. They demand money in the name of some fictitious Home Affairs officials promising services in exchange.

Once inside the Refugee Office premises, people are forced to sit between each other's legs so they do not break lines. While seated, they are not allowed to stand, move or ask any questions. Most of the times they are made to remain in such positions for long hours without being given any permission to use toilets.

A considerable number of applicants have been visiting the office for more than two weeks without getting served and most of them testified that on some occasions they had been asked money by police officers, security guards and Home Affairs officials in exchange for service. Quite often, the collection of money is done by agents.

Out of desperation and an apparent confusion for not knowing what is happening, some applicants suggested that the Department of Home Affairs should officially charge their services so that everyone is aware of how much they should pay and prepare accordingly. This was thought by many to be an alternative to putting an end or decreasing the alarming rate of corruption at the Office.

There were also many complaints among the applicants that they were not being given any directional signs as to what should happen next. People are not told what to do, where to go and when to come back for services. And this was again evident by looking at people scattered around the field across the Office.

Large numbers of Somalis and Ethiopians are not being assisted. They spend nights in the field across the Refugee Office. It seems like the —First country of safety law is already being implemented.

There are also many ladies, mostly from Zimbabwe, who spend nights outside the Office fence with their babies hoping that they would be served the following morning but this does not always happen. They were however concerned about their babies' health given that they witnessed a child dying on Monday (01/08/2011).