



MIND THE GAP

Homelessness Amongst
Newly Recognised Refugees

- May 2018 -

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Huge thanks to all who took part in the evidence gathering and case studies for this report including but not limited to C4WS Homeless Project, The Boaz Trust and One Roof Leicester. Thanks also to the agencies in the sector who provided support on the issues and recommendations raised.

Thanks as well to Rose Burton at Crisp Design for the presentation of the report.

Definitions:

This report refers to single adults with leave to remain including newly recognised refugees and people with discretionary leave to remain 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 refused asylum seekers, other migrants with no recourse to public funds and refugees who face barriers to mainstream housing. The network, which includes 53 Full Members (providing accommodation) and 22 Associate Members (in support of NACCOM's aims), exists to promote good practice, increase accommodation provision, and call for an end to destitution.

This report was written to explore pathways into and out of homelessness amongst refugees (including those who have been supported by NACCOM Members) and contribute as evidence of the need for reform.

Executive Summary

Homelessness amongst newly recognised refugees is a significant problem that relates directly to government policy and has a damaging and lasting impact on people's lives. This report highlights how inadequate advice and support in the limited timeframe before eviction from asylum accommodation is resulting in homelessness. It also evidences how barriers to accessing accommodation, both in terms of social housing and the private rental sector, are faced, and in some cases addressed only with support from the voluntary sector whose services are overstretched and at risk due to funding challenges.

Data and case studies from several NACCOM Members alongside wider research from the network contributed to key findings and recommendations, summarised below.



4,672
nights of
accommodation
provided



169
people
accommodated



28%
of the guests had
refugee status

Recommendations

- The move-on period should be extended from 28 to 56 days, so that refugees can be assured of the same support to prevent them becoming homeless as others benefitting from the extension to the timeframe under the Homelessness Reduction Act. A longer time-frame would also mean that refugees have longer to apply for and begin receiving benefits, reducing risks of hardship and exploitation.
- The Home Office should share the learning from the 'warm handover' pilot for newly recognised refugees that preceded the Post Grant Appointment Service.
- More advice and support should be offered to refugees to ensure understanding about housing options after leaving asylum accommodation.
- The amount being offered through Integration Loans should be adjusted and monitored to reflect the private rental market. Communication about the availability of, and criteria for, loans should be more readily available to refugees and support services.
- Asylum accommodation providers should be listed as a 'public body with a duty to refer' refugees to Local Housing Authorities under new Homelessness Reduction Act regulations. This will ensure that people receive support within their local connection area.
- Any changes to specialist supported housing should ensure that the rights and opportunities of all vulnerable people- including refugees- are put front and centre. Assurances must also be made that there will be no risk to the delivery and sustainability of services as a result of any changes and refugees should be cited as an eligible group for supported housing, both in the legislation and guidance.

“

'I got a letter...saying I would need to leave the house. I went to the council... They said they didn't have any accommodation - I would have to rent somewhere. But I didn't have a job, I didn't have any money.... I don't have any place to go, I don't know what to do.'

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Context

People who are granted leave to remain (LTR) in the UK are given 28 days to vacate their government-funded asylum accommodation. This is known as the 'move-on' period, and its short time frame, compounded by a shortage of social and affordable housing more widely, and lack of coordinated integration support, is highly problematic. Again and again, refugees are being forced into destitution and homelessness after being told they have the Government's full protection.



On The Move On Period

'The purpose of the 28-day period is to allow newly recognised refugees and those granted leave to remain the time to obtain employment or to apply for any mainstream welfare benefits to which they may now be entitled.'¹

- *Minister of State for the Home Office (Baroness Williams of Trafford), July 2017*



Over recent years, a growing body of evidence has highlighted the barriers people face at this crucial juncture. Several reports have been published and key recommendations include extending the move on period, improving support with integration and more advice with accommodation and benefits.²



On the Post Grant Appointment Service

'The scheme is designed to ensure that the refugees receive the first payment of any benefit they are entitled to before their Home Office support ends. All frontline DWP staff have access to operational instructions that explain the support available to refugees. Staff in the areas where the refugees have been accommodated by the Home Office have received full information to make them aware of the scheme and the need to process the claims quickly.'³

- *Caroline Nokes, Immigration Minister, 7th February 2018.*



¹House of Lords debate, 19th July 2017

²See British Red Cross; 'The Move on Period: An ordeal for new refugees' (2014), Refugee Council; 'England's Forgotten Refugees' (2016) and 'Refugees without Refuge' (2017), APPG for Refugees, 'Refugees Welcome?' (2017).

