

NACCOM Press Release – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

20th March 2020

Leading charities call for urgent Government action to protect people experiencing homelessness due to migration status and safeguard public health

Today (March 20th), leading charities and organisations that provide essential services for people who are destitute and homeless because of their migration status are calling on the Government to take urgent action, as the Covid-19 crisis escalates.

In a letter addressed to the Prime Minister, over 60 charities including Crisis, Refugee Action, Freedom from Torture and the Refugee Council, lay out a set of key policy recommendations that would ensure that vulnerable migrants experiencing homelessness and destitution are able to access vital support, healthcare and appropriate accommodation, in-line with public health guidance to combat the spread of Covid-19.

Hazel Williams, National Director of the No Accommodation Network (NACCOM), the charity which coordinated the letter, commented: “As the Covid-19 pandemic intensifies, night shelters, housing projects and essential drop-in day services around the country for migrants experiencing destitution and homelessness are struggling to offer effective support to this very vulnerable group. Many of the people we work with are unable to access housing and basic food supplies.”

“To effectively combat the spread of Covid-19, it’s critical that we enable every member of society to self-isolate, seek healthcare and access basic provisions. The emergency public health measures put in place by the Government do not work unless they apply to every single person living in our communities. This is for the benefit of all, and we’re calling on the Government to make these crucial changes to ensure that everyone’s health is protected at this very challenging time, with no exceptions.”

The measures the charities are calling for include:

Social distancing and self-isolation

- Everyone should be able to access self-contained accommodation and self-isolate safely, regardless of immigration status.
 - Rooms should be block booked so that people who are rough sleeping or sofa surfing can access safe accommodation. These spaces should be open to all and should be available with light-touch engagement.
- All evictions from Home Office asylum support accommodation should be stopped. This includes the evictions of people who are appeals rights exhausted and of those who have recently been granted their refugee status.

Accessing healthcare

- All NHS charges should be abolished and a public communication campaign launched to ensure that everyone is aware of their rights to access healthcare.
- No one recovering from Covid-19 should be discharged from NHS care to rough sleep, sofa surf or to stay in accommodation in which maintaining self-isolation and good hygiene is not possible.

Providing financial support for all

- NRPF conditions should be removed for all migrants, enabling everyone to access Universal Credit and Statutory Sick Pay where needed.
- All applicants for section 95, section 4 or schedule 10 support should be automatically and appropriately accommodated within the Home Office asylum support system while applications are being processed. Any decision that someone is not, in fact, eligible for support should not be actioned until after the current health emergency has passed.
- Any introduction of a Universal Basic Income or Universal Self-Isolation Pay should be available for everyone, including those with NRPF.

Hazel Williams added, “The voluntary sector can play a crucial role in preventing the spread of Covid-19 by supporting groups in vulnerable situations. The measures outlined above will give us the best possible chance of doing this effectively.”

You can read the full letter and list of signatories [here](#).

ENDS

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NACCOM is a national network of member organisations preventing destitution amongst people seeking asylum, other migrants with no recourse to public funds and refugees facing barriers to housing. Visit our website www.naccom.org.uk.