MIND THE GAP
ONE YEAR ON

Continuation report on homelessness amongst newly recognised refugees

- June 2019 -

NACCOM
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Thanks to Rose at Crisp Design for the design of the report. Image on front cover by Anna Berdnik/Shutterstock.com

Names may have been changed for anonymity purposes. Any inaccuracies identified in the report should be emailed to *hannah@naccom.org.uk.*

Definitions:
This report refers to single adults with leave to remain (LTR) including people newly recognised as refugees and people with discretionary LTR on other grounds, for instance, humanitarian protection. For expediency, both groups are referred to hereafter as 'refugees'.

Introduction

NACCOM is a network of organisations preventing destitution amongst people who are refused asylum, other migrants with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) and refugees. The network, which includes (to date) 59 Full Members (providing accommodation) and 40 Associate Members (in support of NACCOM's aims), exists to promote good practice, increase accommodation provision and call for an end to destitution.

Refugees make up a considerable proportion of those supported by NACCOM's members; of the 3,471 people accommodated in 2017-18, 1,097 (32%) were refugees. Members support refugees in different ways, with some providing housing or hosting schemes and a smaller number providing night shelter accommodation. It is to the work of the latter that this report turns.[1]

In 2018 NACCOM published 'Mind the Gap', exploring pathways into and out of homelessness amongst newly recognised refugees after the 28-day move on period.[2] Analysis was undertaken with night shelters in Manchester, Leicester and London in 2017-18, in which time 169 people were accommodated, 28% of whom had refugee status. To identify recurrent or new issues, follow up research was undertaken over the winter of 2018-19 with the same organisations (Boaz Trust, C4WS and One Roof Leicester). Interviews were also conducted with refugees facing homelessness, including but not limited to those accessing night shelters.

4,405 nights of accommodation

156 people accommodated

23% of the guests had refugee status

What is the move on period?

The 'move on period' refers to the 28-day timeframe that recently recognised refugees are given before they are evicted from asylum accommodation and have support payments stopped. In this timeframe they are expected to access benefits and/or find employment and secure accommodation.

[1]For more information about NACCOM's aims and accommodation schemes, visit www.naccom.org.uk.
[2]NACCOM, Mind the Gap (May 2018); https://naccom.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/NACCOM-Homelessnesss-Report_2018-10-24.pdf

> *The Home Office needs to give people more than one month. I tried to arrange everything in 28 days but everywhere takes time. You can't sort anything out in 28 days.* ***- Dariush***

Summary of recommendations

- The move on period should be extended to at least 56 days alongside improvements to support, so no refugees face homelessness and destitution after leaving asylum accommodation.
- To help with this, the Home Office should pilot an extension of asylum support for a period of at least 56 days, including additional support, with the findings made publicly available.
- The Government should publish the findings from the Post Grant Appointment Service without delay, so learning from it can be embedded in future advice and support services.
- There should be robust monitoring in place to show the impact of changes to support for newly recognised refugees and this should be made public.
- The Government should publish an assessment of the appropriateness of Universal Credit advance payments for newly recognised refugees.
- Integration loans should be increased to reflect the cost of entering the private rental market and more information should be made available about them.
- Clear guidance should be given to Local Authorities about the obligations of asylum contract providers so that non-compliance can be quickly identified, published and rectified.
- The Home Office should monitor and report on referrals from accommodation/advice providers to Local Authorities, so the impact can be monitored and if necessary the 'duty to refer' extended to include the providers.
- The Right to Rent scheme should be abolished.

Key Events In The Last Year

In the last twelve months, there has been some positive progress on the move on issue. Whilst it is clear that much more needs to be done, key changes and events are summarised below:

June 2018

- Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) launched the Local Authority Asylum Support Liaison Officers (LAASLO) scheme in 19 Local Authorities (LAs) in England.[3]

July 2018

- Parliamentary debate on 'Homelessness amongst refugees' highlighted support for policy change.[4]
- All Party Parliamentary Group on Ending Homelessness (APPGEH) launched report into 'Rapid Responses to Homelessness' which included calls for an extension to the move on period.[5]

August 2018

- MHCLG scrapped planned changes to funding for supported housing.[6]
- Integration National Asylum Stakeholder Forum (NASF) sub-group launched.