³Home Office Written Question, answered on 7th February 2018, No. 124424.

Since then, some progress has been made. In October 2017, the 'Post Grant Appointment Service' was launched, an initiative by the Home Office and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) where refugees are offered a phone call to arrange a JobCentre appointment during the move on period. In December 2017, the Home Office announced that National Insurance Numbers (NINOs) would now be printed as standard on Biometric Residency Permits (BRPs). In 2018, government funding has been allocated to appoint Asylum Support Liaison Officers (LAASLOs) across multiple Local Authorities (LAs), whose brief includes supporting people after move on.⁴ Meanwhile, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government has launched an Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper. The needs of, and barriers faced by, refugees are mentioned at several points in the proposal, which is undergoing a period of consultation until June 2018.



On Supporting The Integration Of Refugees

'Recognising the benefits that integration activities have had for people on the UK's refugee resettlement schemes, we will work with civil society and others to increase the integration support available to those recognised as refugees after arrival in the UK.'⁵

- *Integrated Communities Green Paper, March 2018*



Whilst it will take time to see the full effects of these changes or proposals, and pressure needs to be maintained to ensure effective evaluation and monitoring, a separate issue continues to loom, that of homelessness amongst refugees. This is, of course, not a new problem but it does have the potential to garner more attention now than ever before. This is because major changes in homelessness legislation that are expected to impact the wider population could fail to benefit refugees, as a direct result of the shorter move on period and other related barriers.

⁴Integrated Communities Green Paper, March 2018, p.23

⁵Integrated Communities Green Paper, p.22

Homelessness Reduction Act

From April 2018, across England, changes to services for people at risk of homelessness have come in under the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA). Below is a summary of the key changes that have now come into force, and barriers that refugees may still face:

Key Changes

Local Housing Authorities (LHAs) must provide free advice and information around homelessness rights, available support and access to that support. Information should meet the needs of all people in the LHA district, including a number of specific groups.

Risks/Barriers

In order to benefit from advice to prevent homelessness, refugees need to first know where the information is. If this is not understood at the time of granting status, then refugees are likely to miss out.

Key Changes

The period that someone can be deemed 'threatened with homelessness' has been extended to 56 days (formerly 28 days) to allow for earlier intervention.

LHAs have new responsibilities to prevent or relieve homelessness. Prevention duty applies to all eligible people, regardless of priority need, local connection or intentionality. Relief duty applies to all eligible people who are already homeless, regardless of priority need or intentionality, and LHAs can refer on if people are from another local connection area.

Personal Housing Plans (PHPs) must be developed with applicants following an assessment of circumstances, housing needs and other support requirements. This includes steps that both the applicant and LHA will take to either keep existing, or find alternative, accommodation.

Risks/Barriers

If refugees present to the LHA during the 28-day move on period, there will be a limit to the quality of support that can be offered because of the short timeframe. Furthermore, because refugees are unable to stay in their asylum accommodation, unless alternative housing can be found before the end of the move on period, they will need to be supported under the 'relief duty'. One of the differences with this is that LHAs can refer people on (or back) to other LHAs if they do not have a local connection, which could increase the likelihood of homelessness.

Key Changes

Some public bodies are required to notify LHAs of service users they think may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless ('Duty to Refer'). This comes into force in October 2018.

Risks/Barriers

The list of public bodies does not include asylum accommodation providers, and whilst there is an expectation on accommodation providers within the COMPASS contract to 'co-operate' with LHAs in order to prevent homelessness amongst residents granted LTR, the approach is not standardised.⁶ Therefore, relevant departments of LHAs will not always be aware of the number or needs of refugees evicted from asylum accommodation, thus services and advice could be limited.

