

Still an ordeal: the move-on period for new refugees

Report summary

When a person is recognised as a refugee in the UK, having successfully applied for asylum, they are granted a 28 day grace period to 'move-on' from asylum support provided by the Home Office. In this time they must find alternative accommodation, arrange receipt of mainstream benefits and/or find a job.

For many newly recognised refugees, 28 days simply isn't long enough to successfully move-on. Unacceptable numbers of newly recognised refugees are left without food and shelter due to delays and mistakes in receiving documentation, barriers to opening bank accounts, and difficulties in accessing welfare systems. As a result many fall between the two systems and into crisis.

In 2014, the British Red Cross published research that showed that the move-on period was an ordeal for new refugees. Despite positive

policy changes in the intervening years, in the first six months of 2018, the British Red Cross supported 9,469 destitute refugees and people seeking asylum. This is an increase of 2 per cent compared to the first half of 2017. Of those, nearly one in five had refugee status. As this new report shows, the move-on period is still an ordeal and further changes, including extending the move-on period, are now needed.

Read the full report here:
<http://bit.ly/BRC28days>

British Red Cross recommends that:

- 1 The move-on period for newly recognised refugees should be extended to at least 56 days.**
- 2 The level of support and accessibility of information provided to newly recognised refugees to help them navigate the move-on period should be improved.**
- 3 Refugees should be able to navigate the application process for Universal Credit with support as required and payments should be made as soon as possible.**
- 4 Newly recognised refugees should be able to quickly and easily open bank accounts.**

Key findings from the research

Incompatible timescales and the 'destitution gap'

- 28 days remains too short a timescale for newly recognised refugees to transition from asylum to mainstream support or work, leaving many unable to meet their most basic needs for several weeks or more.
- The introduction of Universal Credit has made it almost inevitable that refugees will be left without support. The 35 day waiting period built into the Universal Credit application process is not compatible with the 28 day move-on period afforded to newly recognised refugees.
- All 26 surveyed refugees who had applied for benefits had experienced problems and became destitute at the end of the move-on period for between six and 72 days.

The implementation of the Post Grant Appointment Service

- The introduction of the Post Grant Appointment Service (PGAS), introduced with the aim of securing an earlier initial interview for newly recognised refugees at the Job Centre Plus, is effective in setting up a claimant's first benefit application interview earlier than previously.
- However, we found no evidence that this leads to an earlier first payment or mitigates the risk of destitution due to a break in support.

Inaccessible advance payments

- The key safeguard within Universal Credit, advance payments, was not normally accessed by newly recognised refugees.
- Refugees are often unaware of their eligibility or cannot receive advance payments due to barriers to opening a bank account without the necessary proof of address or passing the habitual residency test.
- Only 2 of the 23 people with refugee status surveyed for the report in a Universal Credit area applied for an advance payment. Neither application was granted due to delays with the Habitual Residency Test, which determines a person's eligibility for benefits.

A struggle to open bank accounts

- Universal Credit payments can only be made into a bank account, which in turn can normally only be opened once a letter from the Department for Work (DWP) and Pensions has been provided as proof of address. However, the online nature of Universal Credit means that the first formal letter from DWP is only generated when the first payment is made.
- This leads to a chicken-and-egg situation whereby a bank account cannot be opened without a DWP letter, but a DWP letter will only be provided once a benefit payment is made into a bank account.

Inadequate language and IT support

- The level of English required to engage with the Universal Credit online portal made it difficult if not impossible for most refugees with limited English language and IT skills to complete without significant and sustained support from third sector volunteers and staff.

Mary's story

Mary* arrived in the UK with her one year old son in May 2009. She claimed for asylum and started receiving support. Nine years later, Mary was granted asylum and knew she had 28 days before her asylum support ended. However, she wasn't aware of Universal Credit.

Three days after receiving her official grant letter, on 15 May, Mary received an eviction notice informing her she must vacate her asylum accommodation by 6 June. At this point Mary unsuccessfully applied for alternative housing through the local authority.

On 24 May, half way through the move-on period, she applied for Universal Credit with the help of a local refugee support organisation. A week later, seven days before the end of the move-on period, Mary received a PGAS letter stating they had tried to call her but were

unable to get through. She did not follow this up having already submitted her Universal Credit application.

On 6 June, having been evicted from her asylum accommodation, Mary presented as homeless and was put into temporary accommodation in a hotel. On 11 June Mary undertook a habitual residence test (HRT) interview which had to be repeated a few days later due to an error in the original. Later that day Mary applied for an advance Universal Credit payment. This was rejected due to the outstanding HRT decision.

On 30 June – 23 days after her asylum support ended and 37 days after applying for Universal Credit – Mary received her first payment, covering the period from May 24 to 30 June.

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About the British Red Cross

The British Red Cross is the biggest independent provider of support and advice to refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK. In 2017 we worked with over 30,000 people in 58 towns and cities. Around half of those people we supported faced destitution, and around one fifth of those had some kind of status.

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