September 2018

- NACCOM published its 2017-18 annual report featuring data on housing needs of refugees.[7]

October 2018

- APPGEH identified refugee homelessness as one of its campaign goals for the year ahead.[8]

[3] *https://www.gov.uk/government/news/19-million-funding-for-councils-to-boost-integration*
[4] For the transcript see *https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2018-07-17/debates/6DDAB279-15B3-409B-9F76-BF978821450D/HomelessnessAmongRefugees*
[5] APPG Ending Homelessness, 'Rapid Responses to Homelessness; a look at migrant homelessness, youth homelessness and rapid rehousing models' (July 2018); *https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/239050/appg-for-ending-homelessness-report_final.pdf*
[6] *https://www.gov.uk/government/news/all-supported-housing-funding-to-be-retained-in-welfare-system*
[7] NACCOM Annual report (Sept 2018); *https://naccom.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/NACCOM-AnnualReport_2017-09-19_final-EMAIL.pdf*
[8] APPG on Ending Homelessness, AGM Minutes (Oct 2018); *https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/239625/agm-2018-minutes.pdf*

November 2018

- Independent Chief Inspector of Immigration (ICIBI) launched a report on asylum accommodation.[9]
- Home Office responded with Asylum Assurance Plan[10] including details around consulting stakeholders on the evaluation of the Post Grant Appointment Service (PGAS), and launch of a 'Move-on Board' and working group with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).

December 2018

- British Red Cross published 'Still an Ordeal', calling for an extension of the move on period, improved support, quicker payments of Universal Credit, and quick and easy access to bank accounts for all newly recognised refugees.[11]

January 2019

- Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility Support (AIRE) and Asylum Accommodation and Support Services (AASC) contracts awarded.[12]

February 2019

- MHCLG launched the Integrated Communities Strategy Response[13] and Action Plan[14], featuring plans for government departments to learn from the Controlling Migration Fund, LAASLO scheme and PGAS.

March 2019

- House of Lords debate took place based on Baroness Lister's question: '*To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to prevent destitution among newly recognised refugees in the light of the British Red Cross Report Still an ordeal, published in December 2018?*'[15]

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[9]ICIBI, 'An inspection of the Home Office's management of asylum accommodation provision' (Nov 2018); *https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-the-home-offices-management-of-asylum-accommodation-provision*
[10]Asylum Assurance Plan (Nov 2018); *https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/757724/Action_Plan.pdf*
[11]British Red Cross, 'Still An Ordeal' (Dec 2018); *https://www.redcross.org.uk/-/media/documents/about-us/research-publications/refugee-support/still-an-ordeal-move-on-period-report.pdf*
[12]*https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-asylum-accommodation-contracts-awarded.*
[13]Integrated Communities Strategy: Response (Feb 2019); *https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/777160/Integrated_Communities_Strategy_Government_Response.pdf*
[14]Integrated Communities Strategy: Action Plan (Feb 2019); *https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/778045/Integrated_Communities_Strategy_Govt_Action_Plan.pdf*
[15]For the transcript see *https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2019-03-20/debates/207980D9-3B31-4C4B-86B6-26F3539777EC/Refugees#contribution-50CAA4DC-8ABD-4E3E-BFFB-1F3A0279A4F3*

‘Mind the Gap’- One Year On

Night Shelter Provision (Oct 2018-April 2019)

4,405
nights of accommodation

156
guests were accommodated over 6 months

36
refugees were accommodated (23% of total guests)

Despite the slightly lower proportion of refugee guests in shelters this year (23% in 2018-19 compared to 28% in 2017-18), of those who did access the shelters, 13 (36%) were known to have left asylum accommodation in the last six months. This is higher than last year, when 10 of the 48 (21%) refugee guests were known to have left asylum accommodation in the last six months. Meanwhile, the number of refugee guests known to come to shelters after leaving asylum support 1-4 weeks previously has increased proportionally (in 2017-18, 5 guests were known to have moved on in the previous 1-4 weeks and this year it was 6 guests).