Key Changes

When LHAs review and publish homelessness strategies, these must be informed by the HRA.

Risks/Barriers

If refugees are not recognised in these strategies, then there will be a limit to resources and support that will be made available. In areas that do not have specialist services already in place, for instance new dispersal areas, refugees could face disadvantages.



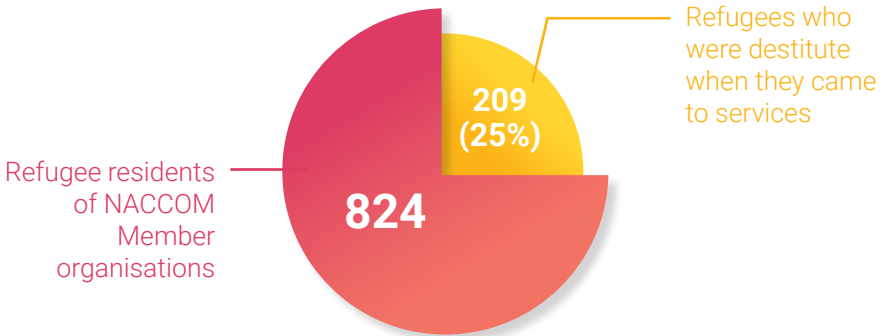
Shirzad

After I got my visa, I stayed for longer in NASS [asylum accommodation] because after the 28 days finished I didn't have any place to go. I didn't go to the council. I didn't have any friends to help me. After one month, I got a call from the Home Office who gave me appointment at the Job Centre. After this I signed for benefits but I didn't get anything for two months. I was waiting for a long time for my BRP card. Some people get BRP quickly but for other people it is taking a long time. London is very busy and very expensive, so after I left NASS I came to Manchester. Some people told me about the Boaz night shelter. When I came to the shelter I still did not have any benefits. Then I got £500 in one go (Boaz helped me with proof of address). Before then I had friends in NASS helping me. It was not good. I was waiting for a long time.

Methodology

STAGE 1: Recognising refugee homelessness in the NACCOM Network

Within NACCOM, evidence of homelessness and other needs, as well as positive outcomes achieved, are gathered in an annual survey. Over recent years the number of refugees being accommodated by Members has been rising, and in 2016-17, of the 1,907 people accommodated across the network, 824 were refugees. Furthermore, at least 25% of refugee residents were destitute (without access to benefits, housing and employment) when they approached the Member organisation for help.⁷



STAGE 2: Developing understanding about the reasons for and routes out of homelessness for refugees.

Of the 38 Members that took part in the 2016-17 survey, 50% had accommodated refugees that year, either through emergency night shelters, hosting schemes or supported housing projects.

Those who were accommodating refugees in night shelters were then asked to provide monthly data on the demographics of residents over the winter of 2017-18, to develop understanding about why people with status were requiring emergency support and what could be done to support people out of this crisis. Of the three night shelters that received refugees into their shelters during this period (One Roof Leicester, the Boaz

⁶See COMPASS PROJECT Schedule 2 Accommodation and Transport Statement of Requirements, p.18

⁷NACCOM 2016-17 Annual Report

Trust and C4WS Homeless Project), further analysis was carried out with the two that received the highest number of refugee guests - Boaz Trust (in Manchester) and C4WS Homeless Project (in Camden, London). This included direct interviews with three refugees whose experiences are shared throughout this report.

Summary Of Concerns

- Lack of advice and support leading to homelessness
- Delays with receiving benefits due to not having proof of address
- Systemic and practical barriers to accessing housing

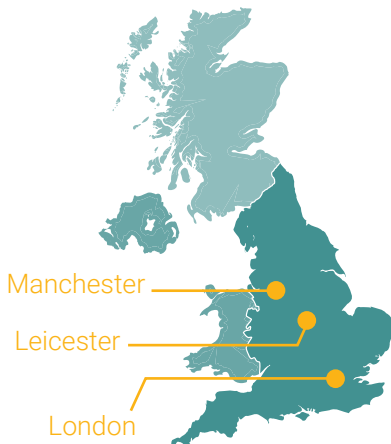
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Staying in the night shelter helped me. It was really good. It was difficult during the day but if I didn't have the night shelter I would have had to stay in the road. They really helped me.

”

Night shelter provision for refugees

(Oct 2017-April 2018)



4,672

nights of accommodation provided



169

people accommodated



48 (28%)

guests had refugee status

The Boaz Trust

The Boaz Trust (also referred to in this report as 'Boaz') is a holistic support service for destitute refused asylum seekers and refugees in Greater Manchester and has been operating for 14 years. The charity provides accommodation (including 17 shared houses, a hosting scheme and winter night shelter) living essentials, practical and emotional support, access to legal advice and representation, and wellbeing activities.

How The Shelter Works

The Boaz night shelter accommodates asylum seekers and refugees needing emergency accommodation. The male-only shelter operates for 7 months of the year, from October-April, via a rota of seven local 'host' churches, and the Friends Meeting House who provide a city centre reception venue each evening. Each church provides 12 bed spaces and 2 meals per day, one night of the week for seven months of the shelter.

In 2017, a local pilot emergency night shelter was launched for female asylum seekers and refugees in partnership with the British Red Cross. From October to mid-December 2017, this provision operated in the same way as the men's shelter, with 8 bed spaces available each night. However the model changed to emergency short-term hosting from mid-December until March, due to the low number of referrals.

Emergency accommodation is overseen by two part-time staff and supported by over 300 volunteers. Volunteers are recruited and managed by the 'host' churches, with training provided to all volunteers and ongoing support offered to night shelter leaders at each venue.

Who The Shelter Supports

From October 2017- March 2018, the men's night shelter:

- provided 1,515 nights of accommodation
- accommodated 57 men, 24 of whom were refugees

In the same period, the women's night shelter and emergency hosting service:

- provided 221 nights of accommodation
- accommodated 20 women, 11 of whom were refugees

The dates that guests had left asylum accommodation were known for 11 refugees. Of these;

- 3 had left their asylum accommodation within the previous 1-4 weeks
- 4 had left asylum accommodation in the previous 1-6 months
- 4 had left more than 6 months before

7 of the guests presented as homeless before coming to the Boaz Trust.

C4WS Homeless Project



C4WS Homeless Project (also referred to in this report as C4WS) is an accommodation service based in Camden, North London, that has operated since 2005. As well as providing somewhere to sleep, C4WS offers people support through a Friday Drop in Club, English Classes, a Mentoring and Befriending Scheme and a Jobs Club. All of this is managed by a team of 3 permanent members of staff, plus the support of over 600 volunteers.

How The Shelter Works

C4WS run a night shelter that operates across 13 different churches in the borough, with each church taking responsibility for 10 nights of provision for five months of the year, from November-March. In addition, guests are offered support around mental and physical health problems, addiction issues, immigration matters, employability skills, welfare advice and housing advice. The project also oversees a Mentoring and Befriending programme for night shelter guests, coordinated with local volunteers. In 2017, C4WS set up 'Home From Home', a hosting scheme providing short-term interim accommodation in volunteer households for guests who have not secured long term accommodation after the winter months.

Who The Shelter Supports

From November 2017- March 2018, the night shelter received 334 phone calls to make a referral and provided a total of 2,096 nights of accommodation across 16 bed spaces.

In this period, 67 people stayed at the night shelter, 33% of whom cited immigration issues as their reason for homelessness.

Of the guests, 12 were refugees. Dates for those who had moved on from asylum accommodation were known for 5 refugees. Of these;

- 2 had left their asylum accommodation within the previous 1-4 weeks
- 1 had left their asylum accommodation in the previous 1-6 months
- 2 had left more than 6 months ago

8 of the guests presented as homeless before coming to C4WS.

Pathways Into Homelessness

1 Lack Of Advice And Support Is Leading To Homelessness

Finding safe, secure accommodation after leaving asylum support is a daunting task, made worse by the lack of advice and support and the short window of time to arrange future options. As a result, refugees often face homelessness at the end of the move on period. Of the 24 refugees accessing the Boaz men's night shelter in 2017-18, 29% (7) were known to have left their asylum accommodation within the previous 6 months. Of the 12 refugees accessing support from C4WS, this figure was 25% (3). Research for this report highlighted that refugees were coming to shelters as early as one week after leaving their asylum accommodation.