Whilst there is an element of improved reporting procedures this year amongst the members involved, the overall point is still that refugees are becoming homeless after moving on from asylum support. The breakdown of the figures are shared on the following page.

Photo credit Roman Bodnarchuk /Shutterstock.com

The Boaz Trust

From October 2018 - March 2019, the Boaz Trust night shelter in Manchester received 201 referrals and provided 1,556 nights of accommodation. The shelter accommodated 53 people, 22 of whom were refugees. Of these;

4 had left their asylum accommodation within the previous 1-4 weeks

7 had left asylum accommodation in the previous 1-6 months

9 had left more than 6 months before

1 came on a Family Reunion visa and therefore did not access asylum accommodation

Details about the date of leaving asylum accommodation was unknown for 1 guest.

15 of the refugee guests were known to have presented at the council as homeless prior to coming to the shelter, 12 of whom were granted LTR outside of Manchester.

C4WS

From November 2018 - April 2019, the C4WS night shelter in Camden received 378 referrals and provided 1,978 nights of accommodation. The shelter accommodated 78 people, 10 of whom were refugees. Of these;

1 had left their asylum accommodation within the previous 1-4 weeks

5 had left more than 6 months before

3 were granted refugee status before turning 18, and of these, 2 were known to have moved on from care (not asylum accommodation)

Details about the date of leaving asylum accommodation was unknown for 1 guest.

One Roof Leicester

From December 2018 - March 2019, One Roof Leicester's night shelter received 46 referrals and provided 871 nights of accommodation. The shelter accommodated 25 people, 4 of whom were refugees. Of these;

1 had left their asylum accommodation within the previous 1-4 weeks

1 had left more than 6 months before

1 had been granted status before turning 18, so moved on from care (not asylum accommodation).

Details about the date of leaving asylum accommodation was unknown for 1 guest.

All 4 of the guests were known to have presented as homeless before coming to One Roof Leicester.

Key Issues And Recommendations

1. Continued gaps in advice and support for housing options

In the last year, much of the Home Office activity around refugee move on has focused on the Post Grant Appointment Service (PGAS), a joint initiative with DWP, where refugees receive a phone call inviting them to a Job Centre appointment to set up access to mainstream services. This was rolled out in 2017 after a pilot in the North East and Yorkshire and Humberside, with the Immigration Minister describing it as '*designed to ensure that the refugees receive the first payment of any benefit they are entitled to before their Home Office support ends*'[16],[17] Yet despite calls for evidence of the scheme's success to be made public, to date this information has not been shared.

However, as housing advice has not (to date) been part of the PGAS, refugees have continued to receive limited information via the Home Office and asylum housing provider about their accommodation options after move on. This is clearly not good enough, with a lack of understanding about the UK housing market and/or statutory services alongside the short timeframe before eviction leading to a high risk of homelessness.

As such, changes in the new AIRE (asylum advice) contract are welcomed. These include more advice for refugees on accommodation and signposting to housing services during the 28 day period.[18] Yet given that this service builds on the work of the PGAS, without a full understanding of the impact of the PGAS itself it is unclear how effective the changes will be when they are rolled out later this year. Robust monitoring and evaluation is therefore essential, alongside a public evaluation of the PGAS and the warm handover that preceded it.