Becoming homeless is a hugely traumatic experience and one that everyone agrees should be prevented if at all possible. Since April 2018, the period of time that someone can be deemed 'threatened with homelessness' has been extended to 56 days (formerly 28 days) and LHAs have new responsibilities to prevent or relieve homelessness e.g. by developing Personal Housing Plans and providing free advice and practical assistance. These changes have been developed to either help people stay in their current accommodation or find alternative secure accommodation. Whilst it is encouraging that legislation now recognises homelessness takes more than 28 days to 'resolve', it is unclear how refugees can benefit in the same way as other applicants from these changes because of the continuation of the 28-day move on period.

Recommendation

The move-on period should be extended from 28 to 56 days, so that refugees can be assured of the same rights and protection as others benefitting from the duties that their LHA now has to prevent and relieve homelessness.

People that were interviewed for this report shared how they had received little or no advice on housing options once their decision had been granted. Whilst the Home Office does issue letters and leaflets with some information, the expectation still heavily lies on refugees to be able to communicate in written and spoken English and know the system well enough to avoid homelessness. In addition, varying degrees of leniency amongst asylum accommodation providers around eviction dates, and different experiences of community networks can play significant factors in someone's options after 28 days.

Alongside longer time frames to move on from housing and benefit from the new HRA changes, the Home Office could prevent homelessness amongst refugees by improving their communication methods. Learning from the Post Grant Appointment Service would significantly help with this.

Recommendation

The Home Office should share the learning from the 'warm handover' pilot for newly recognised refugees that preceded the Post Grant Appointment Service.

More advice should be offered to refugees to ensure understanding about housing options after leaving asylum support, and to ensure refugees are able to benefit from the free advice and support that LHAs are offering under the HRA.

There is also a need for consistency between asylum accommodation providers and LHAs. As asylum accommodation providers are currently not listed as one of the public bodies with a 'duty to refer' in the regulations under the HRA (in effect from October), the degree to which they share information about people moving on from their accommodation varies across the country. There is a risk that the relevant departments of LHAs are not always aware of the number or needs of refugees evicted from asylum accommodation, which could limit the provision of specialist services or advice and result in confusion for refugees who are unsure of the next steps to take.

Recommendation

Asylum accommodation providers should be listed as a public body with a 'duty to refer'. This will ensure that upon being granted status, people receive support within their local connection area.

2 Delays With Receiving Benefits Due To Not Having Proof Of Address

Refugees who have been forced to depend on very low levels of asylum support throughout the application process are at a severe financial disadvantage when they are granted status. Benefits are therefore an important resource, yet research shows that delays or errors with applying for benefits are commonplace.

People who were interviewed for this report highlighted that not having a proof of address was often a major barrier to setting up bank accounts and accessing benefits, based on advice they had received from the JobCentre. This is despite government assurance that benefits can be paid by other methods if bank accounts are unavailable, and that JobCentre staff can explain the process to applicants.⁸ In another instance, a guest who had recently turned 18 and left care was asked to complete a habitual residence test (HRT) before their benefit claim could be processed. This is despite Home Office/DWP guidance that a BRP will prove that refugees are exempt from this test.⁹

At the Boaz night shelter (Oct 2017- April 2018), six refugees were supported who were not in receipt of benefits at the time of coming to the service, two of whom had not got NINOs when they arrived. In several cases, people only received benefits once they came to the charity (who provided a correspondence address whilst permanent accommodation was sought). Of those who struggled without benefits, one guest waited five months to receive his NINo. In this time, he borrowed money from the charity to avoid getting into debt with a loan company. Other guests who faced hardship in the first few weeks after being granted status explained that they were often supported by people still living in asylum accommodation, who would have been living on very low levels of support.