In recent months, some refugees have been offered advice and support with housing via the implementation of 35 Local Authority Asylum Support Liaison Officers (LAASLOs) across 19 Local Authorities (LAs) in England. Whilst these posts play a key role in the government's response to homelessness amongst refugees,[19] it is still too early to tell the impact- or long-term prospects- of the pilot scheme, with the MHCLG evaluation not due until 2020.[20]

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[16]Caroline Nokes, Written Question no. 122424, 7th March 2018: *https://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2018-02-01.126096.h&s=refugee+speaker%3A24943#g126096.q0*

[17]For more on the PGAS, see Caroline Nokes' answer to Written Question no. 129976, 5th March 2018; *https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-02-27/129976/*

[18]AIRE Contract Schedule 2- Statement of Requirements (4.9.12), pp. 70-72.

Tekie's Story

Tekie is a 34 year old Eritrean refugee. He reported how he received some information about his housing options when he got his papers, but because of his limited English skills his brother, who has refugee status in Germany, had to translate the letter for him over the phone. He then went to the Job Centre to apply for benefits and at the same time asked the council for help with housing, but was advised there was nothing available for him. He then experienced a one month gap after getting his papers before his benefits started. In this time, he went to a homelessness support service, where he was supported with food and shelter until the One Roof night shelter opened in December 2018.

"I have had many refusals so when I read the letter from the Home Office I just saw that I had been granted my leave to remain, I didn't read anything else. The way the Home Office writes is very voluminous. There was other information in the letter about work, benefits and loans but I didn't know what to do next. I didn't have a phone call from the Home Office. If someone had phoned and explained about it that would have been very helpful. My mental health was really struggling at that time. I was panicking. I didn't know how to go about accessing the support."

Phillippe's Story

Whilst changes that have been implemented this year to improve advice for refugees around housing are cautiously welcomed, it remains unclear how they will reduce homelessness in many instances. As such, alongside the continued recommendation to extend the move on period to at least 56 days, in response to claims that there is not enough evidence of both the need for, and impact of, a longer time frame, the implementation of a pilot is recommended. Such a scheme could extend the move on period to at least 56 days for a group of at least 300 refugees, and be tracked to show the effects and cost-savings that an extension to both time and accommodation could bring. If implemented alongside other procedural changes, with findings made publicly available, the pilot could both ensure a robust assessment of the benefits of an extension, whilst improving understanding about any additional support that might be needed.

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[19]Caroline Nokes, Written Question no. 181330, 26th Oct 2018; *https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-10-18/181330/*

[20]Integrated Communities Strategy: Response, p. 12 and Integrated Communities Strategy; Action Plan, p.10

Recommendations

The move on period should be extended to at least 56 days, alongside clearly defined procedural improvements to the support and advice offered, so no refugees face homelessness and destitution after leaving asylum accommodation.

The Home Office should pilot an extension of asylum support for a period of at least 56 days for at least 300 refugees, which can be tracked to conclusively show the effect and cost-savings of an extension of time and accommodation alongside improved support. These findings should be made publicly available.

The Government should publish the findings from the PGAS without delay, so learning from it can be embedded in future advice and support services.

There should be robust monitoring in place to show the impact of changes to support for newly recognised refugees (through LAASLO scheme and asylum contracts) and this should be made public.

2. Ongoing delays with receiving benefits for those recently granted status

In NACCOM's 2017-18 annual survey, of the 3,471 people accommodated, 401 (12%) were refugees who did not have access to benefits or housing when they approached organisations for support.[21] This is reiterated by evidence from shelters involved in this report, who all supported refugee guests who were not in receipt of benefits when they came to their services. In one instance, a refugee got LTR in August 2018, but despite getting his National Insurance number (NINo) in good time, was still not in receipt of benefits when he came to the shelter five months later.

With the roll out of Universal Credit (UC) for all new applicants since December 2018, problems are likely to worsen. With its in-built delay of five weeks, all new refugees applying for support will experience a period of destitution for at least one week (most likely more) before their first payment. Further difficulties are incurred by refugees in receipt of Section 4 support at the time of their decision, because they do not have any cash to carry over in the interim period.[22]

[21] NACCOM Annual report (Sept 2018); *https://naccom.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/NACCOM-AnnualReport_2017-09-19_final-EMAIL.pdf*

[22] Section 4 (2) support is offered to people who have been refused asylum and meet certain criteria. Cash payments are not provided. See *https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/asylum-support-section-42-policy* for details.

Dariush's Story

I went to the Job Centre and got an appointment one week after my decision letter. They said they would start my Universal Credit one week after my asylum support ended. That was on the 9th April, and my Universal Credit started on 17th April. I had one week where I had no benefits, and because I have been on Section 4 I haven't got any cash. I asked them what I was to do, and they said that this was the process and they couldn't do anything about it.

The Government's response to criticism around UC delays has been to point to the availability of advance payments.[23] Yet the British Red Cross highlight barriers around this, including a lack of awareness amongst refugees, or issues getting bank accounts,[24] whilst those refugees who do know about them may feel uncomfortable about taking on debt. In January 2019, a parliamentary question confirmed that the government had not made any specific assessment around access to advance payments for refugees.[25]

I was offered an advance payment and told there would be a five week wait for my first Universal Credit instalment. Usually I have a bad feeling about loans, but I took the offer of £250 to cover my costs. The main challenge I faced was from my Job Coach, who was pushing me to apply for jobs. Even though I wanted to work, there were expenses to pay during that time. I had to pay for DBS checks and travel for interviews, and I needed to eat. I had to do all that on £250 which was very frustrating. They didn't tell me about integration loans which could have been very helpful.

Phillippe's Story

Recommendations

The move on period should be extended to at least 56 days so refugees do not face destitution whilst awaiting their first Universal Credit payment.

The Government should publish an assessment of the appropriateness of Universal Credit advance payments for newly recognised refugees.

[23] Alok Sharma, Written Question no. 203324, 28th December 2018, https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-12-18/203324/
[24] British Red Cross, Still An Ordeal, p.23
[25] Baroness Buscombe, Written Question, 3rd January 2019, https://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2018-12-17.HL12360.h&s=speaker%3A25058#gHL12360.q0

3. Reliance on charities for support due to a lack of social and private housing options

Dariush's Story

"I got my decision letter and I went to Housing Options soon after. I told them I would be homeless and would have nowhere to live. They said 'You are not suitable for a council house. You need to find somewhere privately to rent.' They said they would help me find a shared room in a privately rented house. I went back on the day that I became homeless and Housing Options said they hadn't managed to find me anything. They said I had to go to a hostel. The hostel was a terrible place. I spoke to the manager and they told me it would not be safe for me to leave my luggage here and also I would not be able to study here. I went back to Housing Options, and they contacted me with a room in a shared house. I chose a room, but after waiting for more than a month to move in, I have just been told that this room is not suitable. I went back [to the charity that had supported me when I was destitute] and said I had nowhere to stay. They let me stay with a host family, where I am still staying now."

With only 3 refugee guests known to move on to hostels or long term social housing from shelters this year, and 4 into the private rental sector (PRS), the most common move on option (taken up by 12 of the guests) was charity accommodation. Yet, whilst this can be positive, it is not always long-term (for instance, some people moved on to other night shelters or hosting schemes) and there remains the issue of capacity amongst services, which may have a time limit or other limitations on availability. This year, 5 refugee guests were known to return to the streets or sofa surfing after accessing shelters. If such outcomes are to be avoided, alongside improvements to the support offered during the move on period, barriers to accessing the housing market need to be overcome as well.

Barriers in the Private Rental Sector (PRS)

Within the PRS, a major barrier is payment for upfront costs, closely linked with levels of financial support that refugees have access to in the early weeks and months after getting status. Getting a PRS tenancy requires people to have a deposit and usually at least a month of advance rent payments.[26] One refugee trying to get a tenancy whilst starting out on UC reported a 'Catch 22' scenario, where he was unable to secure a tenancy without the funds to pay the upfront costs required, but was unable to receive the housing element of UC without a tenancy agreement.