“

I got my papers in September but I did not get any benefits until February. I didn't have proof of address and they said I had to have bank account for benefits. Then they say I have no proof of address so I cannot open the bank account. After I moved into the Boaz house, then I had proof of address and I could start getting benefits. I am thankful for the benefits but I want to work. I have fifteen years experience working, I am a good welder, but now I cannot find a job. I ask at JobCentre about learning English and now I am waiting for college. It is hard... I want to speak to people. I am thinking, thinking, all the time, at night time I cannot go to sleep. This is not good. I want to make myself strong for my family.

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⁸See 'Payment Exception': <https://www.gov.uk/payment-exception-service> and 'How to have your benefits paid': <https://www.gov.uk/how-to-have-your-benefits-paid>

⁹Turn to Us: <https://www.turn2us.org.uk/Your-Situation/A-Migrant/Habitual-Residence-Test/Who-is-exempt-from-the-Habitual-Residence-Test#guide-content>

At the C4WS night shelter (November 2017- March 2018), thirteen guests (including refugees) were supported who were not in receipt of benefits. Alongside providing hardship funds, staff supported guests with transitioning to mainstream benefits (most commonly refugees who have recently turned 18). To reduce delays for applicants, C4WS provided a proof of address and also advised the DWP of changes to people's addresses so they could sign on at a new office.

A Note On Universal Credit In Camden and Manchester

Universal Credit was rolled out in Camden in 2016 for a limited group of single people, but for many residents, roll out has not happened yet. Guests often use the C4WS office as proof of address, and the nearest Job Centre is St Marylebone, which starts claims from June 2018.

In Manchester, roll out has also been staggered. A small cohort began receiving it in 2014, but full implementation began in October 2017 and continues in 2018.

Recommendation

The move-on period should be extended from 28 to 56 days, so that refugees have longer to apply for and begin receiving benefits. This timescale would fit with the roll out of Universal Credit and would help to prevent hardship, destitution and exploitation.

3 Systemic And Practical Barriers To Accessing Housing

Whilst social and affordable housing options are significantly limited across the country, there are specific barriers that could be addressed to improve access amongst refugees.

The first is the issue of local connection and risks of becoming intentionally homeless. After getting status, people sometimes want to better their chances of settling in a community or finding employment by relocating. A major reason for this is that during the asylum process, applicants are housed in no-choice accommodation (often in areas of the country where housing is particularly cheap), and can be moved at various points

in the process. As a result, many do not have strong roots in the place they were granted status.

Both the Boaz Trust and C4WS shared that it was commonplace for refugees to present at their shelters after moving from another local connection area. In some cases, this was because of community connections in these areas, and for others it was a decision based on costs of living and/or work. Sometimes, however, the full impact of this decision is not understood, particularly with regards to local connection and housing options. Under the HRA 'relief' duty, local connection still plays a role in the level of support that must be offered (for instance, a receiving LHA can refer people back). If refugees move away from their local connection area and apply for support elsewhere they could be deemed intentionally homeless, which will have implications for their future options.

One Roof Leicester shared how a guest in their night shelter the previous winter was successfully moved into an LHA hostel when the shelter closed. Whilst at the hostel he was offered accommodation which he refused. Due to a lack of understanding of how the system worked, not helped by language barriers, he was evicted from the hostel as the LHA classed him as intentionally homeless as a result of this refusal. Consequently, he became street homeless again. When the charity became aware of the situation, he was offered a room in their supported housing scheme.

Recommendation

Asylum accommodation providers should be listed as a public body with a duty to refer. This will ensure that upon being granted status, people receive support within their local connection area.

Under the HRA, LHAs should consult with and in some cases commission specialist services to provide advice and support to refugees about their rights and future options.