[26]See Crisis, Home. No less will do: improving access to private renting for single homeless people (Feb 2018), https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/237168/home_no_less_will_do_access_crisis.pdf

Integration loans could provide much needed support to bridge this gap, yet the amount offered does not reflect the cost of securing a PRS tenancy. In 2017 a parliamentary question revealed the average amount offered for an Integration Loan was less than £500,[27] whilst figures cited by Crisis indicated the average tenancy deposit stood at £1197.73 (as far back as 2014).[28] To date, no amendments to this loan scheme have been introduced but it seems to be an opportunity not to be missed.

Phillippe's Story

"To receive a housing payment, I needed a signed contract with a housing provider in place. All the private landlords I approached required references, deposits and at least one month's rent up front, so I went back [to the charity that had supported me when I was destitute] and they came to my rescue."

It can also be extremely difficult to get a tenancy because of a shortage of landlords willing to take on UC tenants. Alternative payment arrangements (APA) can be made through which housing payments are paid direct to landlords.[29] This can help encourage a landlord to accept a tenant who is on UC, but one shelter reported that they did not know how to advocate for this on behalf of their guests.

A further barrier is created by discrimination towards non-British tenants via the Right to Rent scheme. This legislation, which was recently ruled discriminatory by the High Court, obliges landlords to undertake checks which prohibit certain groups of people from accessing accommodation. Despite the landmark judgement handed down in March 2019, the scheme remains in place whilst the Home Office appeals the decision.[30] Whilst the research for this report did not focus on this issue directly, the evidence from others in the sector of the barriers created by the scheme is stark.[31]

[27] APPG on Refugees, 'Refugees Welcome?' (April 2017), pp.21-22; https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/APPG_on_Refugees_-_Refugees_Welcome_report.pdf

[28] My Deposits (August 2014), 'Tenancy deposits rise by a third since 2007', cited in Crisis, 'Home. No less will do', p.6.

[29] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-and-rented-housing--2/alternative-payment-arrangements

[30] Home Office statement: https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2019/03/01/home-office/. For the judgement, see https://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2019/452.html

[31] See JCWI, 'No Passport, No Home' (Sept 2015) and 'Passport Please' (Feb 2017); https://www.jcwi.org.uk

Recommendations

Integration loans should be increased to reflect the cost of entering the private rental market and more information should be made available about them.

The Right to Rent scheme should be abolished.

Barriers To Accessing Statutory Support And Social Housing

With regards to statutory support, whilst many refugees are either not eligible for, or remain in the lowest priority banding for, social housing (for instance if they have relocated from another area, or do not meet the requirement for priority need), there is still a lot that can - and should - be done. Indeed, as a result of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) anyone who is not in priority need is still entitled to statutory support to help prevent and relieve homelessness. But to benefit from this, people have to know their entitlements and feel supported to access them.

To help, the 'Duty to Refer' (which gives certain public bodies a responsibility to refer vulnerable people onto LAs) was introduced in October 2018.[32] The premise is that by ensuring referral pathways, groups at risk of homelessness can be assured of appropriate advice in a timely manner, and it is key to ensuring both the prevention and relief of homelessness.[33] Yet the exclusion of asylum accommodation and advice providers from the list of public bodies who hold this duty means that vulnerable refugees may be missing out on vital support. The clearest way to address this risk would be to bring these providers under the same referral pathway system.

However, the Home Office argues that it is sufficient that providers have a contractual obligation to refer refugees on to LAs,[34] and have strengthened the wording on the process in the new contracts which come into place from September 2019.[35] As with other contractual amendments, it remains to be seen if the changes will be effective. To this end the Home Office should commit to making LAs aware of the changes (and routes for reporting non-compliance) alongside publishing the impact of their own approach to referrals and reviewing it as evidence of the benefits of 'Duty to Refer' gathers over time.