A further issue is around demonstrating 'priority need'. One refugee who was interviewed for this report had presented at his LHA but was told there was no temporary accommodation available to him because he was not 'priority need'. This is commonplace, despite the fact that many refugees do have physical and mental health conditions (often both as a result of experiences before coming to the UK and because of experiencing trauma in the UK, such as detention and destitution) that could render them eligible. However, it can take a significant amount of time and resource to demonstrate need, and applicants may need additional support to receive a positive decision.¹⁰

There are also problems around the private rental sector (PRS), including systemic barriers created by 'right to rent' legislation, which has led to discrimination against migrants by some landlords.¹¹ Separately, financing a deposit remains a near impossible task for a refugee who has just got status after living on asylum support rates, or facing destitution, with no right to work. One way that people can be supported into the PRS is through rent deposit schemes. These are usually run by LHAs or housing associations and enable loans to cover a tenancy deposit to be paid back over a period of time.¹² However, as such schemes are commonly for people with priority need, many refugees will not benefit. To combat this, some charities have started running schemes- one example is Refugee Council's 'Housing Resettlement and Deposit Guarantee Scheme', another is C4WS's in-house hardship fund. For more on schemes to support access to the PRS see the Crisis website.¹³

Support to secure a deposit can also be sourced through Integration Loans which refugees can apply for upon receiving their NINo.¹⁴ However, not all applications are approved, and research into the effectiveness of loans in 2015 demonstrated that they are often not as useful as they could be due to delays and low payments.¹⁵ In addition, NACCOM Members shared that communication about loans is not clear, with some refugees not receiving any information about them in their decision letter.

Recommendation

The amount being offered to refugees through Integration Loans should be adjusted and monitored to reflect the private rental market.

Communication about the availability of, and criteria for, loans should be more readily available to refugees and support services.

Finally, there is a lack of availability, and certainty around the future of, specialist supported housing, in particular the provision of intensive support and housing management for people with additional needs (including refugees) which is funded through a higher rate of housing benefit. This type of specialist supported housing is known as 'Exempt Accommodation'. It is a type of accommodation that around 10% of NACCOM Members provide.

¹⁰Refugee Council: <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/homelessnessapplications>

¹¹JCWI's report, 'Passport Please' (2017)

¹²Shelter: https://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice/private_renting/rent_deposit_bond_and_guarantee_schemes

¹³Crisis: <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/housing-resource-centre/prs-database/>

¹⁴Government Integration Loans: <https://www.gov.uk/refugee-integration-loan>

¹⁵APPG on Refugees, 'Refugees Welcome?' p. 21

Government proposals in October 2017 outlined dramatic changes to the model for (what was defined as) 'short term supported housing', one of which was moving the source of funding to a ring-fenced pot to be administered by LHAs. Such a change would have huge implications, reducing flexibility and prohibiting the development of specialist services, and could increase homelessness, not just amongst refugees but many other groups with additional needs.¹⁶

Recommendation

Any changes to specialist supported housing should ensure that the rights and opportunities of all vulnerable people- including refugees- are put front and centre.

Assurances must also be made that there will be no risk to the delivery and sustainability of services as a result of any changes.

Refugees should be cited as an eligible group for specialist supported housing, both in the legislation and guidance.



Bahram

'When I come to this country the government protect me, they support me, they put me in a safe place and they accept me after 14 months. Until this time it is good. Then after they give me this BRP card, they leave me. That is so bad. After they give me the visa, I got a letter 2 weeks later saying I would need to leave the house. I went to the council in London. They said they didn't have any accommodation- I would have to rent somewhere. But I didn't have a job, I didn't have any money. I talked to my housing manager, saying I don't have any place to go, I don't know what to do, can I stay for one or two weeks later? But he says no. 28 days is too short. A little bit longer would be better. After that you could sort your life, you could find a job, you could rent a house... But it is too short. I went to my pastor and they said I could stay with him and his family. If I didn't know the pastor, I would have had to stay in the road. This would be a bad situation...There is not enough housing in London.'

¹⁶NACCOM response on the consultation: www.naccomm.org.uk/resources

Pathways Out Of Homelessness

The majority of refugees featured in this report found secure accommodation before it was published. This is a huge testimony to the lifesaving and community-transforming work of NACCOM Members, not only in preventing homelessness but also in supporting a positive and lasting transition to life in the UK. A lot can be learnt from the voluntary sector in this regard, so in this final section, further analysis is carried out of the outcomes that people achieved after the night shelters ended, and the good practice that this demonstrates across the NACCOM Network.