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[32] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/homelessness-duty-to-refer/a-guide-to-the-duty-to-refer
[33] Crisis, 'Preventing Homelessness: It's Everybody's Business' (Oct 2018), https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/239551/preventing_homelessness_its_everybodys_buisness_2018.pdf
[34] Caroline Nokes, Written Question, 25th February 2018, https://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2019-02-19.223186.h&s=Refugees#g223186.r0
[35] AASC Schedule 2: Statement of Requirements (4.4.7), p.75, AIRE Contract Schedule 2- Statement of Requirements (4.9.12), p.72

Recommendations

Clear guidance should be given to LAs about the obligations of the asylum contract providers so that non-compliance can be quickly identified, published and rectified.

The Home Office should monitor and report on referrals from accommodation/ advice providers to LAs, so the impact can be monitored and if necessary the 'duty to refer' extended to include the providers.

What Is Not In This Report

This report focuses on the needs of newly recognised refugees, largely because it is understood that simple changes in the approach to the move on period could drastically improve lives at this critical juncture. Yet it is clear from the evidence provided by shelters, both this year and last, that refugees are requiring support at other points as well. Examples include after arriving on Family Reunion visas, when they leave the care system, when they find themselves unemployed and in rent arrears, or after relationship breakdowns.

Justice to such a range of issues cannot be done in this short report, but there is strong evidence that people who have experienced homelessness at one point in their lives are likely to face it again.[36] Therefore, alongside standing with others to call for a society in which no one faces homelessness, it is hoped that this report can stand as a warning for the future if action is not taken quickly.

A Note on Homelessness Charters

Two of the cities where evidence was gathered for this report, Manchester and Leicester, have established Homelessness Charters in recent years. Both documents set out a vision for tackling homelessness by calling on public bodies, charities, faith groups, businesses and local government to work together.[37] Such an approach is welcomed by projects working locally, and it is hoped that learning from them can disseminate nationally as well.

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[36] See Crisis, 'Nations Apart' (Dec 2014), pp.26-28; *https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/20608/crisis_nations_apart_2014.pdf*
[37] Leicester's Homelessness Charter: *https://www.leicester.anglican.org/download/16531/* and Manchester's Homeless Charter: *https://charter.streetsupport.net/manchester-homelessness-charter.pdf*

Update on Supported Housing

Supported housing is intensive support and tenancy management and accommodation for vulnerable groups, with some schemes receiving a higher rate of housing benefit for tenants (known as 'exempt accommodation'). Within NACCOM, several members provide this, primarily for newly recognised refugees who have begun to receive benefits.

In October 2017, changes were proposed to funding for certain types of supported housing, but there were concerns that such changes ran the risk of excluding or limiting existing service provision, which could have resulted in rising homelessness. When Mind the Gap was published last May the government response was unclear, so a recommendation about it was included. In August 2018, MHCLG announced they would not implement the changes, a response which NACCOM welcomed.[38]

[38] *https://naccom.org.uk/naccoms-response-to-the-governments-u-turn-on-supported-housing/*

Conclusion

Whilst actions that government departments have implemented to support refugees in the last year are cautiously welcomed, there remains a disconnect between public policy and the experiences of homeless refugees. Some of this has to do with the pace of learning around government initiatives, but it is also clear that 28 days is simply not long enough to definitively prevent homelessness.

With a longer move on period, alongside more joined up support, refugees who are not eligible for social housing would have more time to find PRS alternatives whilst not having to go into debt to get their first payment of Universal Credit. There would be less panic and more chance of genuine integration. Of course, there would be a cost to extending the move on period, but there is currently a cost, both human and economic, by failing to do so. It is for this reason that the report's leading recommendation is for the Home Office to implement a move on pilot and make public its findings. Without such a practical step towards change, there is a real concern that tinkering will continue around the edges of the system that never goes far enough to make a lasting difference.

Homelessness is a scandal and all avenues to end it must be explored. Every refugee who becomes homeless after finally receiving recognition of their need for protection, every refugee who has to worry about finding a place to sleep rather than putting in place positive and hopeful plans for their future, represents a failure on the part of this government to learn from the past and make changes for the future. More must be done, and quickly. There is no time to waste.

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