Boaz Trust

Of the guests in this year's shelter with refugee status;



Pathways - Supported Housing

Supported housing is a significant move-on option for refugees who stay in the Boaz night shelter. The service has been operating in partnership with a local housing association, Arawak Walton, since April 2016. The charity runs 7 shared occupancy houses for refugees (14 bed spaces for men, 12 for women), and 1 flat for a couple. Rent collection is managed by the housing association who also bring additional benefits such as well-established relationships with the DWP and Manchester City Council. A further benefit can be found in the financial sustainability that regular and timely rental income from tenants brings in. As well as accommodating refugees, the Boaz Trust provides assistance with other aspects of move on with the help of a part-time Refugee Support Worker.

C4WS Homeless Project

Of the guests in this year's shelter with refugee status;

4  moved onto more permanent accommodation i.e. supported housing or a long term hostel

1  moved onto the C4WS 'Home from Home' Hosting scheme

3  moved on to another shelter

3  went on to stay with friends or sofa surfing

Pathways - Private Rental Sector

C4WS works closely with a supportive estate agent in the borough that is able to house people with no previous history of accommodation or a background of homelessness. This has enabled a significant proportion of guests to move on to private rental accommodation, which is crucial because of the high waiting lists for social housing in Camden.

C4WS also provides a Hardship Fund which gives guests who are moving into PRS accommodation help to pay their deposit. Staff work out an affordable repayment scheme with the individual and in some instances apply for additional grant funding to supplement payments.

The staff also work with local hostels that can take people for short placements although there are concerns about the impact of proposed changes to funding for short-term supported housing which could affect this provision in the future.



Mohsen

I left NASS [asylum accommodation] in January 2018. They let me stay on for two more weeks because they knew I didn't have anywhere to go. Then I stayed outside for 2 nights. It was very cold. When I left my NASS accommodation, I went to the council and registered with housing. I knew to do this because I have been here a long time. They said I am not priority, and I cannot have any hostel place. I applied for housing and I waited two months. Charities helped me to apply as priority. At first the council say there will be something in four weeks, then eight weeks. In that time, I stayed at the shelter. Now I am in hostel and I am waiting for a house. I am bidding every week and I am learning English at college.

Conclusion

Despite positive steps forward in recent months, there are still a significant number of areas around refugee move-on that require urgent attention. Short timeframes for intervention and lack of advice and support for refugees after eviction was the first major concern that this report addressed, followed by issues and delays with benefit payments. The final issue addressed was barriers to housing, with questions raised about accessibility to social, supported and private rental sectors (particularly without support from community groups including those in the NACCOM Network).

There are several steps that could be taken to address these problems. The extension of the move on period is the first and most crucial, and would bring this Home Office policy in line with wider homelessness prevention work. This needs to be alongside more and better advice from the Home Office, and in this way, learning from the Post Grant Appointment Service and the handover pilot that preceded it is essential.

Other measures that could be taken include naming asylum accommodation providers as ‘public bodies with a duty to refer’ in the new regulations under the HRA. This would ensure people receive advice and support locally, whilst also helping LHAs develop strategies and services to prevent homelessness that reflect the needs of all their residents (including refugees). Finally, there needs to be assurance from the government that there will be no risk to the delivery and sustainability of services under planned changes to specialist supported housing, and that the needs of all the groups accessing such services, including refugees, will be put front-and-centre of any future policy.

If left unaddressed, refugee homelessness as a direct consequence of government policy will continue unabated. Indeed, within NACCOM, if resources continue to be stretched and funding is reduced for members preventing destitution in practical ways (for instance if changes are made to specialist supported housing that reduce provision or increase instability), the number of people at risk of homelessness could rise significantly. If, on the other hand, these recommendations (which echo many made by others in the sector) were implemented, huge differences would be evident immediately. The numbers of refugees becoming homeless would reduce, and the risk to NACCOM Members’ capacity and resources would be lowered. Finally, and crucially, such changes would demonstrate the government’s commitment to their own ambitions around improving integration for refugees and ending rough sleeping.¹⁷

¹⁷Government Rough Sleeping plans published November 2017: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-to-lead-national-effort-to-end-rough-sleeping>

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